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Language Policy of the European Schools

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1. Purpose and Principles

The mission of the European Schools is to provide a multilingual and multicultural education of high quality from nursery level to the Baccalaureate, fostering a European and global perspective to educate children of different mother tongues and nationalities. The European Schools is committed to giving pupils confidence in their own cultural identity as an integral part of their development as European citizens. This aim is expressed in the foundation stones of all the schools:

“Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind European, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe.”¹

From the establishment of the European Schools, and still today, languages and language education have played a key role in this very unique system.

The multicultural, multilingual nature of the schools and the particular teaching and learning context offer especially valuable opportunities for the development of language competence and cultural awareness.

A number of key principles are integral to and underpin the language policy and practice of the European Schools. These principles are listed below although definition and discussion of terms is provided later in this document. These can be divided into three **basic** principles and *three* further **scaffolding** principles which, though important, are essentially arrangement-related:

1. The primary importance of the mother tongue ² (Language 1).
2. The recognition of and commitment to support the national languages of each Member State of the European Union.
3. The offer of a multilingual educational system that promotes plurilingualism.

The arrangement-related principles include:

4. Enrolment of pupils into language sections.
5. The promotion of plurilingualism by supporting the effective acquisition of the Language 1 and of two other languages (Language 2 and Language 3).
6. The promotion of the development of linguistic competence through Content Integrated Language Learning (CLIL), offering education through languages other than Language 1, present in the pupil’s curriculum.

¹ Jean Monnet, 1953

² In the European Schools system, the term ‘dominant language’ is used to refer to the language in which a pupil, at the moment of enrolment in the system is the most proficient, especially in education-related domains of language use, and/or in which the child is most likely to perform well academically, linguistically and emotionally in the course of his/her education in the European Schools System. The dominant language will serve as the main language of learning for most pupils and will be fostered throughout the pupil’s education as the basis for other learning.

Education in the schools is organised on the basis of the above listed principles, which have been respected since the foundation of the schools.

Although the objectives of the European Schools have withstood the test of time, demands from the Society in recent years are suggesting the need for some changes to the System, not least in relation to the role and purpose of language education. Among these changes is the need to embed the overarching concept of the key competences into the curriculum.

“Growing internationalisation, the rapid pace of change, and the continuous roll-out of new technologies mean that European citizens must not only keep their specific job-related skills up-to-date, but also possess the generic competences that will enable them to adapt to change. People’s competences also contribute to their motivation and job satisfaction in the workplace, thereby affecting the quality of their work³”.

Among the eight key competences, Literacy and Multilingual competences (embracing the former Communication in the mother tongue and Communication in foreign languages competences) lie at the heart of every educational system. This is especially the case in the European Schools, where pupils are educated in an international, multilingual and multicultural environment, and where consequently languages play a fundamental role in successful learning.

Learning languages is a foundation for learning in general. Therefore, it supports pupils in becoming successful and contented citizens in their future career and throughout their lives. Since their establishment, the European Schools have proven excellence in providing high quality multilingual education, therefore, a language policy document is a priority.

The aim of the Language Policy is to define the pedagogical principles with a special focus on teaching languages and the use of languages, and to provide a source of information on the ways in which the European Schools put principles into practice.

2. Dominant language, multilingualism and plurilingualism

2.1. The concept of dominant language

Article 4 of the Convention lays down the linguistic principles of European schooling. A fundamental aim of the European Schools, which makes this system unique and characteristically different from all other systems, is that **every pupil should enjoy the benefit of learning in his/her dominant language**. In the European Schools, due to the increasingly global and multilingual environment described in the previous section, more and more children come from a bi- or multilingual family, or have spent some time of their lives in countries different from the country where they were born. This growing experience necessitates that the Language Policy distinguishes the above-mentioned terms (*dominant language, multilingualism and plurilingualism*⁴).

Although the Glossary contains explanations for the terms, in the following paragraph, for the sake of clarity, we provide a definition for *dominant language*, as a technical term mainly used in linguistic and educational contexts.

³ Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Reference Framework, European Commission, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 30 December 2006, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf) 2007

⁴ Definitions of these terms are provided in the Glossary, section 7 of the Language Policy

In this policy, the term *dominant language* will be used as the language in which a bi- or multilingual child “has the highest level of proficiency in especially education-related domains of language use, and which he/she uses **most often (or is likely to use most often) with significant interlocutors (e.g. parents, siblings, caregivers, close friends, teachers)”.**⁵ This term neither replaces, nor diminishes the significance of the concept of **mother tongue or home language**.

