



Language Philosophy and Policy
The IB Diploma Programme

April 2018
Next review: April 2021

Philosophy

Being an IB World School our language policy is based on the following declaration by the International Baccalaureate Organisation:

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is committed to supporting multilingualism as a fundamental part of increasing intercultural understanding and international-mindedness, and is equally committed to extending access to an IB education for students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. With these aims in mind, the IB has instituted its language policy to provide a framework that will ensure that the IB's values and aims in relation to access and multilingualism are reflected in the organization's activities.

The aim of the school is to build a truly international environment in general and for the PreIB and IB students in particular. In this language naturally is essential and we emphasize that the students must be open-minded towards different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and different varieties and accents, and to see this diversity as one of the strengths of the programme. We cherish the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students and teaching staff and at the same time recognize that English is the global language that you need to master at as high a level as possible if you want to be a citizen of the world and if you want to do well in further education.

VK staff and faculty believe that

- Mastering more than one language is essential as part of discovering and learning about the world and other cultures
- The acquisition of language is a central component of growth, intellectually and personally
- Language is an expression of culture and identity and mastering two or more languages with a high proficiency is a gift
- Developing your first language or mother tongue is critical to maintaining your cultural identity
- Being proficient in one language aids the student in acquiring more languages
- All teachers are language teachers and as such have an obligation to recognise the language needs of students

Our Aims

- Helping students to grow as persons and learners through mastering two or more languages very well
- Enabling students to learn and use language efficiently and with confidence
- Enabling students to use accurate and subject-specific vocabulary and argumentation
- Developing the students' oral and written skills and proficiency
- Emphasising language as a way of knowing with links to the curriculum and other ways of knowing

- Encouraging the appreciation and understanding of literature and the role of language and style in literary analysis

Context of the school and overall policy

Viborg Katedralskole is a large, Danish state school (“gymnasium”) and the IB Diploma Programme forms a relative small part of the school as a whole. The students in the IB come from a variety of national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A large group of the IB students have Danish as their mother tongue and a smaller group speak no or little Danish when they begin. The vast majority of those who do not have Danish as their first language choose the language acquisition courses of Danish ab initio or Danish B in the programme. The school supports this ambition of learning Danish. In line with the philosophy above, we regard it as beneficial for the students to be able to understand and take part in the school community and the local community and in order to have the choice of continuing in a Danish-speaking further education course. It is not a requirement to learn Danish, however, and if students instead wish to maintain or further develop another mother tongue than Danish they will be supported in choosing a self-taught language (if available) in the IB. If students have reasons to choose another language B than Danish, they are free to do so.

One of the entry requirements of both the PreIB and IB programmes is that the student is very good at English. Details can be found in the Admissions Policy. In addition, it is typically a key motivation for the IB students to gain a very high proficiency in English, both spoken and written, both academic and everyday language. For that majority of students who wish to keep the doors open to a Danish-speaking further education in Denmark it is typically a requirement that they have either Danish A HL/SL or Danish B HL and also and English A or B. The alternative for those without Danish is to choose one of the many international programmes in Danish further education. (see: <https://www.ug.dk/programmes>).

Languages on offer

All students must choose at least two languages. These can either be two languages from the Language and literature group or one from this group and one from the Language acquisition group.

In the Language and literature group, we offer Danish A Literature and English A language and literature, both as Higher Level and Standard Level courses. For the Higher Level courses a high level of proficiency and fluency or near-fluency is required.

For those students choosing a self-taught language we inform them carefully about the requirements and the level of independence necessary to succeed in such a course. In years where we have a group of self-taught students, these are supervised and guided through the programme in timetabled lessons. In years with only very few self-taught students, they will receive supervision on a more individual basis. In both cases a calendar of deadlines for the self-taught components will be put in place.

In the Language acquisition group we currently offer German B (HL/SL), Danish B (HL), Spanish ab initio (SL), Danish ab initio (SL) and English B (HL). For the B languages, the requirement is 2-5 years of experience with the language and for the ab initio languages no experience is required. It is always the matter of an individual assessment what level the student will be placed in.

