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**Helmholtz-Gymnasium
Schule der Stadt Bonn**



Language policy

1. School language philosophy

Helmholtz-Gymnasium, a school with a bilingual tradition, considers language learning to be pivotal for learning in a globalized world.

"Language is integral to exploring and sustaining personal development cultural identity and intercultural understanding. As well as being the major medium of social communication, it is tightly linked to cognitive growth because it is the process by which meaning and knowledge is negotiated and constructed. It is the main tool for building our knowledge of the universe and our place in it. Language then, is central to learning, as well as to literacy, and is thus closely related to success in school."

(Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes, April 2008, p.1)

Therefore language learning is one of the main pillars of education at Helmholtz-Gymnasium that takes place at all times and in all situations either through learning about language, learning in a language or finally learning languages.

Learning about language at Helmholtz-Gymnasium mainly takes place in the mother tongue. Therefore education in German is meant to develop the students' language awareness and their ability to express themselves orally and in writing in their mother tongue, in a wide range of situations and styles. The study of German literature allows students to develop their understanding and appreciation of literary works and to develop sensitivity for linguistic phenomena. However, students with mother tongues other than German are encouraged to keep up and further develop their command of the language spoken at their homes.

Learning in a language takes place in all subjects since we understand learning to be a constructive process that is based on prior knowledge and understanding. As language is the key to understanding and learning in each subject every teacher is a language teacher.

Finally, learning foreign languages promotes inter-cultural understanding and communicative

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competence in the contemporary world. Both aspects are central to our mission statement and our school programme and are catered for by our choice of foreign language courses, our bilingual streams and the range of international exchanges, experiences and projects we offer to develop the international-mindedness of our students.

Since we understand language to be central to our school community not only inside but also beyond the classroom, our school rules determine that all language and communication used by everybody in the school must show respect for others.

2. School language profile

The main language of teaching is German as Helmholtz-Gymnasium is a German state school. In the bilingual streams and the IB Diploma programme English is used as the language of instruction in a number of subjects. In foreign language classes (English, French, Spanish and Chinese), the target language is the language of teaching. Every student learns at least two foreign languages.

Second languages taught are

English from Year 5 (age 10)

French or Latin from Year 6

French or Latin as options for a third language from Year 8

Spanish and Chinese are offered as options from Year 10

Range of mother tongues of students: German is the mother tongue of a large majority of our students. Most students with an international background are second generation immigrants who mostly speak German at home, but some of them are still able to speak the mother tongue of their parents. The languages represented are above all Turkish, Russian, Polish as well as Italian, Spanish and English but the language of communication in the school is mostly German.

German as a Second Language: In order to enable new students who do not speak German as their mother tongue to take part in the regular classes at an earliest point possible, the school offers a combined approach of integrating these students into regular courses while additionally giving them intense language tuition and support. (cf. "DaZ" – Deutsch als Zweitsprache). Within the IB DP these students will be encouraged to replace German A in group 1 by their mother tongue and they will be supported by the school as explained in the IB-Dokument "Language A: literature school supported self taught alternative oral assessment procedures" (2013).

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Communication with parents: Liaising with parents takes place at parents' evenings, in individual interviews/counseling and department meetings. Information sessions for parents are held to pass on information about the different foreign language options and the bilingual streams offered by the school.

Language policy directives by the ministry of education

- The school decides on this profile based on the language policy directive of the region North-Rhine Westphalia. According to this, two foreign languages are compulsory for all students in secondary schooling at a "Gymnasium". German is taught as first language / mother tongue from Year 5 up to Abitur (Year 12/13).
- In the senior school (Years 10-12 / 11-13) students have to continue learning at least one of the above foreign languages. Those who choose the language profile for their national school-leaving qualification (Abitur) learn two languages.
- Students with different mother tongues (not German) have the possibility of attending classes provided by the City of Bonn in/for these languages. By passing an external examination in this mother tongue, a student acquires recognition of this language as equivalent to one of the required languages not studied in school.

