QASMT LANGUAGE POLICY

Language Philosophy at QASMT

Language is core to learning and SMT has, as a core philosophy, the belief expressed by Wittgenstein, that “the limits of my language are the limits of my world.” Therefore, we support the centrality of language learning as essential to our students gaining and maintaining an internationalist perspective of their world.

One of SMT’s core pillars is EXCELLENCE, and we strive to be an outstanding English language IB World School. Our vision to be internationally recognised for academic excellence applies in full to our focus on language learning. We aim for our students to be world class in their mother tongue (usually English), and to be outstanding learners of other languages whilst at SMT.

In line with Education Queensland policy and philosophy, and current language trends, we believe that language needs to be considered in terms of:

- Learning language
- Learning through language, and
- Learning about language

These approaches also link well to our SMT Pedagogy Statement, including the concept that we need to explore how knowledge is formed and we need to test knowledge claims. Language also allows us to exemplify the ten elements of the IB Learner Profile in academic and personal life.

It is a pedagogical imperative that we attend to student language development. Intellectual and social growth enables full participation in the wider community.

We believe:

- Multilingualism establishes cognitive patterns of language acquisition that can be drawn upon in the learning of additional languages
- Proficiency in additional languages and high levels of academic proficiency in English are required to derive positive cognitive benefits from multilingualism
- Proficiency in English as the “international language”, as well as proficiency in other languages (including mother tongue of students whose first or family language is not English) meets the demands of Queensland and Australian imperatives for our students to be internationally focused
- All teachers are language teachers and are therefore responsible for specifically teaching and enunciating the vocabulary and genres appropriate to the subject area in which they teach
- Language teaching should reflect the developing knowledge of how people learn and thus, language teaching should be developmental, taking into account the cognitive abilities and language knowledge of the individual learner
- Language learning embraces the development of cultural awareness and understanding, and this is a fundamental belief of SMT as an IB World School
- Language is best learned in significant and meaningful situations, contextually appropriate for language learners, and where learners interact with each other to accomplish their goals
- Language proficiency in spoken and written language often vary greatly; all students require support to develop high-level academic language proficiency, irrespective of their target language. Specifically at SMT, this will include written English (usually Group 1 A1 language), and written and spoken second language proficiency (Group 2).
- Celebration of and ongoing support of a student’s dominant language is crucial for academic and social development and for personal identity. In most instances, our current students are English A1 proficient, as required by our entry rules, but continuing celebration of our rich language diversity, as well as support for individual students (e.g. ‘International Students” admitted under EQI policies), is an imperative at SMT.
- Language learning and teaching is an ongoing partnership between the Academy, the students and their parents. Parental support of this language policy is vital for its success.
The Teaching of English

- English is the A1 language at SMT, being both the national language of Australia and the language in which all students are currently proficient (to a greater or lesser degree). All students currently study English as their A1, but provision needs to be made in our Language Committee to discuss, where appropriate, the provision for an individual to study an A1 in a language other than English. This provision will always be subject to Education Queensland policies regarding staffing, and the Academy’s ability to manage effectively such an undertaking.

- Fluency in English is an expectation of SMT and appropriate language support is essential at SMT to ensure that all students are sufficiently competent to use English for academic (tertiary) purposes and to successfully complete their IB Diploma.

- If and when we begin to take in international students (under EQI policies and guidelines), appropriate second language support in English will need to be provided. This may take a variety of forms, including in-class support, withdrawal classes etc.

The Teaching of Languages Other than English

The Academy has a policy of teaching a broad a range of languages other than English through its Group 2 offerings. Currently, four international languages are offered to students, usually at both Ab Initio level, and for students with sufficient previous exposure to one or more of these languages, at Language B level.

Our offerings at SMT include MANDARAIN, SPANISH, GERMAN and FRENCH.

The Language policy of this Academy supports the following:

- Maintenance of all the above languages to ensure that any student who begins a course in one language, has the ability to study at the highest appropriate level through to Diploma.

- The Language Committee, in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, should review, on an annual basis, the offerings made by the Academy. Reviews should take into account the ongoing viability of a particular language, and should reflect changes as they occur in the composition of the student cohort and their language needs and backgrounds. Reviews should also take into account The Melbourne Declaration, which mandates a focus on Asian languages for Australian students. Also, reviews should consider the efficacy of certain second languages in terms of their “usefulness” for future study patterns of students (e.g. the study of languages from countries with strong science backgrounds, such as Germany).

- Further consideration needs to be given by the Language Committee to the linguistic “footprint” of our student cohort. For example, we have currently a significant proportion of students of Indian, Vietnamese and Korean ethnicity, and future language offerings might reflect these linguistic backgrounds, if and when time and resources permit. In the meantime, it is imperative that provision be made for students to maintain mother tongue proficiency, and that linguistic diversity be celebrated through selections of our publications, as appropriate. An example of this might be occasional publication of important documentation in multiple languages, reflective of our community languages.

- Promotion of English as first language and the main academic language of the Academy is an imperative and in line with Education Queensland, Australian Curriculum and national education policies.

- All Academy stakeholders need to be cognisant of and supportive of the language policy of the Academy. This includes involving staff in professional development in the fields of language learning, where appropriate, and to ensure that this document becomes a working document, reflecting the dynamic environment of SMT. Ongoing support for first and other language development should remain a priority for SMT.

- The Language Committee (and staff) need to consider what resources and practices will be appropriate in assisting parents in planning the language profile and development of their child.
The IBO publication, Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes, states that: “Language stands at the center of the many interdependent cognitive, affective and social factors that shape learning.” (p.1).

