



Tartu International School

# Language Policy

**2017**

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## Tartu International School - Mission and Objectives

Tartu International School (TIS) was founded in April 2001 in response to a demand from the international community in Tartu. TIS is providing a high-quality programme, with English as a language of instruction, to students between the ages of 6 and 15. TIS is an International Baccalaureate (IB) Candidate School.

The curriculum of Tartu International School is based on the IB programmes, Estonian National Curriculum for the Basic Schools, the Estonian Private Schools Act, the Act of Elementary and Secondary Education of Estonia, the Statute of the school, and the agreements between the school and its community. The objective of TIS curriculum is to support each student's individual development, while taking into consideration their individual needs, ethnicity, cultural background, and plans for the student's further education.

The educational objective of TIS is to help to develop an individual who is motivated to learn and knows how to learn; is aware of his/her interests, skills and abilities; is happy and adaptable; Earth-conscious and values a healthy lifestyle.

### Language Profile

Tartu International School is located in the city of Tartu which is the second largest city in Estonia. The state language of Estonia is Estonian. The language of instruction of Tartu International School is English.

Tartu International School is a culturally and linguistically diverse school. TIS provides education to up to 125 students (Preschool - Grade 9), from more than 10 different nations at any one time. TIS enrolls students with any mother tongue and English language proficiency.

As part of the formal curriculum, the students of TIS have the opportunity to study three languages:

- 1) English - as a native language or as a second language (Preschool - Grade 9);
- 2) Estonian - as a mother tongue or as a second language (host country language) (Preschool - Grade 9);
- 3) Foreign language A (German, Swedish) (Grade 4 - Grade 9).

English and Estonian as a mother tongue programmes include literature curricula.

TIS believes that the development of a student's mother tongue(s) enables them to learn all languages more proficiently. The school is committed to supporting

arrangement mother tongue and culture studies (e.g. providing classrooms, equipment and access to library, helping to organise cultural events etc).

## Philosophy of Language Teaching and Learning

TIS seeks to developing its students into knowledgeable, active and responsible readers, writers and communicators. Learning of languages supports the formation of students' identity and self-awareness as well as their cultural and social development.

A good command of English as the language of instruction is a prerequisite for successful learning in all subjects, therefore all teachers at TIS are language teachers. The language of instruction (English) is taught in transdisciplinary manner to ensure that learning experiences are relevant, meaningful and engaging. Transdisciplinary language teaching helps the students acquire the listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies necessary for studying all subjects and develop the wish and ability to express their ideas.

Language is always taught meaningfully and in context.

Reading literary texts and analysing them during lessons broadens students' insight into culture and life, enhances their vocabulary and promotes their literary interests and the development of their reading abilities and personality.

Learning environments at TIS are inclusive of all students' cultural backgrounds and needs. Language learning is differentiated to meet each individual student's needs.

## Language Learning Outcomes

Language learning and teaching supports the formation of students' language competence and communication skills, as well as their aesthetic, cultural and social development. Through the language programmes taught at TIS we aim to develop confident, curious, highly proficient and enthusiastic readers, writers, viewers, presenters, speakers and listeners.

TIS graduates:

- 1) value languages as a means of public communication;
- 2) perceive language skills as the basis for learning skills and as an important part of their identity;
- 3) are linguistically knowledgeable and express themselves clearly and appropriately both orally and in writing by taking into account the language practice established in the culture;

- 4) listen to, read and write texts of different types in a meaningful way and present information in different ways;
- 5) use different communication channels appropriately and are able to find, critically judge and use information provided by the media and online;
- 6) are acquainted with and value literature and cultural heritage, traditions and diversity;
- 7) have read quality literature appropriate to their age, have formed ethical beliefs through literature and have enhanced their way of thinking and spiritual world as developed personalities;
- 8) perceive literary works as works of art, understand their content and appreciate their artistic value;
- 9) are able to form and express personal opinions and acknowledge and consider the opinions of others;
- 10) value integrity and fairness as well as human dignity and responsible behaviour; and
- 11) know how to learn and seek information in different sources and use dictionaries and handbooks.

## Language Learning and Teaching Practices at TIS

The IB programmes and the Estonian National Curriculum for Basic Schools describe language learning and teaching practices that Tartu International School is committed to:

### **The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages**

At TIS languages are taught in transdisciplinary manner. Each language programme has specific learning outcomes for reading, writing, listening and speaking. The school invests into professional language teachers, teaching resources and supplies. Estonian as the host country language is taught in Preschool-Grade 3 for two 45-minute lessons per week; from Grade 4 to Grade 9 for four 45-minute lessons per week. The students are allowed and encouraged to use their mother tongue to access the curriculum (e.g. completing homework in mother tongue). The school supports learning of the mother tongues. This includes for instance providing a classroom and ICT resources for mother tongue lessons, encouraging students to read in mother tongue, hosting cultural events, developing a Mother Tongue section in the school library, advertising community cultural events to staff and students (e.g. Hanukkah, Lucia Day), making students' mother tongues and cultures visible at school (posters, flags). Mother tongue lessons that are not part of TIS formal curriculum are financed by the parents.

