

## **K. International School Tokyo: Language Policy**

### **Language in our school community**

*At K. International School Tokyo we believe that language is central to the development of a global mind for all members of the school community allowing access to a greater range of experiences in the world. We believe that language plays a significant role in the development of community identity and inclusion and within the school environment students need to make choices about use of language that is mindful of the community in which they are part. We believe that in order to make appropriate choices about the ways in which we use language, individuals need to consider and reflect on the context, purpose and consequences of using this language.*

### **Language Groups**

The school population includes a large number of native-speaking Japanese and a large number of students who are long-term residents of Japan and therefore speak Japanese relatively fluently even if it is their second language. Other major language groups represented include Hindi, Arabic and Korean. The diversity of language within the school community is seen as a positive element, something to be encouraged and celebrated.

### **Language Philosophy**

KIST espouses the following beliefs about language and language learning.

1. Students learn language predominantly by using language to achieve meaningful purposes in real contexts and so instruction must provide as many opportunities for students to use language in this way as possible.
2. Cultures have specific language genres to achieve specific purposes and the structure and language features of these genres can and should be explicitly taught to help students achieve those purposes.
3. Language learning involves making approximations, which become closer and closer to a native-speaker norm as the learner progresses and the best way to support this progress is with specific individualized feedback on an ongoing basis.
4. Each subject area has its own 'language' which needs to be learned in context and so each teacher must be a language teacher and explicitly teach the vocabulary and structures of their discipline.

### **Language Use**

**In the classroom** – The language of instruction is English, though it is recognized that other languages may be used for varying purposes during instructional activities. Decisions regarding language use in the classroom are at the discretion of individual teachers, but are to be guided by the following principles:

1. During general instructional activities, decisions regarding which language(s) should be used must have the ultimate aim that all students develop the necessary language proficiency in English to perform to their best ability on all tasks related to the curriculum
2. It may at times be helpful for student understanding to think through or talk through unfamiliar or complex concepts in their first language before learning the vocabulary to talk about these concepts in English.
3. When whole class discussions or mixed-language group discussions / activities are taking place, it is important to use English in order to ensure the understanding of all participants.
4. Though the use of a student's first language will never be banned in the school, there will often be times in the classroom where the teacher needs to stipulate that a particular activity be undertaken solely in English in order to achieve the aims stated under principle 1. above.
5. Teachers should consider language use at all stages of curriculum planning and implementation with the aim of facilitating student understanding of both the language used in the classroom and the concepts embedded in the curriculum. In support of this the school undertakes to provide ongoing professional development for teachers in the area of ESL strategies appropriate for mainstream classroom settings.

**In the playground / during transitions** – In line with the general belief that diversity in language is a positive element in the school, no language will ever be banned from use in the playground. Students however are to be encouraged to communicate with their peers in a way that will not result in some students being excluded as a result of language they are or are not familiar with.

### **Language Support**

The school undertakes to provide ESL support for students who have not reached a level of English language proficiency which facilitates their success in the curricular activities they need to undertake in the classroom. In line with the school's philosophy of language learning, ESL support is primarily conducted in-class in conjunction with the classroom teacher. This is to enable students the maximum opportunities to use language in meaningful contexts, particularly in their interactions with fellow students and to ensure that ESL students do not miss out on valuable lesson sequences through being pulled out. As different students have different levels of language proficiency, the language needs of all students in the class should be considered in joint planning by the ESL teacher and classroom teacher. Pull-out support is offered in specific circumstances:

- For students who have no prior exposure to English, or whose English language proficiency is not such that they are able to follow daily routines, a pull-out program of survival English is provided.

- For students who may have prior exposure to oral English, but have no prior exposure to the Roman alphabet a pull-out program focusing on phonic awareness in context is provided.

In addition to the support provided by specialist ESL teachers, the school recognizes that all teachers need to be language teachers and that language must be taught across the curriculum, not just in designated language activities. In order to support this, the professional development programs mentioned in principle 5 above have been put in place.

### **After School ESL Program**

For those students whose level of language proficiency is such that they require considerable support in order to be successful in classroom activities and tasks, the school provides extra language support after school. If a student is deemed as needing this support, attendance at these classes will be compulsory. Entry to and exit from the After School ESL Program will be determined on an assessment conducted by the school.

### **Second Language Development**

As Japanese is the language of our host country, the school offers Japanese language classes to all students in the school. Students undergoing intensive ESL pull-out may be temporarily exempted from the Japanese language program on the grounds that studying two languages from beginner level simultaneously could be unnecessarily confusing for them. The Japanese language program is streamed so as to cater for the needs of learners of different levels including native speakers.