In this sense, the dominant language is considered an underlying principle, one that is well documented and supported by researchers in the fields of linguistics, pedagogy, social sciences and psychology. The European Schools have always defended and will continue to defend the status of the dominant language, to avoid the danger of devaluing it, in the pupil’s best interest.

2.2. The role of the dominant language in a multilingual system

According to a widely known and acknowledged theory on bilingual education⁶, pupils learning in a multilingual environment will frequently, by dint of interacting with children and teachers who are native (or as it is often the case in the European Schools, highly fluent) speakers, acquire basic skills in a foreign language, such as speaking and listening, much more quickly and easily than their counterparts in a monolingual system. By starting to learn foreign languages at a young age and by thus learning these basic communication skills within a very short time, they become near-native speakers as far as communication in everyday school life is concerned, but they need a few more years to be able to acquire the academic language which is required to follow tuition in more abstract subject matter. **Immersion in a foreign language environment makes it easier for them to communicate in everyday contexts, but being confident and competent in more complex learning situations takes more time.**

This is the main reason why the European Schools, different from all other systems, offer part of the education in the dominant language of the pupils at all levels, so that the competence of pupils in that language will never cease to improve. **Competence in all the other languages** that pupils have in their curriculum **is built on the dominant language.**

Research and common experience show that **continued improvement in competence in the dominant language is conducive to the learning of other languages and leads to better academic progress in other subjects.** "Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible."⁷

On the grounds stated above and in line with the recommendations of the European Council, language learning is considered in the European Schools an underlying individual

⁵ The definition has been provided by professor Alex Housen: The definition is based on a summary of the literature in the field of language dominance.

⁶ The paragraphs which follow are based on the articles by Professor J. Cummins, whose theory is commonly cited. The summary here is based on a publication *Second Language Acquisition – essential information*. Downloaded from <http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/cummin.htm>. Cummins uses the terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) as fundamental concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism.

⁷ Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters p. 39

competence, which stays with all citizens during the whole of their private life and academic/professional career.

2.3. Multilingualism and the linguistic repertoire of pupils

Language competence “needs to be developed not just for utilitarian or professional reasons but also as education for respect for the languages of others and linguistic diversity.”⁸

The system of the European Schools is a **multilingual environment**. Pupils of the European Schools should acquire the “linguistic repertoire” which is recommended to any European citizen by the end of his/her secondary studies⁹.

A pupil from a family where the parents share the same dominant language and have the same cultural background can usually speak a *standard national language*, (often accompanied by a regional or minority variety) and at *least two foreign languages* at a later stage.

The level of language acquisition and the skills can be different from pupil to pupil, but some minimum standards of competence are aimed at. This stock of language competencies builds up during the entire period of schooling.

This picture is even more colourful in situations where the parents are of different nationalities and speak different languages at home.

After completion of secondary studies, our pupils are likely to further their studies in a different country, which results in another layer of complexity.

Besides the curriculum, the exposure to languages in and outside the school environment, (e.g. the influence of the media and the social networks of the parents) enhances the child’s language acquisition.

3. Language sections and the curriculum

3.1. The creation and role of language sections

In other (multilingual) educational systems, early learning of foreign languages usually comes at the expense of the dominant language. In our system, the dominant language accompanies the pupil permanently throughout his/her schooling, keeping the dominant language (Language 1) up to the Baccalaureate and increasing the number of subjects taught in a foreign language over time. Teachers are expected to demonstrate that all pupils’ languages and cultures are valued. The multinational atmosphere of the schools strongly supports the coexistence of languages and cultures.

Based on the principles above, schools organise **language sections**, i.e. groups of pupils who share the same first language of instruction at any given European School. The enrolment of the pupil in the section of his/her dominant language is guaranteed, provided that such language section exists in the school.

⁸ *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe – Executive Version* (Council of Europe 2007), p. 7

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 7

An essential document¹⁰ lays out the guidelines for opening and closing language sections in different school locations. There is a minimum required number of language sections in a school and in order to create a language section in a school, a “critical mass” of pupils of the same Language 1 should be enrolled. This rule translates into the existence of 20 different language sections from amongst the 24 official European Union languages taught in the European Schools as Language 1. In the case of some languages, the number of pupils speaking these languages does not and probably will not reach the “critical mass”. Some sections exist only in larger schools/sites (mainly in Brussels and Luxembourg), but not in the other schools/sites. This leads to a large (and increasing¹¹) number of pupils who do not find the language section corresponding to their dominant language in their own school.

