



Language policy

1. School language philosophy

Gymnasium Birkenfeld 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 Gymnasium Birkenfeld that takes place at all times and in all situations either through learning about language, learning in a language or finally learning foreign languages. Learning about language 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. 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. Thus the importance of language cannot be overemphasized since a student cannot learn what he / she cannot understand (compare special educational needs policy). Finally, learning foreign languages promotes inter-cultural understanding and communicative competence in the contemporary world. Both aspects are central to our school programme and are catered for by our choice of foreign language courses 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 Gymnasium Birkenfeld is a German state school. In the IB Diploma programme English is used as the language of instruction in a number of subjects. In foreign language classes (English and French), the target language is the language of teaching.

Second and third languages taught are

English from Year 5 (age 10)

French or Latin from Year 6

French, Latin and Russian are offered as options from Year 9

Russian ab initio from Year 11

Range of mother tongues of students: German is the mother tongue of the vast 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 the parents. The languages represented are Chinese and Russian but the language of communication in the school is mostly German. Students that still have to improve their language skills in German participate in DaZ courses (Deutsch als Zweitsprache) once or twice a week.

Communication with parents: Liaising with parents takes place at parents' evenings, in individual counselling and department meetings. Information sessions for parents are held to pass on information about the different foreign language options 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 Rhineland-Palatinate. 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 13).

Language practices of Gymnasium Birkenfeld

- Exchange programmes are in place with schools in France (Year 8).and British Columbia (Year 9/10).
- Additional intercultural experiences and opportunities for foreign language learning are offered through class trips (England, France, Italy, Spain).
- The school offers language certificates (DELF).
- Students receive guidance and support when interested in spending time at a foreign school.

- Assistant teachers from the English-speaking countries help our students improve their foreign language skills and develop intercultural understanding as well as international mindedness.

3. Language learning in the IBDP

The school curriculum for English meets the DP aims of Language B:

- develop students' intercultural understanding
- enable students to understand and use the language they have studied in a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes
- encourage, through the study of texts and through social interaction, an awareness and appreciation of the different perspectives of people from other cultures
- develop students' awareness of the role of language in relation to other areas of knowledge
- develop students' awareness of the relationship between the languages and cultures with which they are familiar
- provide students with a basis for further study, work and leisure through the use of an additional language

4. Assessment of language learning

- The criteria for second language assessment are based on the levels of the Common 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.

5. Special educational needs in language learning

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).

6. Communicating and reviewing the policy

The policy is regularly reviewed as required. Possible changes are discussed in department meetings, staff meetings and communicated in staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, in circulars and information sessions for students.

7. References:

Diploma Programme: From principles into practice, for use from 2020

Guidelines for developing a school language policy, 2008

Last reviewed: September 2024