Due to enrolment numbers, the school does not offer a third language but will consider offering a third language at such time as it can be supported by enrolments.

### **ESL Referral Policy**

The classroom teacher and/or the ESL teacher may decide that a student should be considered for entry into the ESL program. It is important that teachers report the areas of need that they notice to the parents on a regular basis. The process of referral is as follows:

- The classroom teacher and the ESL teacher will discuss their concerns about the child in relation to specific abilities and tasks
- If reading and/or writing are a concern, a sampling of student work will be reviewed and analyzed
- If speaking and/or listening are a concern, the classroom teacher and the ESL teacher will collect and review written anecdotal observations which illustrate the area of concern
- The classroom teacher and the ESL teacher will address the issue of whether a student's difficulties may be the result of non-ESL related factors and consult with other staff members as necessary.

- If the classroom teacher and the ESL teacher agree that a student should be tested for ESL, the ESL Coordinator will be consulted. If the ESL Coordinator agrees with the teachers' decision, a letter (translated into Japanese if necessary) will be sent to the parents advising them of the concerns and the proposed testing and testing will proceed (See letter template attached).
- If the classroom teacher/ESL teacher/ESL Coordinator do not agree that a child should be tested for ESL, the following will happen:
  - More evidence (e.g., work samples, anecdotal observations, consultations with Japanese teachers, prior year teacher, ESL Coordinator, Area Head, etc.) will be gathered and reviewed.
  - If the teachers are still not in agreement on the need to test, the teachers will meet with the Area Head and the ESL Coordinator and a determination will be made as to whether or not the child should be tested.

The classroom teacher and the ESL teacher may have concerns about a child's English Language Proficiency (ELP) but feel that parental support at home will be sufficient intervention. In this case, the following will occur:

- Steps 1-4 above will be followed:
- A letter will be sent to parents (See letter template attached). The letter should be translated into Japanese if necessary and should include the following:
  - An outline of specific concerns about the child
  - Specific guidelines as to how the parents can help at home
  - An option for a face-to-face meeting
  - A notice that if the child does not show improvement within a designated period of time, he/she may be tested for entry into the ESL program
  - Signatures of both classroom teacher and ESL teacher
- A copy of the letter will be provided to the ESL Coordinator

### **Mother Tongue Support:**

The school recognizes that the maintenance of each student's mother tongue is not only important for its contribution to each individual's cultural identity, but also lays the foundation of linguistic understanding upon which second and further language learning takes place. The following measures are in place to support mother tongue maintenance:

1. During admission interviews the importance of mother tongue maintenance is stressed and it is explained to all prospective parents that they will need to play a large role in this. Some appropriate strategies are also discussed.
2. The school library undertakes to include literature in a range of languages representative of the school population.
3. Parents and / or second language children will have opportunities where appropriate to

share stories / drama etc. in their own language. One of the functions of such activities will be to reinforce awareness that although these students may have difficulties operating in English, they do have fluency in their native language. This is also a way of sharing culture and of making explicit the fact that language is a part of culture.

4. As stated under 'Language Use', where appropriate opportunities may be given to students to discuss / think through unfamiliar or complex concepts in their first language.
5. As a significant proportion of the school population has at least one parent for whom Japanese is a first language all official school communications to the entire school community will be in both English and Japanese.
6. The school realizes that we are unable to translate all communications into all languages represented in the school community but especially in the case of information displays, every effort will be made to include all languages possible.

### **Admission**

A language self-assessment is included in admissions documentation. As part of the admissions process, students also undertake an English language assessment conducted by the school. Students whose level of English language is below a level that the school considers itself able to reasonably support with its ESL programs may be denied admission. Students who are deemed to require considerable ESL support will be considered an 'ESL Enrolment' and must attend the After School ESL Program and Summer Intensive Language Program

### **Facilitating Clear Pathways for Students**

Every course is a potential starting point for a student coming to KIST. In the KIST language programme a number of pathways are possible. Every course has a Scope and Sequence document as part of our written curriculum – the base of skills and knowledge that will be taught at this particular stage of development. The teaching is broken up into a number of Units of Inquiry that outline the learning experiences of the student in each particular course. A horizontal coherence in the Scope and Sequence is necessary to ensure that a student is always able to move from one unit to another, within any given year level and also between any year levels. During 2009/2010 a language policy review will be undertaken in order to clarify these pathways as well as identify ways in which language learning support is provided in the variety of languages making up each student's language profile.