Language sections play a vital role in the schools by contributing to the multicultural and multilingual atmosphere of each school, as well as providing pupils with a sense of security and identity, therefore they are fundamental elements of the organisation of the school. Naturally, they are the foundation stones of the curriculum and the timetable, as especially in the earlier years, the dominant language and the subjects taught in Language 1 play a key role in the timetable of the pupils who have their own language section in a school.

The curricula and syllabuses (except in the case of Language 1) are the same in all sections.

3.2. Determination of the dominant language and the language section

The European Schools, as explained earlier, in principle respects the pupils’ right to receive tuition in their dominant language. Pupils are therefore enrolled in the section corresponding to their dominant language. Mostly, the determination of the dominant language and the enrolment is obvious, nevertheless, in certain cases, a decision regarding the child’s dominant language needs to be taken (see previous examples of multilingual familial backgrounds that are frequent phenomena in the system). Determination of the child’s first (i.e. dominant) language is the sole responsibility of the Director, whose responsibility is to determine the dominant language, based on the information provided by the legal representatives¹².

When making a decision on the admission into a language section, the director has to follow the stipulations of the General Rules. These regulations need to be respected in the best interest of the child in order to identify the language, in which (s)he can best follow classroom tuition ensuring his/her educational development is optimal.

When necessary, specific comparative language tests are set up to assess the level of the child in the different areas of language competence. The procedures followed are made public and clearly communicated to the parents before assessment takes place.

A procedural document stipulates the main criteria to be met in the procedure of testing¹³: This document defines the rules regarding the organisation and assessment of the language tests.

The outcome of the tests is communicated in a harmonised assessment report template, which gives precise information on the child’s language competences in the languages

¹⁰ See document 2015-04-D-18 *Criteria for the setting up, closure or maintenance of European Schools*

¹¹ With the increasing number of official EU languages

¹² General Rules, Article 47 e)

¹³ 2018-09-D-23 Establishment of a harmonised procedure for the organisation of language tests

tested and summarizes the testers' conclusion regarding the level of the languages tested and the statement whether or not the child is capable of being educated in the language tested.

4. Student Without a Language Section (SWALS)

In schools where the section of the dominant language of the pupil does not exist, the pupil is enrolled into one of the sections of a second language (English, French, German or the official language of the Member State hosting the school – the Host Country Language, HCL)¹⁴. These pupils are called “Students Without A Language Section” (SWALS). SWALS pupils benefit from the provision of their dominant language tuition until the end of their studies¹⁵, with an important number of subjects taught in the language of the section that they join, which becomes their second language (Language 2).

SWALS pupils are exposed to a second language in a more intensive way than their counterparts who are enrolled in the language section of their dominant language. So, from the beginning of their studies, they have to follow tuition in non-language subjects in the language of the section. The competence in the dominant language is not abandoned: rather the contrary is the case, the competence of the pupil in that language is cultivated up to the end of the secondary studies during the Language 1 course. Schools make all necessary efforts to cater for the needs of SWALS pupils in their dominant language, providing them with the teaching of their Language 1, when finding a qualified teacher within the school or upon specific recruitment or through lessons given at distance. The protection of the dominant language (Language 1) of SWALS pupils is a priority in order to counter-balance the effect of the multilingual environment and the lack of use of the dominant language in most of the subjects.

Experience shows that due to the above described situation, progression in competence in Language 2 for SWALS pupils is faster than for other pupils. They often reach the required level of proficiency (e.g. B2 in secondary 5 or C1 in secondary 7) earlier than their peers. Although their level of Language 2 is usually higher than the ones of non-SWALS pupils, they still often need support, as they learn the majority of their subjects in their Language 2 together with native speaking pupils. Experience shows that their needs in terms of language support are different from those of non-SWALS pupils. Schools are aware of these needs and within their capacities offer remedies to bridge the gaps. Dedicated support for these pupils in Language 2 can be offered within the framework of the Educational Support Policy.

5. Language learning in the curriculum and in the classroom

5.1. Teaching languages

In the European Schools, all pupils have to study:

¹⁴ HCL is provided in schools seated in Italy, The Netherlands and Spain (Varese, Bergen and Alicante).

¹⁵ This principle is relevant to category I and II pupils. Category III pupils are entitled to tuition in his/her L1, if a course already exists and if it does not create a new group. Should the course have to be terminated, the category III pupils concerned would have to switch their L1 to their L2 and would have to choose a new L2. They would be allowed two years to catch up. L1 Courses in S6 and S7, are protected from termination.

- 1) The language designated as their dominant language (referred to as Language 1) from Nursery 1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 2) The second language (Language 2, English, French or German) from P1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 3) The third language (Language 3, an official language of the European Union) from S1 to S5.

