

SSIS Language Policy and Practices



Suzhou
Singapore
International
School

SSIS MISSION

To provide an excellent international education to the children of expatriate families.

SSIS VISION STATEMENT

At SSIS, we are a
Compassionate, Principled, Inspiring community.

SSIS DEFINITION OF LEARNING

Learning is a continuous, transformative, and reflective process, where learners engage with the world and connect meaning to understanding.

Table of Contents

POLICY OVERVIEW	4
PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING.....	6
PRINCIPLE #1	6
PRINCIPLE #2	6
PRINCIPLE #3	6
PRINCIPLE #4	7
LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION AT SSIS.....	8
HOME LANGUAGES.....	8
LANGUAGE A PROVISION.....	8
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES).....	9
ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT	9
DEFINITIONS	10

POLICY OVERVIEW

The purpose of the SSIS Language Policy is to provide a framework that reflects our commitment to multilingualism, language development, and equitable access to learning. This policy is implemented and monitored by divisional leadership, with regular reviews to ensure alignment with our school's vision and values.

Communication of SSIS Language Policy

The SSIS Language Policy is shared with the community through various communication channels, including the school website, newsletters, parent workshops, and school presentations.

Language Policy Review Process

The SSIS Language Policy is reviewed bi-annually by the Senior Leadership Team in collaboration with curriculum coordinators, ensuring that it remains relevant and effective.

BELIEFS

At Suzhou Singapore International School (SSIS), we believe that language is fundamental to learning, identity, and connection. Our approach to language development is guided by our commitment to inclusion, and celebration of multilingualism, while ensuring that all students receive rigorous instruction in English as our language of instruction. These principles are embedded in the following key areas:

Access to Learning

At SSIS, all teachers collaborate to ensure that the curriculum is accessible in the language(s) of instruction. Through intentional planning, scaffolding, and inclusive practices, we provide equitable access to learning for all students. English serves as the primary language of instruction, providing a common foundation for communication and learning. At the same time, we recognize that multilingualism is a right, responsibility, and resource that enriches student learning across all sections of the school. Language is central to learning and serves as a means of inclusion and active membership in the SSIS learning community.

Identity

We view students' home languages and cultures as valuable assets that enrich our community. A student's home language is deeply connected to their identity, and we encourage students to use and maintain their home languages while developing proficiency in the language(s) of instruction. The development and maintenance of students' home languages are critical to their academic success, personal identity, and sense of belonging. We also value and respect the language and culture of our host country, China, through exposure to and the teaching of Mandarin Chinese language and Chinese culture from PK to Grade 12.

Inclusion and Connection

We prioritize inclusive language practices to foster connection and belonging within classrooms and across the school. We explicitly teach and model inclusive language usage, ensuring that all students feel respected, valued, and supported. Multilingualism is embraced as a shared resource that connects our diverse community, and language learning supports the

development of international mindedness, fostering global awareness and a lifelong enthusiasm for language acquisition. Inclusive practices are central to our philosophy, ensuring that all students can thrive in the SSIS learning environment.

Language Development and Instructional Goals

At SSIS, we believe that all teachers are teachers of language, recognizing the integral role language plays in all aspects of learning. Students' language development is a collaborative effort, requiring partnership between students, teachers, parents, and the broader SSIS community. Through purposeful planning and instruction, we ensure that students develop as confident communicators, who are able to read, write and speak proficiently using academic language in the language of instruction. Language learning is designed to support critical and creative thinking, foster confidence in self-expression, and encourage students to embrace opportunities for growth.

Professional Development for Language Teaching

SSIS invests in ongoing professional development for all teachers to enhance their ability to support language development across the curriculum. Training includes strategies for scaffolding language learning, integrating translanguaging, and fostering multilingualism in diverse classrooms.

PRINCIPLES FOR DECISION-MAKING

Principle #1: All students will have equitable access to our curriculum.

At SSIS, English is the primary language of instruction. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the curriculum is accessible to all students through scaffolding, explicit language instruction, and intentional planning.

