

St John the Baptist BNS

LANGUAGE POLICY STATEMENT ©

An Integrated Approach to Language Teaching and Learning

'By not creating a context for bilingual language exploration in our classroom, we miss out on one of the most powerful tools that children have to develop their literacy and awareness of language. ...the cognate connections between the languages provide enormous possibilities for linguistic enrichment, but not if the programme is set to ensure that the two languages never meet' (Jim Cummins).

'...languages should be taught in relation to one another rather than in isolation' (David Little).

Each pupil's home language is the default medium of her self-concept, her self-awareness, her consciousness, her discursive thinking, and her agency. It is thus the cognitive tool that she cannot help but apply to formal learning, which includes mastering the language of schooling (David Little).

An integrated approach to language teaching and learning is used in St. John the Baptist BNS to:

- Enhance cognitive development and thus support all learning;
- Develop reflective, analytical, conceptual skills that can be used in all areas of learning;
- Support communication and social cohesion within the various linguistic groups that are part of our school community;
- Introduce and develop the skills needed for independent and lifelong learning.

Language Mission Statement

Language teaching and learning in primary education strives to empower all pupils to reach their full potential as individuals and to become fully integrated members of the community of the school and the wider social community, while respecting and valuing the richness of cultures and linguistic diversity.

Introduction

The Language policy of St. John the Baptist BNS is developed in collaboration with the Partners in Education, namely:

Parents

Teachers

Management

The policy itself is developed and its implementation is achieved through the active involvement of the partners representing the whole school community.

Aim

Based on the idea of an integrated approach to language learning and teaching, the aim of the language policy is the promotion and achievement of:

- Excellent English language skills at all levels, for both native speakers and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners alike;
- Excellence in the Irish language, using children's unique experience of language in general as a support;
- A positive attitude to all mother tongues within the school;
- A positive attitude to Irish culture and the cultures of all pupils by validating every child's identity through the language learning experience.

Language Support

As language underpins all formal learning, developing English language proficiency for all pupils is of crucial importance to the child's success in school. All elements of the curriculum incorporate the learning of language and all teachers are, therefore, teachers of language. In this approach, there is an emphasis on 'commonality' of language through interconnectedness and linkage. In learning a language, the pupil is not unlearning another. The child's profile among her peers can be raised when her knowledge of and reference to her own language allows her to actively participate in class. This facility of language awareness enhances the experiential learning of all pupils and their language learning skills are promoted. Initiatives including modern language teaching and learning, Léargas projects, *TEAL* training and participation in local radio programmes, are very suitable vehicles for developing this kind of learning. In terms of Gaeilge, there is the opportunity to focus on its use as a real means of communication.

Staff Roles

All school staff, including teachers, special needs assistants and ancillary staff, are made aware of the importance of mother tongue (home language, L1) in the child's development. Parents are also actively encouraged to enhance their child's language learning through maintenance and development of their child's mother tongue.

Class Teacher

The role and responsibility of the class teacher is to teach the curriculum to all the pupils in the class (native speakers of English, EAL, special needs pupils), being mindful of the strengths and weaknesses brought by children to the task of learning.

Language Support Teacher

The primary responsibility of the language support teacher is to promote the pupil's development of English language proficiency so that she can gradually gain access to the curriculum, ultimately achieving the same educational opportunities as English-speaking peers so that she can reach her potential as a fully participative learner within the school. The language support teacher delivers a programme of English language tuition which is based on the requirements of the primary curriculum and which prepares and supports the child in:

- Accessing classroom learning
- Socialising with peers

On-going liaison between the language support teacher and the mainstream teacher is crucial to EAL learner success which is achieved by:

- Working in collaboration with the mainstream class teacher to set relevant and achievable learning targets for each pupil.

- Preparing the pupil, on an on-going basis, to access mainstream learning, initially in part and later more fully.
- Helping the pupil to develop appropriate strategies and skills to support future formal education in general.
(*Up and Away*, Dublin: Integrate Ireland Language and Training, 2006: p. 5)

The joint objective of both class and language support teachers is to:

- ensure that the newly arrived pupil can understand and use the basic language of the classroom (e.g. toilet, be quiet, copy from board, etc.)
- equip the pupil with knowledge of the rules and procedures of the school so that he or she does not unwittingly infringe them.
- help the pupil to understand different norms of behaviour that may exist in the new culture/society (in classroom, school, playground, etc).
- help to build the confidence and self-esteem of the pupil who may feel different, excluded and less able than those around him or her. Valuing the home language of the pupil is a crucial step in this process.

Early support Strategies

Parents are encouraged to maintain and develop home language.

Language support for all pupils from the beginning of schooling.

Buddy system to be set up on informal basis e.g. yard

Language pairing – children from the same country.

Literacy pairing – Older children same L1 skills paired with each other and younger children with same linguistic background.

N.B. The child's needs are paramount when putting the language support plan into place. Good communication between mainstream and language teachers is vital for success. (Primary School Assessment Kit, pp. 24; 47).

Consultation

The partners in Education, as outlined in the introduction, will be consulted on matters concerning development and review of the school's language policy.

Training and Resources

A Special Education Teacher is currently engaging in the TEAL network. The Teal Project is a teacher development project run by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. It aims to respond to the needs of children with English as an Additional Language needs in schools in Limerick city. In 2020 they were awarded a European Language Label Award by Léargas.

Ratification and Review

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in May 2021. The language policy is to be reviewed by the partners in education in the light of changing needs..

References

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