Language practices of Helmholtz-Gymnasium

- At Helmholtz-Gymnasium all students continue learning English from Year 5. Compared to what is required by the ministry of education they get one additional lesson in English each week plus individual support, depending on their achievements, to give them a sound foundation which prepares them for the use of English as a language of instruction in other subjects in the bilingual stream.
- Students can choose to enter the bilingual stream in Year 7. The number of subjects that are taught in English is gradually increased starting with Geography in Year 7, adding History and Politics from year 8 and eventually also including Biology in Year 9.
- In upper school those students who choose to remain in the bilingual stream study English as a higher level subject and select at least one additional subject that is studied in English and tested in the Abitur exams.
- New students with little or no command of the German language are welcomed at Helmholtz-

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Gymnasium at all levels up to year 10. They are taught 1 – 3 extra lessons per week for a period of two years. Depending on their level of achievement they are then (re)-assigned to an appropriate class.

- Exchange programmes are in place with schools in the United States (Years 9 and 10), France (Year 10), China (Years 10-12) and Brazil (?).
- Additional intercultural experiences and opportunities for foreign language learning are realized through regular class trips to England for all students in the bilingual stream, which is also offered as an option for all other students in year 8.
- The school encourages students to take part in language competitions (The Big Challenge, Bundeswettbewerb Fremdsprachen) and offers preparatory courses for the language certificates (Delf, Cambridge Certificates), which are conducted at Helmholtz-Gymnasium.
- Every year the school applies for an English foreign language assistant who supports the teaching staff in the promotion of the English language inside the classroom as well as outside lessons, e.g. by offering extra curricular activities, such as an English drama group or a reading and debating club.

3. Language learning in the IBDP

All students will take German A1 / German A Literature HL as their first language (group 1) and English B HL in group 2. For international students whose English is stronger than their German the two languages can be exchanged. Students can opt for a second foreign language instead of a group 6 subject. To start with the school will offer Spanish ab initio level. Given a sound number of students' choices, Chinese ab initio level as well as French Language B can later be added to the range of subjects on offer.

The development of the students towards additive bilingualism will be reinforced through using English as the language of instruction for TOK (core) as well as History and Geography (group 3), Biology (group 4) and Mathematics (group 5). Depending on the choice of subjects IB Diploma students receive up to 22 lessons a week were the language of tuition is English.

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4. Language and student admission

On account of the school language policy those seeking admission for Year 5 have to be willing to put an emphasis on the study of English in additional lessons. Normally students can only be admitted if their proficiency in German allows them to follow lessons and learn in German. Exemptions from this rule are granted within the DaZ Programme (see above).

International students whose command of German or English is not adequate for a higher level course cannot sign up for the IB-Programme. However, they are offered further German and/or English-lessons in year 10 (Ergänzungskurse) and will be advised to join language training courses outside the school (e.g. offered by the City of Bonn).

Individual counseling is offered for students who wish to enter the bilingual stream in Year 7 and those who wish to continue the latter in years 10-12. This also applies for the choice of the second foreign language in Year 6 and to those wishing to choose a third foreign language in Year 8.

For admission to the IBDP above average proficiency in English is expected in order to be able to study group 3-5 subjects in English (compare school brochure and IB DP information leaflet). Intensive individual counseling is provided at this point.

5. Assessment of language learning

- The criteria for second language assessment are based on the levels of the European Framework. They comprise the communicative skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening and mediation) of the student as well as his / her proficiency, accuracy, precision, logic of argumentation and other aspects (compare assessment policy).
- Both summative and formative means of assessment are applied (compare assessment policy).
- Depending on whether the students are assessed for the German Abitur or the IB Diploma the directives of the ministry of education or the IBO are followed.

6. Special educational needs in language learning

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Special arrangements for students with specific performance deficits, especially dyslexia, are regulated by circular from the Ministry of Education. These include for example the possibility of remedial courses as well as extension of time allowed for tests or help by technical equipment to make sure that all students can show their true potential in examinations and are not disadvantaged in any way (compare special educational needs policy).

Students with special talents in the area of language learning can choose to enter the bilingual stream, can learn up to four foreign languages and take part in language competitions and international certificate exams. Furthermore they can join the extra-curricular activities mentioned in the school language profile.

7. Communicating and reviewing the policy

The policy will be communicated and regularly reviewed as required in the *Guidelines for developing a school language policy* (April 2008, p.4). Possible changes are discussed in department meetings, staff meetings and communicated in staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, in circulars and information sessions for students.