- SSIS ensures that all students, regardless of their linguistic background, have equitable access to language learning opportunities and support systems.
- Teachers analyze language demands in their units, set clear language objectives, and explicitly teach academic vocabulary, language functions, and discourse forms.
- Scaffolding strategies for MLLs include modeling, guided practice, sentence prompts, and translanguaging opportunities.
- Strategic use of home languages for sense-making and connections is encouraged but balanced with planned scaffolds to ensure all students progress in the language of instruction.

Principle #2: SSIS is committed to fostering social inclusion and interaction.

Language plays a critical role in creating a cohesive and inclusive community. We ensure that no member of the SSIS community experiences exclusion due to their language background.

- Flexible grouping strategies are employed to mix students of diverse language backgrounds and provide opportunities for positive collaboration.
- Teachers and staff facilitate discussions about inclusive language choices and scaffold social experiences to support students with beginning proficiency.
- We acknowledge that language learning is social, and students benefit most from modelling and interaction with peers who are fluent English speakers. Classes are designed to ensure that students are surrounded by speakers who are fluent in English, as this is fundamental in developing English capacity.

Principle #3: High-quality language input and output experiences are essential for language development.

SSIS is committed to providing students with rich language experiences in all languages of instruction, including English, Mandarin Chinese, and other world languages.

- We believe in “watering up” instruction: providing deliberate scaffolds to allow students to access rigorous, grade-level, complex texts and robust academic talk. When we “water down” the curriculum, by simplifying complex texts and tasks, language learners miss out on the language, text structures, and content that help them comprehend these texts. By ensure that we continue to teach complex, grade-level texts, we provide opportunities for MLLs to acquire the English language vocabulary and structures used in academic writing. Language courses (e.g., Mandarin Chinese, French) focus on active

use of the target language, with scaffolding for both input (listening, reading) and output (speaking, writing).

- Whole-class instruction and final products primarily utilize the common language of instruction, but students may use their home languages during exploration or brainstorming phases.

Principle #4: Intentionality in Language Use – Adults mediate language usage to balance inclusivity and learning goals.

Teachers and staff at SSIS are empowered to guide students in making appropriate language choices to meet learning objectives and foster inclusion. In English-medium classrooms, teachers ensure students receive comprehensible input and are equipped with strategies to grow their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Decision-making should be intentional about *how*, *why*, and *when* language is used in teaching and learning. Language serves as both a tool and a medium for instruction, and its role must be carefully aligned with the context, subject matter, and the goals of the learning experience. Teachers should consider the following guiding principles:

- 1. Purposeful Language Use Based on Context and Goals**
 - Distinguish between language-based and content-based activities.
 - Define whether the goal is conceptual understanding, language proficiency, or both, and tailor instruction and assessment accordingly.
- 2. Collaborative Policy on Home Language Use**
 - Establish clear agreements with students about when and how home languages can be utilized during the learning process.
 - Recognize the value of home language as a cognitive tool for processing and understanding while ensuring alignment with the instructional goals.
 - *Input*: Provide language input in the target language (e.g., English) to establish a foundation.
 - *Processing*: Encourage students to process information in their home languages to deepen understanding and make connections.
 - *Output*: Transition to output in the target language (e.g., English) for performance-based assessments or demonstrations of learning.
- 3. Language as a Tool, Not a Barrier**
 - Treat language as a flexible tool, similar to technology, and establish guidelines for its most effective and appropriate use.
 - Be mindful of when language supports learning and when it may hinder progress toward specific learning objectives

Languages of Instruction at SSIS

English is the primary language of instruction in the SSIS learning community.

We support students' use of home language(s) during play and unstructured time, and in the classroom setting as appropriate to context and task. In conjunction with their students, teachers are encouraged to create language goals and essential agreements for language use in and outside the classroom.

The languages taught at SSIS are:

Elementary School (PK–G5): English and Mandarin Chinese, and German for German Program students in Grades 1–4

Secondary School (G6–12): English, French, German, Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin Chinese

Home Languages

In the promotion of international mindedness and in alignment with the IB philosophy, the maintenance of students' home language(s) is valued and encouraged at SSIS. The school maintains a home language library collection, which is budgeted for each of its language communities and supports home language literacy.

