



# Language Policy



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2007

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## **A. MISSION STATEMENT OF FIRSTSTEPS SCHOOL**

**FirstSteps School aims to move forward with the already adopted motto "We don't Teach – We EDUCATE" and the Mission "INDIA FOR WORLD"**

- I** Inculcate universal brotherhood and values,
- N** Nurture innocence, uniqueness and creativity,
- D** Develop concern for environment in particular and the Planet Earth in general,
- I** Imbibe entrepreneurial skills & international mindedness.
- A** Acquire habit of inquiry.
  
- F** Foster international education system,
- O** Open mind for the development of intellect, self-esteem, self-confidence and critical learning,
- R** Respect one-self and others,
- W** Welcome the change and develop it with a positive attitude and vision.
- O** Organise self-discipline
- R** Right environment to develop inquisitiveness for learning and to dissipate learning beyond the classroom.
- L** Learners for life time and leaders of tomorrow.
- D** Develop the virtue of understanding others' perspective.

The FirstSteps mission statement is the foundation for our language policy. As language forms the basis for all learning, this policy is critical for helping the school to achieve its mission.

## **Objectives of the Language policy Document**

The language policy document aims to consolidate ideas and beliefs at FirstSteps School regarding language and language teaching, outlines systems and strategies to support the development of English as a lingua franca as well as development and maintenance of mother tongue in the school community.

This document also seeks to ensure that, as a candidate IB School, compliance with IBO Standards and Practices are met.

This document should be referred to when planning for language teaching, curriculum planning and professional development.

The audience for this document also includes the parent community at FirstSteps School as well as new and interested parents seeking admission in FirstSteps School.

### **Beliefs and Aims**

FirstSteps School believes that language fulfills three fundamental, compelling human urges- to connect with others, to understand our world and ourselves in it. Language is fundamental to learning, thinking and communicating.

We aim to nurture an appreciation of the richness and diversity of language. Language does much more than promote cognitive growth; it is crucial for maintaining cultural identity and emotional stability. The acquisition of more than one language and maintenance of the mother tongue enrich personal growth and help facilitate international understanding.

While English is the language of instruction, the language policy allows for students to inquire in the mother tongue and aspire to multilingualism. The school is committed to providing as much diversity of language instruction as possible.

The language policy validates the equal status to all languages. It endorses an awareness of the host country's culture and language by teaching Hindi/English at all acquisition levels throughout the school. The mother tongue programme in each section of our school reinforces literacy and cultural identity and reflects the multilingual society we live in. The modern foreign languages programme develops understanding and respect for other cultures.

The language policy recognizes the transfer of cognitive skills from the mother tongue to English and vice versa and the acquisition of additional languages. This process encourages in acquisition of higher order thinking skills and development of multiple perspectives. The policy also recognizes the importance of all teachers differentiating instruction for students at different levels of language acquisition.

We aim to foster in students the ability to think and express themselves with precision, clarity, confidence and imagination in at least two languages. The language policy supports the shared responsibility of all teachers, students and parents for language development. All teachers and students are encouraged to assume their responsibility to be language learners.

The language policy promotes life-long learning. Developing language learning skills gives students the capacity to solve problems, think critically and act creatively. Language empowers students to understand, interpret and respond to ideas, attitudes and feelings. Information literacy and technology also provide a gateway to life-long learning and a rich range of language learning opportunities.