It is possible to choose a fourth language (Language 4, an official language of the countries of European Union) as an option in secondary year 4 and a fifth language (Language 5) as a complementary course in secondary year 6.

It should be noted that no language can be studied at more than one level simultaneously and the existing regulations rule out the possibility of different languages being studied at the same level at the same time. Level refers to the different possibilities L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5.

Special rules apply to SWALS.

For minimum proficiency level at the end of different sub-cycles see Annex A.

5.2. Use of languages for teaching other subjects

The concept of learning and use of Language 2 in the primary cycle is based on a common assumption that at this early age, exposure to the language is more important than its systematic teaching. Emphasis is placed on creating a motivating atmosphere. Pupils are just starting to learn languages in a formal way, which implies that the teaching of Language 2 and teaching *through* Language 2 focuses on oral skills and activities that match their level of development.

An important element in the role of foreign languages is that as from Secondary 3, Language 2 gradually becomes the language of tuition of Human Sciences, History, Geography, Economics, Religion and Ethics. In the case of Music, Art, ICT and Physical Education, education is provided through a language that the pupil knows. This means that the mainly monolingual teaching in the primary gives way to the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach in the secondary school¹⁶, where students start to learn an increasing number of subjects through a language different from their Language 1. Learning actual subject content in a language (or languages) other than Language 1 enhances the learning of the language itself.

For a detailed description of the use of languages please refer to Annex A.

5.3. Educational support

The complex and diverse communities of the schools justify a well-pondered and personalized support system. The general educational support policy is well described in a document, which can be found on the official website of the European Schools¹⁷.

This document gives an overview on the principles and implementation of differentiation practices and the types of educational support.

¹⁶ Content and Language Integrated Learning is a term describing both learning a content subject through the medium of a foreign language; and at the same time learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject. See <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/content-language-integrated-learning>.

¹⁷ 2012-05-D-14 *Policy on the Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools*

As explained earlier, the pupil population of the European Schools is extremely complex, which results in a wide range of individual learning needs to be served. Special provisions are in place to support the integration of pupils who join the system at a later stage of their educational career, or whose familial background justifies certain support measures, e.g. in mobility cases when due to the parents' change in their profession children need to move from one European School to another or from a national system to the European Schools system.

The European Schools are, within the framework of the Educational Support Policy, committed to assess the individual needs of those pupils who, due to their special situation (SWALS' Language 2 courses, mobility cases etc.) cannot follow mainstream language teaching without additional support.

6. Revision of the Language Policy

This Language Policy will be revised on a regular basis when changes require it and at least every ten years.

7. Glossary

BICS - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) refer to the linguistic skills needed for general, everyday (esp. spoken) and typically interactive language use and social face-to-face interactions which deal with general (rather than specialised), concrete (rather than abstract) and cognitively undemanding topics. The language used in such interactions is typically context-embedded (i.e. in the here-and-now). For instance, the language used in the playground, on the phone, or for interacting socially with other people is part of BICS. BICS are said to form the foundation upon which other types of language skills are based.

CALP - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) refers to the linguistic and cognitive skills required to successfully use language for communicating about more abstract and specialised topics in context-reduced language situations (i.e. about topics that are not present in the here-and-now of the speech situation). CALP provides the basis for a pupil's ability to cope with the demands imposed upon her by the language that is used in various subject matter classes.

CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

A set of descriptors issued by the Council of Europe to identify and describe six levels of proficiency which learners of foreign languages can attain (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). The CEFR aims to provide a language-independent framework for organising language learning, teaching, assessment and validation/certification in Europe (but increasingly also beyond). The CEFR is organised along three principal dimensions: (i) language activities (reception (listening, reading), production (speaking, writing), interaction (spoken and written), and mediation (translating and interpreting)), (ii) the domains in which the language activities take place (educational, occupational, public, and personal), and the (iii) competences on which language learners draw when engaging in such language activities. Competences are subdivided in knowledge, skills, and existential competence, with particular communicative competences in linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence.

CUP - Common Underlying Proficiency

A theoretical model which holds that the proficiencies and skills required for more academic and cognitively demanding language tasks (such as those involved in literacy, subject matter learning, abstract thinking and problem-solving; i.e. CUP) are to some extent language-independent or common across languages. Once acquired in one language, they can be transferred to another language.

CLIL - Content and Language Integrated Learning

A pedagogical approach for learning subject matter through a language different from the main language of learning which integrates both content and language related learning goals. The aim of CLIL is to enhance pupils' language skills in the target language while

attaining the same level of content matter knowledge as would be attained if the content matter were taught in the main language of learning.