Our Language Policy at SMT, and its ongoing actioning through the Language Committee and staff interactions, asserts that:

- Language “sustain[s] personal development, cultural identity and intercultural understanding”. We believe that language learning (mother tongue, A1 – if different, and Group 2 language) sustains cognitive growth.
- SMT’s vision is to move well away from a monocultural and monolingual environment, thus making it truly reflective of its cohort, of modern Australia, and of a country which perceives the value of a “global” perspective.
- We support the definition of “mother tongue” as that given by the IBO (to include language learned first, language identified as “native”, language known best, or language used most).
- We acknowledge the linguistic and cultural complexity of our student cohort. Our language policy aims to celebrate this, and to “exploit” this diversity for the enhancement of the language skills of all of our students.
- The Academy acknowledges the contribution of language learning made to academic development of our students, and therefore seeks to make sure that the IB DP language offerings truly reflect “best practice” and “best offerings” for our given clientele. It is an imperative of the Language Committee that we regularly review the efficacy of languages offered at SMT.
- We acknowledge that the cognitive academic language proficiency of some of our students is affected by their main academic language (English for the Diploma Programme) NOT being their “mother tongue”. Support in class and external to classes is a vital component of our support of mother tongue students.
- Learning about language is an essential component of our Theory of Knowledge programme, and this should be increasingly reflected in subject work programmes, subject work units and in the classroom environment.
- Each Work Programme and individual work units will need to address the four dimensions of teaching to ensure learner participation and promote engagement, as outlined by Cummins (2007), and enunciated in Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes. These are: (i) to activate prior understanding and build background knowledge; (ii) to scaffold meaning; (iii) to extend language and (iv) to affirm identity.

Activating Prior Understanding

- Our students are selected from a range of school backgrounds and therefore come to SMT with a wide variety of skills and experiences. Teachers must take this into account in their planning, and it is important that the language skills of the students be taken into consideration in class.
- Where a student is less proficient in English than in their mother tongue, appropriate support needs to be provided. Consideration needs to be given to specific tutorial support in language development, as well as in focus on content and skills.
- Tasks and activities need to be differentiated, where appropriate, to support this difference in language experience
- All student profiles should, where appropriate, indicate planning support for future learning
- Teachers in ALL subjects should consider the time and strategies necessary for activating and building up background knowledge when planning a lesson or unit of work. THIS SHOULD BE ESPECIALLY NOTED IN ALL THREE AREAS FOR DIFFERENTIATION in the IB work units – Gifted and Talented/ESL/Differentiation.
QASMT LANGUAGE POLICY

Scaffolding meaning
- Encourage, where appropriate, the use of a mother tongue to carry out research if it would be impossible in another language. Our Academy supports appropriate multilingual approaches in classroom environments which aid learning through language.
- Using visual aids
- Using graphic organisers
- Demonstrations
- Dramatizations
- Collaborative group work (including groups of same mother tongue, where appropriate)
- Teacher language (including clarity, pitch, written summaries, avoiding colloquial expressions where appropriate, metalinguage – discussion of cultural dimensions to language, especially English; celebration of the other languages used in the Academy).
- Fostering independence of language learning

Extending language
- Academic language becomes increasingly complex through the IB Diploma course, and as such, it is the responsibility of teachers in all subjects to support development of academic proficiency
- Teachers need to explain and support understanding of increasingly complex technical vocabulary and grammatical structures. This should be supported through Language A1, Group 2 language AND through all individual subject offerings.
- High expectations are a given at SMT
- Learner-centred practice and interactions are imperatives at SMT
- Encouraging increasing learner independence is a priority at SMT
- Encouraging reading for enjoyment and for practical academic purposes is encouraged at SMT
- Encouraging practice of a wide range of written genres is to be encouraged, and appropriate scaffolding is essential

Affirm Identity
- SMT supports ADDITIVE BILINGUALISM (where another language and culture enhances, rather than dominates mother tongue and culture)
- Classroom and whole Academy environments embrace celebrating diversity of cultures
- Valuing and USING diversity of cultures to enhance learning is encouraged at SMT
- Consideration needs to be given to mother tongue development and possible extension, where possible, of L2 (Group 2) offerings at SMT, both to reflect the cultural diversity of SMT, and to reaffirm the rich language abilities of our students. It is common for many of our students to speak more than one language at home and to switch between languages depending on audience and purpose. This is a relatively untapped resource, and consideration should be given to exploiting this rich resource.
- Parental collaboration to achieve shared goals is an aspect to be explored at SMT
QASMT LANGUAGE POLICY

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AT QASMT AND ACTIONING LANGUAGE POLICY

1. Language is core to our business at SMT and best practice language policies should be implemented.

2. Language teaching and pedagogy should celebrate the wealth and diversity of languages at SMT.

3. Implications arising from this include accessing best language professional development for staff.

4. Multilingualism is central to our core value of excellence and the desire to be one of the best internationally-focused IB World Schools.

5. Regular (annual) review of our language offerings, with a view to accessing new offerings, where appropriate, is necessary.

6. The core role of English in the IB Diploma programme at SMT means that all students should be taught academic English to the highest possible standard.

7. The value of reading widely and for enjoyment is central to language learning and ways and means of encouraging this is a vital aspect of our language policy.

8. Appropriate support for students from a non-English speaking background is essential.

9. The broadening of language offerings needs to be considered in line with the cultural demographics of our student cohort, subject to Departmental demands and resources, including the strengthening of Asian languages in line with Australian Government policy.

10. The centrality and importance of language learning must be reflected in unit and work programmes.

11. Appropriate scaffolding to enhance learning is essential in language teaching across all areas of the curriculum.

12. Extending language competence is the responsibility of all teachers and high expectations are a given.

13. The core role of parents and the way in which they can help to achieve shared goals requires further exploration and development at SMT.