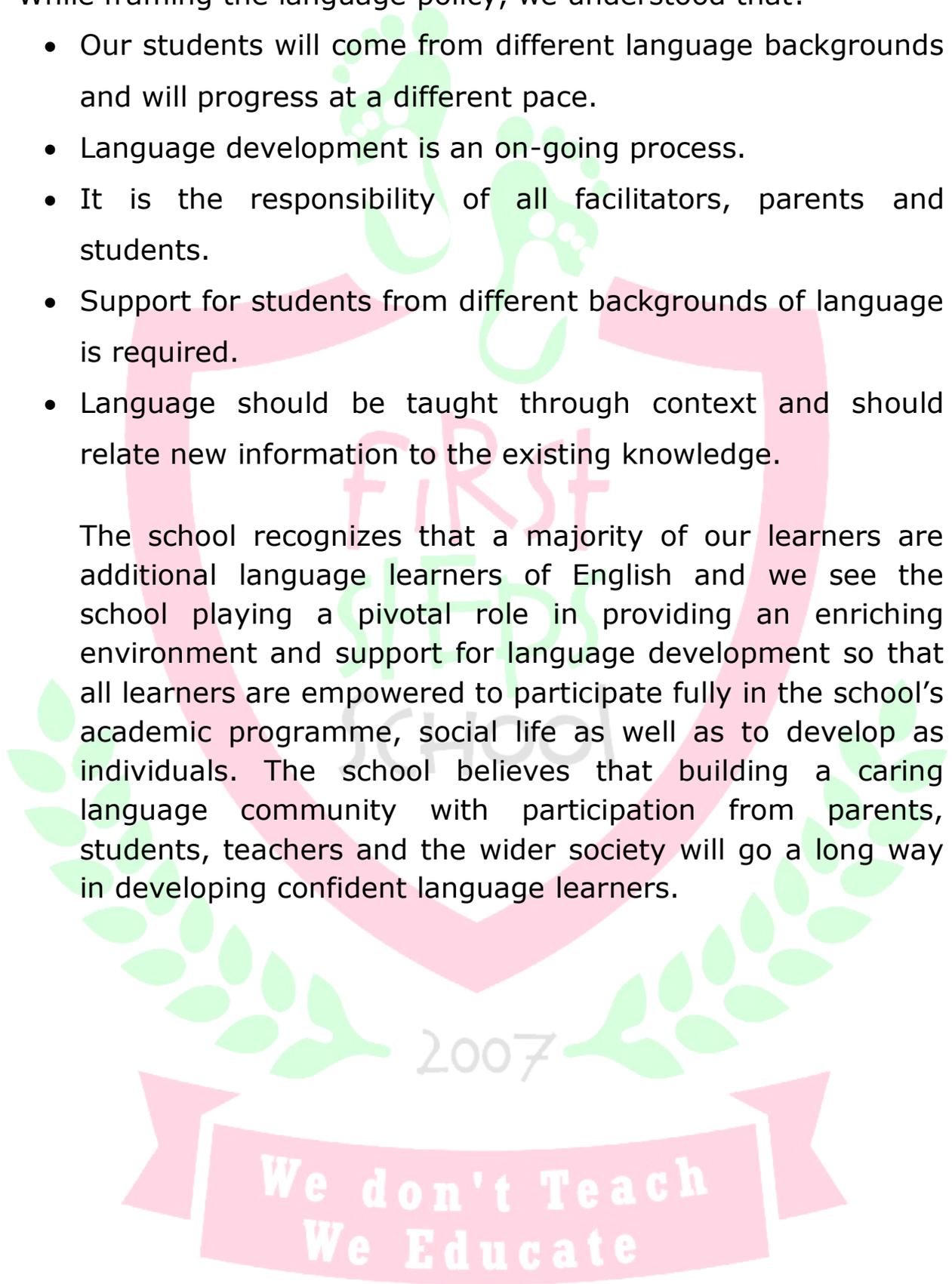


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While framing the language policy, we understood that:

- Our students will come from different language backgrounds and will progress at a different pace.
- Language development is an on-going process.
- It is the responsibility of all facilitators, parents and students.
- Support for students from different backgrounds of language is required.
- Language should be taught through context and should relate new information to the existing knowledge.

The school recognizes that a majority of our learners are additional language learners of English and we see the school playing a pivotal role in providing an enriching environment and support for language development so that all learners are empowered to participate fully in the school's academic programme, social life as well as to develop as individuals. The school believes that building a caring language community with participation from parents, students, teachers and the wider society will go a long way in developing confident language learners.



## **Language Profile of students at FirstSteps School**

The following points summarize the language profile of students currently studying at FirstSteps School:

- Majority of the students have Hindi as their mother tongue/ native language.
- A small percentage of students have other Indian languages as their mother tongue.
- Almost all students are second language learners of English.
- English is the preferred medium of instruction and is commonly acceptable to all.
- All parents want their children to learn English as the main language in school.
- We understand that the primary language of a child serves as the foundation on which English proficiency is built. We encourage students to continue to increase literacy and proficiency in their primary language.
- English is an important and the most popular medium of communication in the world and it is medium of communication and instruction at FirstSteps.