Dominant language

In the scientific literature, the dominant language of a multilingual individual is defined in terms of (i) the relative language proficiency and competence (i.e. the language which he/she knows best, feels most confident in and requires the least effort to use in the majority of domains of language use) and (ii) frequency of use (i.e. the language which (s)he uses most often in the majority of domains of language use). Language dominance in multilinguals is not a static but a dynamic property which may vary in time and with domains of language use.

In the European Schools system, the term 'dominant language' is used to refer to the language in which a pupil, at the moment of enrolment in the system is the most proficient, especially in education-related domains of language use, and/or in which the child is most likely to perform well academically, linguistically and emotionally in the course of his/her education in the European Schools System. The dominant language will serve as the main language of learning for most pupils and will be fostered throughout the pupil's education as the basis for other learning.

Educational support provision

European Schools has a well-pondered and personalized educational support system which is well described in the documents Policy on the Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools and Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools. Both documents can be found on the official website of the European Schools. These documents give an overview on the principles and implementation of differentiation practices and the types of educational support. Support provisions are put in place to support the integration of pupils who join the system at a later stage of their educational career, or whose familial background justifies certain support measures, e.g. in mobility cases.

HCL - Host Country Language

In general usage, the language used by the majority of inhabitants of a country, region or community which receives new (and possibly temporary) residents from outside the country, region, society or community.

In the European Schools, the HCL refers to the official language(s) of the country or region in which a particular European School is located.

Home language(s)

The language(s) spoken by a pupil with the members of his/her family, household or home, especially with parents (and other significant caregivers) and siblings. Alternative term: *family language*.

Language 1 (L1)

In general usage and in the scientific literature, the term 'first language' (abbreviated as L1) refers to the language(s) to which a person is regularly and substantially exposed during

infancy and which is typically (though not necessarily) acquired to a native-like level as a principal medium of (esp. oral-aural) socialisation, typically (though again not necessarily nor exclusively) in the family or home.

Alternative terms: *native language*, *primary language*, *'mother tongue'*.

In the European Schools system, 'L1' refers to a pupil's main official language of learning and medium of education, to be chosen from a list of 24 languages agreed upon by the Board of Governors of the European Schools as principal official or national languages of its member states.

Language 2 (L2)

In general usage and in the scientific literature, the term 'second language' (abbreviated as L2) refers to any language (or language(s)) to which a person is first substantially exposed after infancy (and at a moment when the development of the first language(s) is already well underway) and which is acquired and mastered at individually variable speeds and levels of proficiency.

Second language is sometimes contrasted with *foreign* language. A *second* language serves as an important medium of communication in the larger (out of school) community in which a language learner operates, whereas a foreign language does not.

In the European Schools system, 'L2' refers to a pupil's chronologically second and principal-but-one language of learning, to be chosen from a list of three languages: English, French, German. The L2 is first taught as a subject before being used as a medium of instruction.

Language 3, 4, 5 (L3, L4, L5)

In general usage and in the scientific literature, the term 'third/fourth/fifth/... language' (abbreviated as L3/L4/L5/...) refers to the language(s) to which a person is successively exposed and which are learned (to variable extents) after exposure and (possibly partial) learning of a second language.

In the European Schools system, 'L3', 'L4', and 'L5' refer to any additional languages introduced in the European Schools curriculum after the L2 has been introduced. The L3 and L4 can be chosen from among the official languages of the European Union depending on local expediencies. The L5 can be any language. The L3 and possibly also the L4 may also be used as a medium of instruction in the later stages of secondary schooling.

Language Policy

The official (juridical, judicial, legislative, administrative, constitutional) principles, regulations, instruments (e.g. laws, decrees), practices and actions of a governing or authoritative body or person aimed at (a) determining how languages are used within the context or entity within the governing body has authority, (b) cultivating language skills needed to meet national priorities, or (c) establish the rights of individuals or groups to learn, use, and maintain languages.

In the European Schools system, the Language Policy refers to the document 2019-01-D-35 that stipulates the role and the use of languages in the organisation and structure of the curriculum.

Language Section

A unit in the structure and operation of the European Schools defined by the Board of Governors and associated with one of the 24 official L1s of the European Schools system.

Linguistic repertoire

The variety of languages that a person or a community masters and uses to various degrees of proficiency.

In the European Schools system, it refers to all the official languages that a pupil learns and/or is educated in in the course of his/her studies.