Apart from English, the modern languages taught in the wider, Danish school are currently: Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese and French. The teachers of these languages will be able to provide support for self-taught students and students choosing an online language course, provided by the IB recognized provider Pamoja. Whether the school or the student will pay tuition fees for the Pamoja Taught course depends on the circumstances.

Expectations and assistance

All written communication to the IB students about classes, homework, events, timetable changes and the like is in English. All other information about arrangements in the school will be translated when relevant. However, as we know that Danish tends to be the first, second or third language of the majority of the IB students and the Danish section of the school is large with many activities every day, it is not possible to translate everything. Furthermore, as stated above, it is our expectation that the majority of our PreIB and IB students want to learn Danish to some extent to be able to take part in the social life of the local community, the school and the boarding school. With the introduction of Danish ab initio from August 2018, the tendency is probably that most students will study Danish at some level.

The teaching staff

All teachers in the PreIB and IB are also teachers of English in a general sense, and must secure that the students are able to use both general English and the subject command terms and subject terminology correctly. The teachers must be careful with language when giving written instructions and written feedback, but there is no requirement that the teachers are absolutely fluent speakers of English or that they are native speakers. It is essential, however, that the teachers speak English well, that they are able to convey their subjects in a precise, clear and varied manner and that they are capable of supervising students within the subjects, through cross-curricular work and in the EE supervision process. We value teachers who are experienced, engaged in their subjects and the students and able to communicate on all levels, formal and informal. That said, more and more of our teachers have international or English speaking work experience behind them, are fluent or near-fluent users of English and internationally oriented and experienced professionals.

In hiring new teachers from both inside and outside the school the language qualifications and the willingness to actively work to improve the language are key factors. The school is continuously looking to expand the teaching staff with teachers with an international background and has successfully done so in the course of the first three years of offering the programme.

If need be, the teachers are offered and assigned to continuous in-house language training in an individualized, weekly English session by an experienced English instructor (currently the English A teacher). The instructor observes some of the teachers' lessons and makes tailor-made sessions focusing on the needs of the teachers, such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, technical terms, casual conversation, command terms and terms for correcting papers.

All staff meetings concerning the PreIB and IB are conducted in English and internal communication about IB matters is carried out in English, regardless of the fact that most of the current staff have Danish as their first language. This principle is strictly upheld to keep the international focus, to prepare for and strengthen the idea that all IB teachers are de facto language teachers.

Students

If lack of proficiency proves to be a barrier to students' communication and learning the teachers will address this and a common effort of the IB teachers, management and counsellors will be made to meet this challenge. If these challenges stem from dyslexia or other challenges of that kind, the school has a well-organised set up to assist with this (cf. Student support policy). Furthermore, the IB will in most cases grant the use of electronic reading and writing aids and extra time for the exams if there is a documented need for this.

General use of Danish in school and boarding school

English is the default language of communication between PreIB and IB students. The only exception is if students with the same first language meet outside classes, where they are welcome to speak their own language – but only if all present share this language.

When Danish-speaking students meet the counsellors about personal challenges, not academic or subject-related, they themselves choose whether to have the dialogue in English or in Danish.

In the boarding school the non-Danish speakers are still a minority and almost all of them will be in a Danish for beginners course and as such motivated to be part of the life of the large, Danish-speaking community. As the international community of the boarding school is growing, we are in the process of creating a separate language policy for this.

Library

The school library has reference works, magazines and journals in English, and students can gain access to a wide range of other materials through school web-access licenses and the library in Viborg. There is also access to bibliotek.dk, through which you can order books from all Danish libraries. This is especially useful when working with the Extended Essay where special knowledge is needed. The designated EE librarian will be available to assist in how to use these systems and in finding relevant material for the larger assignments.

Review of the policy

This policy will be reviewed in April 2021. The review will be initiated by the IB coordinator and involve IB teachers and student counsellors.