### **Language at FirstSteps School**

English is the medium of instruction at FirstSteps School and is taught as the primary language. It has priority in the school's language programme. It is also the preferred language of communication in the school and is acceptable to all.

It serves as the school's official language for purpose of operations, communication and management. However, it is acknowledged that the school community is multilingual and members function in their everyday lives in more than one language.

All school-wide written communication with parents is done in English although individual parent and teachers may communicate (written and oral) in a common language of their choice. (this is typically done as per parent's preference).

The administration department and the support staff (transport, food, and housekeeping) typically use Hindi in their daily interactions with other members of the school community.

## **Language in the Primary years Programme**

Language is the most significant connecting element across the school's curriculum, both within and outside its transdisciplinary programme of inquiry. Language at FirstSteps in the PYP is seen as permeating the whole curriculum. Language learning is spread across subject areas and through the programme of inquiry and all PYP teachers at FirstSteps view themselves as language teachers. English is the primary language taught at the Primary years and also the language through which the students access the PYP curriculum.

The school offers Hindi (official languages of India) as an additional language from Pre Kindergarten. French and German are offered as optional languages from Grade 3 onwards.

Teachers plan learning experiences in language within meaningful and enjoyable contexts and learners are able to make connections, apply their learning, and transfer their conceptual understanding to new situations. This progressive conceptual development, together with an enjoyment of the process, provides the foundation for lifelong learning.

The school also acknowledges that learning to comprehend language through listening, reading and viewing and to express through speaking; writing and presenting go hand in hand and

hence, promotes integrated language development. The three strands of communication: oral, written and visual are interwoven and interrelated and not taught in isolation.

We believe that literature plays a very important role in language development. Literature helps to reconnect feeling and thinking. It expands our life spaces and takes us outside the boundaries of our life experiences to other places, time periods and ways of living. The school also sees culturally diverse literature as a powerful means to develop international mindedness and attributes of the learner profile in all learners. The library collection reflects this belief in its collection of picture books, folk tales, bilingual books etc.

The learner profile, together with the five essential elements of the programme knowledge, concepts, skills, attitudes and action informs planning, teaching and assessing language at FirstSteps School.

Approaches to teaching and learning in the PYP:

FirstSteps School endeavors to make students proficient and fluent in usage of all forms of English language by the end of the PYP years, by:

- promoting integrated language development
- using language as a transdisciplinary element throughout the curriculum
- using a literature-based approach to learning language
- encouraging appropriate cooperative discussion in the classroom
- encouraging reading for meaning
- using differentiated reading engagements selected according to interest level, readiness, proficiency.

- using a variety of scaffolded learning experiences with the teacher providing strategies for the student to build on his or her own learning
- viewing writing as a process
- teaching students to read and research using multimedia resources
- using language for creative problem solving and information processing
- using a range of appropriate assessment methods such as portfolios, conferencing, writing sample analysis, response journals.

The school is developing a language scope and sequence document for the primary years. This document is a work in progress and we intend to align it with the the PYP Language scope and sequence document.

### **Mother tongue programme at FirstSteps School**

FirstSteps School recognizes that mother tongue is an integral part of an individual's identity and it is important to affirm, value and promote students mother tongue. It also recognizes the need for developing and maintaining students mother tongue. This belief encourages the attributes identified in the IB learner profile, as well as promotes responsible action and international-mindedness.

The school recognizes that multilingualism is an essential aspect of the typical classroom. Teachers are encouraged to use this in the best way possible without undermining the importance of development of English as a lingua franca\*.

The school views all teachers in the school throughout all programmes as language teachers. It is acknowledged that some teachers are more proficient in their mother tongue than in the

language of instruction in the school. The school takes responsibility for ensuring that such teachers are appropriately trained to teach in the language of instruction.

Further, they are encouraged to use their mother tongue in interaction with students where there is a wealth of relevant background knowledge encoded in their mother tongue.