Language A Provision

From PK to Grade 5, homeroom instruction is in English. Both teachers and teaching assistants use a variety of resources and strategies to support our Elementary School learners in accessing the curriculum. Students' home language may be used at teachers' discretion to support learning.

The approach to language learning in the Early Years (ELC – PK) centers around symbolic exploration and expression through play, relationships, and the learning environment. Grades 1 – 5 students have explicit language instruction in the areas of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening. Students in the Early Years have daily lessons in Mandarin Chinese. German Students in PK and Kindergarten have daily German instruction in lieu of Mandarin Chinese.

In grades 1–4, students enroll in our German program where the language of instruction is German, with a daily lesson for English and Mandarin Chinese.

In the Middle Years Programme (Grades 6 – 10), Language & Literature lessons are offered in English, German, Korean, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese.

In Grades 11–12, Language & Literature A (Group 1) subjects of English, German, Korean, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese are taught within the IB Diploma Programme at both Higher and Standard Levels. If there is a demand for other home languages that are not offered by the school, SSIS will strive to provide classrooms, resources, and administration for the Diploma School Supported Self-Taught Languages A.

Language Development (Additional Languages)

In the Elementary School, students have daily Mandarin Chinese language and culture lessons. Students in Grades 1–5 are divided into instructional groups based on proficiency level (Foundational, Standard, Advanced), allowing for a more differentiated approach to Mandarin Chinese language instruction. Students are given an assessment at the end of each year or throughout the year to determine eligibility to move between the proficiency groups.

In the Middle Years Programme (Grades 6 – 10), students study two languages, with some students choosing an additional third language. Students above an expanding level of English proficiency and above (WIDA 4) can choose between the additional languages of French or Mandarin Chinese. In the Middle Years Program, Foundational, Standard, and Advanced are used to distinguish student proficiency levels within the language acquisition classes.

In Grades 11–12, Language Acquisition (Group 2) classes are offered in English and Mandarin Chinese at both Higher and Standard levels. Mandarin Chinese is also offered at Ab Initio (Standard) level.

English Language Support

English Language Learner (ELL) support is offered from Grades 1 – 5 to those students for whom it is deemed appropriate. In the Primary School, a WIDA assessment is administered to all ELLs annually as one measure of their English language development. WIDA proficiency levels, along with WIDA ‘Can Do’ statements, are used to inform the types of scaffolds and supports utilized to connect student learning and expressions of their understandings.

Students in Grades 6 – 10 who have not yet achieved an intermediate level of proficiency in English are enrolled in English Lab. A WIDA assessment is administered to determine placement in English Lab, with a threshold of WIDA 4 for both Reading and Writing to enter English Language and Literature classes at grades 6–8 and a WIDA 4.5 for both Reading and Writing to enter English Language and Literature classes at grades 9–10.

Additionally, an Intensive English class is offered at grades 6–10 in lieu of Individuals and Societies for students who are newer to English.

DEFINITIONS

Common Language

A shared language used to facilitate effective communication across linguistic barriers. At SSIS, English is the common language of instruction, with Mandarin Chinese also serving as a common language in specific programs and courses.

Language of Choice

An individual's preferred language for communication in a given context. SSIS encourages the use of home languages for sense-making, personal reflection, and brainstorming, while ensuring that students engage with the common language for collaborative and formal tasks.

Language of Instruction

The primary language(s) used for teaching and learning. At SSIS, English is the primary language of instruction, with Mandarin Chinese used in the bilingual program and world language courses.

Language Courses

Programs designed to teach or enhance proficiency in a specific language. At SSIS, these include English, Mandarin Chinese, and French.

Explicit Language Instruction

The intentional teaching of language forms, functions, and vocabulary. This is a key feature of all SSIS classrooms, not limited to language courses.