## **Teaching and learning addresses the diversity of student language needs, including those for students learning a language(s) other than mother tongue**

Language teaching is differentiated whenever needed. Special support is offered to students who are new to learning English (additional language lessons, will start learning Foreign Language A one year later, individualised learning materials and assessment). Teaching strategies support the students of diverse needs. Students work in small groups or pairs, technology is used in language learning, ample opportunity is offered for discussions, role-plays, presentations, teaching resources with different levels of language complexity are used. TIS has a flexible placement policy that allows student movement throughout the school year in relation to students' progress. Students may be placed in flexible ability groups within one class for a specific task or longer periods. In the classrooms teacher assistants may be used to support language teaching and learning.

## **Teaching and learning demonstrates that all teachers are responsible for language development of students**

TIS focuses on transdisciplinary approach in learning and teaching. Transdisciplinary focus allows all teachers to develop their students' oral and written expression, communication skills, broaden their worldview, self-management and entrepreneurship competencies. Across the curriculum different text types, including informative and consumer texts, are used. All teachers are responsible for broadening their students vocabulary and guide them to write different types of texts, prepare research papers, use reference sources and refer to them. Language teaching also stresses spiritual and cultural values: language as a medium of culture and language proficiency as an important part of an individual's identity. A variety of reading strategies will be introduced to the students and parents. These include phonemic awareness, recognising patterns in text, recognising sight words and etymological understanding. Teachers encourage students to make connections across the languages. The teachers of TIS collaborate on concepts and vocabulary across the curriculum. All teachers teach an informed critical attitude towards information sources, including the media and principles of citing, referencing and academic honesty. The school facilitates teachers with teaching resources, professional development opportunities and time for collaborative planning.

## **Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s)**

Assessment at TIS is a systematic gathering of information about the pupil's development, analysis of such information and providing of feedback. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning and relies on various methods, evaluation tools and ways. The purpose of assessment is to support development of each student; to help the teacher to choose methods and activities that support each

student's learning and individual development; to guide the development of the student's self-esteem, and support the student in his or her choice of future educational career; to encourage and direct the student to study independently and purposefully; to provide feedback to the student, teachers, school management and parents (or guardian) about the student's learning progress. Students are regularly assessed using the expectations from the school's Languages Curriculum. Formative assessment takes place during studies and focuses above all on comparing the student's development with his or her previous accomplishments. In summative assessment the student's subject-related knowledge and skills are compared with the expected learning outcomes listed in the school curriculum and subject syllabi. Additional feedback about the student progress and development is given to the parents at the parent-teacher conferences in autumn and spring. Student's self-assessment is an integral part of assessment in Tartu International School. Teachers encourage students to assess themselves regularly. Twice a year the students fill in a self-assessment form that is added to the semester report cards. Teachers use portfolios, rubrics, self-reflections, research papers and presentations to encourage self-assessment.

Assessment of student progress and development is presented in the school's online study system (e-diary). This includes grades, notices, approvals and comments from the teachers.

### **Collaborative planning and reflection recognizes that all teachers are responsible for language development of students**

Teachers get support in language teaching from the colleagues who are experienced language teachers. Once a week a collaborative planning session takes place where teachers reflect and plan in order to develop links between subject areas across the school. The school's language curriculum is accessible to all teachers of TIS. The team of language teachers is responsible to introduce the main principles and learning outcomes of the language curriculum to all teachers. All teachers are informed about the community's cultural events and whenever possible collaborate with parents and other community members to hold such events.

### **The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programmes**

TIS has a school library that consists of various printed and digital materials for language learning and teaching (books, posters, maps, games, music, films). Teachers and students have access to various dictionaries, including picture dictionaries. Several mother tongue dictionaries are also available at school. All teachers collaborate with the school management and librarian in ordering the books. The use of ICT is an integral part of the learning and teaching process. Students are encouraged to use their own digital devices or devices provided by

school to support their language learning (e.g. Google translate). TIS uses all possibilities that the community offers to enhance language learning and teaching. Each school year the students go to a number of field trips to museum, cinema, theatre; participate in workshops, sports events etc. Throughout an academic year, students take part in variety of celebrations that introduce diverse cultures and languages. After-school activities support language-learning as some of the activities take part out of the school in authentic language environment. Parents play an important role in TIS community. They are welcome to teach their mother tongues in the school premises, operate a Mother Tongue club or introduce their culture and language during a cultural event.

## Materials

- 1) Assessment in Tartu International School (2016)
- 2) Development plan of Tartu International School 2016 - 2019
- 3) IB Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy (2008)
- 4) Materials from ETI Malta teacher´s course “Practical Methodology for Teachers working with CLIL” (participation in October 2017)
- 5) Curriculum of Tartu International School (2014)

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