Mother tongue

Generally speaking, a popular term to refer either to a person's first language, native language, home language or to the language(s) spoken by a caregiver to a child.

Multilingualism

The presence of two or more languages within (i) an individual (*individual* multilingualism) (ii) a geo-political-legal unit or structure of government (e.g. country, state, region, community, city, district, etc.), society or community (*societal* multilingualism) or within (iii) organisations, institutions, companies, firms, hospitals, services, education etc. (*institutional* multilingualism).

National language

A language that is given a privileged status in the constitution of a country, state or nation and that often serves as a marker of the national identity of the people of a country and its territory. The terms 'official' and 'national' language are often used interchangeably, but with little consistency.

Official language

A language that has a privileged status – de facto or de jure – for use in the functioning of a country, region, district, organization, institution etc.

ONL - Other National Language

Irish and Maltese are the national languages of Ireland and Malta and also official languages. Swedish and Finnish are the national languages of Finland. All four languages are taught as ONLs in the European Schools system for those pupils who request these courses. Irish and Maltese are taught in the English-speaking section to Irish and Maltese Nationals. Finnish in the Swedish section is taught to Finnish nationals and Swedish is taught in the Finnish section.

Plurilingualism

In essence a synonym of *multilingualism*, though the term *plurilingualism* is sometimes used in contrast to *multilingualism* to refer to the presence of two or more languages in an individual (cf. *individual multilingualism* above) rather than in a society or community.

SWALS - Students Without a Language Section

In the European Schools system, 'SWALS' refers to pupils who, according to the regulations of the European Schools, are entitled to receive their basic education in a designated L1 (i.e. in one of the 24 official EU languages) but who are placed in a working language section because their designated L1 language section is not available in their European School (for logistic, practical and/or financial reasons).

Working language

A language with special status – de facto or de jure – in a society, state or other body of organization as the primary means of communication among members from different first language backgrounds to provide mutual understanding. A working language is typically used in a well-defined context or sphere of activities (e.g. professional).

Alternative terms: *procedural language*, *lingua franca*, *vehicular language*.

In the European Schools system, 'working languages' are the languages that are given special status as the languages of administration in the system as a whole (English, French, German, and the language of the Presidency) or within the context of specific schools (the Host Country Language).

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1. Teaching of languages

In the European Schools, all pupils have to study:

- 1) The language designated as their dominant language (referred to as Language 1) from Nursery 1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 2) A second language (Language 2, English, French or German) from P1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 3) A third language (Language 3, an official language of the European Union) from S1 to S5.

It is possible to choose a fourth language (Language 4, an official language of the countries of European Union) as an option in secondary year 4 and a fifth language (Language 5) as a complementary course in secondary year 6.

It should be noted that no language can be studied at more than one level simultaneously and the existing regulations rule out the possibility of different languages being studied at the same level at the same time. Level refers to the different possibilities L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5.

An important element in the role of foreign languages is that as from Secondary 3, Language 2 gradually becomes the language of tuition of Human Sciences, History, Geography, Economics, Religion and Ethics. In the case of Music, Art, ICT and Physical Education, education is provided through a language that the pupil knows.

Special rules apply to Students Without a Language Section (SWALS) and to pupils who learn the Other National Language (ONL).

1.1. Nursery cycle

In the nursery cycle, in principle, Language 1 is taught from the age of four and is the language of the section in which the pupil is enrolled. Language awareness activities are organized in the nursery cycle according to their local conditions and needs. The objectives and learning outcomes are integrated into the Early Education Curriculum.¹⁸

1.2. Primary cycle

Language 1 is taught from primary year 1 and is the language of the section in which the pupil is enrolled.

From as early as primary year 1, pupils start learning a second language (**Language 2**), from amongst English, French or German. This language must be different from the first language. Language 2 is compulsory up to the Baccalaureate level and is the medium of instruction in a number of subjects in the secondary school. In the European hours course sections are mixed and therefore, the subject is taught in different languages, offered by the school.

1.3. Secondary cycle

Pupils start learning a third language (Language 3) as a beginners' course in the first year of secondary school. It may be any official language of the countries of the European Union which is not studied as Language 1 or Language 2. This language is a compulsory subject in secondary years 1 to 5 and may be taken up to the Baccalaureate level.

¹⁸ This measure will enter into force from 1 September 2020.

Language 3 is a 4 weekly period option¹⁹. Compulsory teaching and learning of this language results in a proficiency level corresponding to a minimum of A2+, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, pupils may choose this language in the Baccalaureate cycle and reach a minimum proficiency level of B1+.

