



## ESF International Kindergarten Wu Kai Sha Language Policy

### 1. Philosophy

“Language wraps itself around, in through and between everything the teachers and learners do in the classroom.” Ritchhart 2002

At ESF International Kindergarten (Wu Kai Sha) we recognise that language is embedded in everything we do, it is the most significant connecting element throughout the school’s curriculum. We believe that language is fundamental to learning, thinking and communicating. Language is integral to the whole of the curriculum as students learn to use language, learn about language and access ideas and strategies through the use of language. We strive to empower our learners through their journey to become internationally minded individuals.

We recognise that children use language as a vehicle for inquiry, self-expression and for communicating ideas. Thoughtful, reflective communicators are able to understand, comprehend and appreciate the world around them. Language shapes our thinking and helps each child construct meaning and build a framework for conceptual development. It is through the use of language that children develop responsible attitudes and take appropriate action in order to make a difference in the world.

**Inquiry and Play:** As teachers of language, we are committed to teaching through inquiry and play, adhering to the belief that learning is most effective when it is relevant, appropriately challenging and engaging. We believe that real life experiences and authentic, hands-on, active learning activities promotes language learning in young children. Children learn language through a balance of teacher led, teacher guided and self initiated learning.

**Relationships:** “Relationships are a fundamental part of a child’s experiences in the early years” (Early Years in the PYP: Educators’ Perspectives). We understand that warm, responsive, nurturing relationships are critical to children’s sense of belonging and ability to learn. Relationships, and high quality interactions therefore enable children to learn language. Wood (as cited in Early Years in the PYP: Educators’ Perspectives) says ‘The participation of children, teachers, classmates and all significant adults in a child’s life is an essential part of learning and has a direct impact on the taught curriculum.’ Knowing this, we strive to work in partnership with parents and to provide opportunities for parents to develop knowledge and strategies for language learning.

**Environment:** Believing that the environment has a significant impact on learning, the school aims to provide a physical, social and emotional environment that is enabling for language development. This includes spaces and activities for collaborating and socialising, expectations for respectful interactions along with social and emotional teaching and learning, the way the environment is used to visually promote language and experiences that aim to develop curiosity and discovery.

## 2. Teaching and Learning

We recognise that all teachers and teaching support staff are responsible for language development. To give all children the opportunity to overcome any barriers to learning and to help them to become confident and fluent in speaking and listening, school wide strategies are implemented.

### Support

- Employing teaching staff who model a high level of spoken English
- Identifying children who may need additional support to learn English
- Support of adults who can speak a child's home language where possible, especially when children are new to the kindergarten or in cases of need
- On-going communication with parents about language development and ways to support this at home
- Conducting parent information sessions on language development

### Strategies

- Assess the children's fluency level as soon as possible
- Show differentiation in curriculum planning and teaching
- Employ a range of strategies to reinforce understanding and meaning such as, hands on experiences and the use of visual aids, props and gestures, pace, wait time
- Pre-teach or structure needed vocabulary and sentence structures
- Opportunities to recycle the vocabulary through different activities (repetition)
- Monitor progress carefully and ensure that appropriate and challenging tasks are set
- Have high expectations, expect children to contribute and participate in all activities regardless of their language ability
- To identify and make maximum use of the opportunities for modelling fluent English
- Encourage interaction and collaboration between EAL learners and fluent speakers (peers as well as adults)
- Acknowledge that EAL learners need more time to process answers. There is a recognised 'silent period' for those new to English (receptive language comes before expressive)

## 3. The Written Curriculum

At Wu Kai Sha we plan in a developmentally appropriate way taking into account pupils needs, interests and competencies. Language teaching is planned for both within our units of inquiry and through focussed learning and teaching opportunities. Using the ESF and PYP Scope and Sequence as the guiding documents for the teaching and learning of language, specific areas are planned for; oral language, listening and speaking; Visual Language: Viewing and Presenting; Written Language: Reading and Writing.

A long-term plan ensures coverage, continuity and progression between K1 and K2. Phonics is taught using the Letters and Sounds program from the National Curriculum for England and Wales. Teachers focus on planned language activities during weekly collaborative planning meetings..

- The PYP Language Scope & Sequence Document is used to underpin the planning and progression of our overall language development.
- ESF Language Scope & Sequence Document is used to guide more specific conceptual understandings and learning outcomes
- WKS 'Language Exemplification Document' is tailored to our school's individual needs to support teachers in implementing next steps and ensuring progression, breadth and balance.

#### 4. The Taught Curriculum

Authentic learning engages all the senses allowing students to create a meaningful, useful, shared outcome. At Wu Kai Sha we believe in providing children with real-life experiences to enhance language learning. All staff are trained to promote Shared Sustained Thinking to develop rich, spoken language which is fundamental to becoming confident readers and writers. All children are encouraged to express themselves orally, develop good listening skills, communicate to a range of audiences, think critically and become confident, reflective learners.

Children have access to a wide range of Continuous Provision, where Shared Sustained Thinking with adults is actively modelled and encouraged within:-

- Mark making areas
- Book corners
- Inquiry based learning activities
- Small world play
- Construction
- Sand and water play
- Mud kitchen
- Garden area
- ICT
- Dramatic play
- Malleable /sensory play
- Art and creative play

#### 5. The Assessed Curriculum

Assessment forms a fundamental role in our planning and teaching for learning. Both formative and continuous summative assessment provide teachers and learners with concise guidance to enhance and support student language development.

The IB and ESF Language Scope and Sequence outcomes are used to support assessment of all strands of language. Some standardised tests are used to support assessment of language:

- Dial-4 (Baseline data for all K1 children)
- PPVT, EVT (K1 children about whom there are language concerns, K2 children about whom there are language concerns).