Translanguaging

The dynamic process by which multilingual individuals use their full linguistic repertoire to make sense of learning, communicate ideas, and express themselves. At SSIS, translanguaging is encouraged as a tool for sense-making, brainstorming, and personal reflection, while also balancing the need to engage with the common language of instruction for collaborative and formal tasks. Translanguaging supports students in connecting new concepts to prior knowledge and developing deeper understanding across languages.

MEDIATING STATEMENTS Aligned with SSIS Beliefs

NON-EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES
"Using your home language is a distraction."	"For this task, you may use any language of your choice for brainstorming. Remember that we will share out in English, so summarize your ideas in English."
"Only English is allowed in this classroom."	"For this discussion, we will use our common language of English. Use the sentence stems provided if you need help formulating your thoughts before we begin. Take a moment to think and prepare."
"If you can't speak English, you cannot participate."	"When reflecting independently, you are welcome to use any language that helps you express your thoughts. This is a good time to translate unknown vocabulary to ensure you've got clarity in English regarding your reflection."
"You must speak English at all times."	"Our classroom values respect and inclusion. Please make language choices that ensure everyone feels welcome and included."
"Stop speaking your home language—it's not helpful."	"During group/partner work, you may use your home language to discuss ideas if it is common to the whole group and is needed to further your understanding, but ensure the final product is in English for sharing."
"You're not allowed to translate for each other."	"If you need clarification, you may ask a peer in your home language, but be sure to share your understanding in English afterward."
"Don't use your home language for notes—it's not useful here."	"You may use your home language to annotate or take notes, as long as you can explain your ideas in English when needed."
"We don't allow home language use because it's unfair to others."	"Feel free to use your home language to process this information, but remember to use English when completing the assignment. Your work needs to be formulated in your own words and not a direct translation."
"You can't mix languages in your work—it's not acceptable."	"When creating a project, you may include elements in your home language, but ensure the main explanation is accessible in English."
"Helping others in your home language is not allowed—we only use English here."	"You may use your home language to support a classmate who is struggling, but ensure the group discussion remains in English."

Language Use Agreements: Establish clear policies with students about when to use their home language and when to use English. This could include specific activities or contexts where each language is appropriate.

English Use in Academic Tasks

Category	Instead of	Try
Input	Allowing students to translate text into their home language.	Use scaffolds to prepare students to read text in English, providing key vocabulary in home languages for context.
	Relying on text-heavy input...	Select text with visuals that support the content. If needed, some students might be encouraged to label visuals with home language terms. encourage students to read them aloud, ensuring comprehension.
	Watching videos in the home language....	Watch videos in English with subtitles, followed by a discussion in English to reinforce understanding.
Processing	Allowing group discussions only in English....	Create an agreement where students can process concepts in their home language, then share insights in English. Encourage language use as a transitional tool.
	Asking students to translate, explain, or reteach for their peers in the home language....	Provide clear, succinct, written instructions in English with, and model how to clarify or ask questions in English, fostering a supportive environment for language use.
	Using translation tools as the main resource	Teach students to summarize and paraphrase their understanding in English, encouraging them to think critically about what they've learned.
Output	Students drafting in their home language and translating their product into English....	Assign writing tasks that are shorter and attainable for students to tackle in English, allowing them to use home language for words or phrases that they may not know and then can translate later.
	Students using AI to produce corrected and edited work...	Encourage students to turn off Grammarly and other AI tools, to present work that is authentically theirs and allows for editing conversations and practice.
	Requiring public oral presentations in English....	Allow students to present their ideas in English via video, where multiple attempts are not only allowed, but encouraged.
	Providing written feedback in English....	Offer written feedback through 1:1 conferring conversations, where students have a chance to clarify their understanding directly with the teacher.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

SSIS leadership ensures that the Language Policy is implemented consistently across the school. Regular professional development opportunities are provided to equip teachers with strategies for inclusive and effective language practices. Feedback from students, parents, and staff is gathered during the review process to enhance the policy's effectiveness.

By aligning our language practices with our **Definition of Learning** and **School Vision**, SSIS fosters a compassionate, principled, and inspiring community where all students thrive linguistically, academically, and socially.