Learning a Language 4 is an option (4 periods) and starts in secondary year 4. This elective language is taught from year 4 onwards and may be any official language of the European Union which is not studied as Languages 1, 2 or 3. In secondary year 4, Language 4 is a beginners' course.

1.4. Baccalaureate cycle

In secondary years 6 and 7 the rules are as follows:

Languages 1 and 2 are compulsory up to the Baccalaureate. Language 2 is normally English, French or German, but pupils may request a Language 2 other than English, French or German for secondary years 6 and 7. This may be accepted subject to the rules relating to a change of Language 2 and to the rules governing the creation of groups²⁰. The new Language 2 may be any official language of the European Union. The starting point of this new Language 2 will be B2 proficiency level.

Language 5 is a two-period complementary course for beginners. It is not possible to take a Baccalaureate examination in Language 5.

1.5. Minimum proficiency level at the end of the different sub-cycles

	Nursery	Primary	S3	S5	S7
L2	0	A2	B1	B2	C1
L3	0	0	A1+	A2+	B1+
L4	0	0	0	A1	A2+
L5	0	0	0	0	A1
ONL	A1.1 oral	A1.2	A2	B1	B2

1.6. Other languages

1.6.1. Ancient Greek and Latin

Latin is an optional two period course in secondary years 2 and 3 and an optional four period course in secondary years 4 to 7 offered in the language of the section or in a Language 2, Language 3 or the Host Country Language, respecting the rules for the creation of groups.

¹⁹ All lesson periods in the secondary section are of 45 minutes' duration.

²⁰ See Section 4.2 of the Arrangements for Implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate (2015-05-D-12) and document 2011-01-D-33 *Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools*

Greek pupils, who take the Language 1 Greek course, from the second to the fifth year of secondary education, can benefit from further education in Ancient Greek at the rate of two periods per week.

Ancient Greek is an optional four-period course from secondary year 4 to secondary year 7. This course can be taught through in Greek, in another L1, L2 or the Host Country Language respecting the rules for the creation of groups.

1.6.2. Other National Language

Specific provisions are in place for the teaching of the other national language (ONL) in the case of pupils whose countries of origin have more than one national language. These pupils (of the Swedish, Finnish sections or Irish and Maltese in the English language section) may opt for learning ONL as from Nursery 1.

The Other National Language (ONL) – Irish, Maltese, Finnish/Swedish – must be taught to category I and II pupils from the nursery, up to secondary year 7.

For those pupils who request these courses (in those schools which have a Finnish/Swedish section):

- Finnish is taught to category I and II Finnish pupils in the Swedish section,
- Swedish is taught to Finnish speakers in the Finnish section.

Irish/Maltese as Other National Language is available to Irish/Maltese nationals enrolled in the English language section only.

There is a specific syllabus designed particularly for ONL pupils. Contrary to the minimum numbers of groups in other subjects, Other National Language groups will be created with fewer than seven pupils. In the nursery and in primary years 1-2, the Other National Language is taught three times 30 minutes per week. In primary years 3-5, the Other National Language is taught two times 45 minutes per week.

In secondary years 1-3, the Other National Language is taught two times 45 minutes per week. Starting from secondary year 4 and up to secondary year 5, the Other National Language is a 4-period option. Pupils choosing the Other National Language cannot choose Language 4.

In secondary years 6 and 7, the Other National Language is a 4-period option. Students choosing this course cannot choose Language 4.

Pupils choosing ONL as an option cannot also choose a Language 4 option.

2. Use of languages for tuition in other subjects

In addition to the teaching of (two or potentially more) languages, other than Language 1 the courses taught in these languages have been a pioneer feature of the European Schools (Content and Language Integrated Learning; CLIL²¹). As described above, starting with an essentially monolingual curriculum in the nursery, pupils gradually learn more languages and at the same time other subjects are taught in one of those languages. The privileged status of Language 1 creates a sound basis for increasingly confident command of other languages. In addition to the use of Language 1, the organisation of studies (and the general atmosphere of the schools, including after-school activities and other aspects of school life) contributes to extremely effective language acquisition.

The early introduction of Language 2 makes it possible to teach subjects such as Human Science from Secondary 3, History and Geography from Secondary 4 in the pupils' Language 2, and the number of CLIL subjects increases in the Baccalaureate cycle, depending on pupils' choices. As a means for learning content, learning a foreign language becomes more an important goal for the pupil.

2.1. Use of languages in the primary cycle

In the primary, where there is more focus on raising language awareness, Language 2 is mainly used in Language 2 classes and European Hours. In the secondary school, pupils' competence in the foreign language is developed enough to cope with the complexity of the task of learning the language and abstract content simultaneously.