These tests provide baseline data and are used as an adjunct to other forms of assessment. Teachers also routinely assess language skills through observations, notation of language used in play and interactions with peers and adults, responses to stories and instructions, story telling, recounting familiar stories or events and during teacher guided learning. Assessment enables teachers to plan for differentiated learning within the class and further supports for identified children.

#### 6. Chinese as an Additional Language

We believe that the acquisition of more than one language enriches personal growth and facilitates international understanding and empathy with other cultures. The ability to communicate in more than one language allows students to participate more fully in their community and in the greater global community.

The local dialect spoken in Hong Kong is Cantonese and is the mother tongue or home language for

many of our students. Putonghua (Mandarin) is the primary language spoken in mainland China. Children in the kindergarten learn Putonghua (hereafter called Chinese) as an additional language. In keeping with the educational philosophy throughout the kindergarten, we strive to provide Chinese instruction through play and inquiry based learning experiences that are relevant and engaging to the children. The Chinese language learning is fully integrated into the units of inquiry. There is an additional programme of support for K2 students who have no Chinese language support at home

Learning about and celebrating Chinese cultural events is incorporated into the Chinese curriculum. Learning of culture and language is thus woven together.

## 7. Mother Tongue Support

*“Bilingualism has positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development.” Baker Cummins 2000*

We value the development of all home languages and actively support and encourage use of the home language(s) by members of the school community. We recognise that a solid foundation in a child’s first language strengthens the learning of a second language and we believe that mother tongue language development is crucial to maintaining cultural identity and emotional stability.

The language profile of our international families can be complex and frequently more than one language may be spoken in the home. In some of our families each parent has a different mother tongue or first language. One of these languages, or another shared language may be used as main language to communicate in the home. The language profile of families varies from year to year, sometimes significantly.

In order to help us describe a child’s language profile, we use the phrases ‘strongest language’ (L1) to describe the strongest language of the child, and ‘home language(s)’ to describe languages in use at home. The kindergarten gathers data on the languages spoken by the child and the family at admission.

The parent community at Wu Kai Sha highly value English language fluency, and for many parents, this is a significant factor in selecting this school. English is the primary medium of instruction in the kindergarten. Many families wish to access an international primary education and a high degree of fluency in English is a prerequisite for primary admission.

Information about the benefits for children developing fluency in their home language(s) is shared with families during the School Tours for prospective parents, and during the Play Visits at the time of admission. Models and strategies for supporting the development of English are also shared during these initial meetings with families. Decisions about language support models used in the home are highly personal and dependent on the circumstances and language profile in the home.

### **We provide the following supports for mother tongue / home language development:**

- Valuing and celebrating children and families’ home languages,
- Education on the importance of children developing a mother tongue or strong first language to parents through conversations and information at
  - School tours
  - Play visits
- Parent workshops on language development
  - Let’s get them talking

- o Developing reading
- o Developing writing
- o Learning Additional Languages
- Materials to support parents
  - o Language letter at Admissions
  - o K2 language pack prior to Primary interviews
- Mother tongue stories by parents and staff
- Pairing children with others (children or adults) of the same language background for socialisation and learning on occasion and more frequently in cases of need or when children have newly joined the kindergarten.
- Some use of written scripts from languages represented within the class
- A variety of teaching strategies to support children learning English as an additional language

### **8. English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

The term EAL is used when referring to children whose main language at home is a language other than English, or who are learning English in addition to another language. We welcome and value the cultural, linguistic and educational experiences that children learning English bring to the school. Our school community encompasses a range of cultures, beliefs and languages spoken. Language is intrinsically linked to culture and we value our children's diversity to affirm their cultural identities.

We believe in providing EAL learners the opportunity to participate effectively in the school by creating a learning environment that is socially and intellectually inclusive. Through the Programme of Inquiry, children are given opportunities to share their own cultures and learn about others to become internationally minded, appreciating and actively seeking to learn about others.

### **9. Library**

The WKS school library is available throughout the week for children to access a wide range of literature and multimedia resources including: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, story sacks, iPads, a listening centre and a physical space for the children to inquire into a range of text types and which aims to develop their own interest in and for literature.

The library includes a Chinese language section and a small range of books to support other first languages. The library is resourced with high quality texts in a wide range of genres to reflect the range of languages and cultures of the school community.

Children have the opportunity to borrow books and story sacks from the library using Microsoft librarian. The explicit teaching and learning of library research skills is the shared responsibility of all staff. Parents are encouraged to promote use of the library and book care. Books are catalogued using the library manager software and the library is continually updated with new texts. The library also includes a wide range of texts to support staff continuous professional development in many areas of pedagogy.

### **10. Parent Language Support**



The school provides a range of parent workshops and sessions to promote the importance of language development. Some of these are held as evening sessions, others (Stay and Plays) during the school day:

- Let's get them Talking
- Developing Reading
- Developing Writing
- Learning Additional Languages
- Sharing Stories

From time to time, other language workshops are held by visiting professionals, for eg Neil Griffith.

### **11. Equal Opportunities**

At Wu Kai Sha, we understand that a limited knowledge of English does not reflect a lack of ability. Children who are learning English as an additional language have skills and knowledge about language similar to monolingual English speaking children. All children will have access to the full curriculum and the full range of co-curricular activities on the same basis as all other children.

### **12. Continuous Professional Development**

All staff are provided with continuing professional development in order to ensure they are able to deliver a rich language programme across the school. This is offered in-house by the school and externally at ESF centre, IB workshops and other CPD providers in the region.

### **Resources**

Making the PYP Happen

PYP Language Scope and Sequence

ESF Scope and Sequence

ESF Essential Agreement for Language (English) 2014-2015

Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why is it important for education? Jim Cummins 2000

Early years in the PYP: Educators' Perspectives

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