The concept of learning and using Language 2 in the primary cycle is based on the assumption that at this early age, exposure to the language is more important than its systematic teaching. Emphasis is placed on creating a motivating atmosphere. Pupils are just starting to learn languages in a formal way, which implies that the teaching of Language 2 and through Language 2 focuses on oral skills and activities that match their level of development.

2.2. Use of languages in the secondary cycle

The language teaching in the primary gives way to the CLIL approach in the secondary as prevalent. In the secondary cycle, students start to learn an increasing number of subjects through a language different from their Language 1. Learning actual subject content in a foreign language (or languages) usually enhances the learning of the language itself.

²¹ Content and Language Integrated Learning is a term describing both learning a content subject through the medium of a foreign language; and at the same time learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject. See <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/content-language-integrated-learning>.

2.2.1. Secondary years 1-3

The following table shows the teaching and use of languages in the secondary years 1-3.

Subjects	S1 – Use of languages		S2 – Use of languages		S3 – Use of languages	
	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities
L1	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
L2	Language 2		Language 2		Language 2	
L3	Language 3		Language 3		Language 3	
Maths	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
Human Sciences	Language 1		Language 1		Language 2	
Integrated Science	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
Art	Courses taught in any language in the pupil's curriculum					
Music						
Physical Education						
Rel. / Non-conf. Ethics	Language 1	Language 2, Language 3, HCL	Language 1	Language 2, Language 3, HCL	L2	Language 3, Host Country Language, Language 1 ²²
ICT	Courses taught in any language in the pupil's curriculum					
Ancient Greek			EL		EL	
Other National Language (ONL)	ONL		ONL		ONL	
Latin			Language 1	Language 2, Language 3, HCL	Language 1	Language 2, Language 3, Host Country Language

As a matter of principle, as from secondary year 3 onwards, courses in religion and non-confessional ethics are also taught in Language 2 (English, French, German).

From secondary year 4 onwards, History, Geography and Economics courses must be taught in Language 2 (English, French or German) and may not be taught in Language 1. Some exceptions are accepted for Economics courses.

²² The question of the languages of tuition for Religion and Non-Confessional Ethics courses is the subject of a specific memorandum (2014-05-M-2 'Language of tuition for Religion and Non-Confessional Ethics courses').

2.3. Use of languages in the Baccalaureate cycle

In secondary years 6 and 7, if the 4-period History, Geography option courses cannot be organised in the student's Language 2, the student may follow it in another language, provided that (1) it is not his/her Language 1, (2) the student is able to demonstrate an adequate language proficiency level and (3) the Director gives his/her permission, the Class Council's opinion being taken into account.

Economics is generally taught in Language 2 or the Host Country Language. Special rules are established in document 2012-05-D-23 (Language of tuition for economics in the European Schools system).

In years 6 and 7, if an option course normally offered in Language 1 cannot be organised in the student's Language 1, the pupil may follow it in another language, if (s)he is able to demonstrate an adequate language proficiency level.

3. Changing languages

Normally no changes are envisaged in language choices, except on entry to year 6, when the following changes are possible:

- Pupils may request a L2 different from DE, EN or FR for secondary years 6 and 7. This may be accepted subject to the rules relating to a change of L2 and to the rules governing the creation of groups. The new L2 may be any official language of the EU. For the minimum level established see document 2011-01-D-33.
- for a given language, change from a lower to a higher level (e.g. change from L4 to L3)
- for a given language, change from a higher to a lower level (e.g. from L2 to L3) in justified cases.

It is also possible for a student to choose as a L3 in year 4 or year 6 or as L4 in year 6 a European Union language which has not been studied previously in a European School, provided that the student has passed a proficiency level (written and oral) test at the required level and under the responsibility of the teacher concerned.

If a change of language is requested, regardless of age or level, the decision rests with the Director and is subject to the following conditions:

- The existence of a written request from parents, guardians or the student himself/herself if (s)he is over 18 years of age.
- Deliberation and judgement by the Class Council on the request.
- Clear evidence established by the School of the pupil's ability to follow the course requested. In the case of a change of Language 2, careful consideration must be given to the role of Language 2 as a medium for teaching other subjects. When a change of Language 2 is approved before year 6, the new Language 2 becomes the medium for the teaching of history, geography and economics. When a change of Language 2 is approved on entry to year 6, the old Language 2 remains the medium of teaching for history, geography and economics.
- The compliance with the rules for the creation of groups.