The mother tongue programme plays an important role in developing and affirming the student's personality and identity. Therefore, the guideline for use of mother tongue in the classroom is that it should be used as a support language - interlingua translation should be used wherever the teacher feels the need and sees value in its use. An example of this could be: activating prior knowledge of students, recording anecdotes of students in early years verbatim, exploring cultural beliefs and values etc.

Whole school strategies for developing mother tongue:

- The school library has a variety of books and periodicals in Hindi.
- Students are encouraged to issue books from library on a regular basis.
- FirstSteps School conducts a Hindi Diwas which is a celebration of the richness of the language. A variety of games, quizzes, skits etc are organised in the school for this.
- The school also has presentations in the school assembly on various regional languages of India. These presentations showcase the richness and culture of the language through music, dance etc. The linguistic diversity of the school community is a rich resource for the mother tongue programme and the school makes active use of it in such opportunities.

- The parent community is also actively advised to develop and maintain the mother tongue of their child and encouraged to view English as an additive and not a subtractive language.

## **Additional Language Programme**

### **German and French**

At FirstSteps, in addition to English and Hindi language, students from grade 3 onwards are given an option of third language, German or French (in two language areas listening and speaking). While grade 4 onwards students study the language in all four areas listening, speaking, reading and writing.

While a students' previous knowledge or exposure to the target language is ascertained, classes consist of mixed ability levels and the teacher differentiates instruction to meet the needs of the various language acquisition levels in each class and are expected to cater to the needs of beginners.

### **Support services**

#### **A. Language learning and the library**

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.

- Information is available on the internet for exploration on every possible topic. We believe that use of IT enriches a subject area and enhances learning. It makes the curriculum more accessible helping students to

- Access internet for research work and independent learning.
- Collaborative and interactive work.
- Submission of assignments.

An information literate individual is able to determine the extent of information needed; access the needed information effectively and efficiently and evaluate information and sources critically.

The library is central to the language programme at FirstSteps School. The library provides a learning space and an environment to promote love for reading, books as well as a place for research. The role of the FirstSteps library is to promote and facilitate information literacy across all curriculum and to all members of the FirstSteps community. The library also provides resources for collaborative planning, researching and teacher professional development. Our school board is aware of our need to expand these resources and there are plans to continually add the same.

At the PYP level, there is a library period every week. Teachers can also conduct classes in the library where the librarian teacher and Homeroom teacher conduct story narration and enacting, puppet shows, read aloud, help conduct research and help students browse and pick up books. In addition to the school library, every class also has a class library with books which are age appropriate. The students browse through the books as per their interest and time.

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## **B. Learning support**

### **Additional English Language Support (AELS)**

When a student has been identified with additional learning needs including language difficulties or gifted and talented abilities, intervention and support are provided through the learning support programme. This support may be formalised through an in-class support plan or an individual education plan and may involve short and long term interventions.

The school has designed an AELS program for such students. The programme is a combination of classroom support and pull out programme of intensive English for a stipulated time period. The process of short listing a student for AELS involves a series of steps like informal screening, observations, feedback given by the previous grade's teacher, assessment reports of previous year/ previous school, feedback about student's home environment etc.

Students considered for this programme are generally:

- First generation learners of English
- Have zero support for English language learning at home
- Come from schools where the language of instruction is not English.
- Are admitted in FirstSteps School at a higher grade and have poor foundation skills in English.

These students require additional support to enable them to access the school curriculum in a manner that allows them to reach their full potential.

As of now, the AELS programme is only at the PYP level.

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## **Assessment**

While language acquisition follows distinct stages, students' rate of acquisition varies greatly from individual to individual. Therefore, language teachers assess all language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), regularly differentiating through scaffolding or extension as required. Formative and summative assessments in the classroom provide information on language growth. Language teachers regularly standardise students' work to ensure a fair application of assessment criteria.

Rubrics, anecdotal records, self assessment, peer assessment, teacher assessment are tools and strategies used in the primary school to assess language learning and provide evidence of development.

## **Professional development**

As it is an expectation for all teachers to be language teachers, on-going training focused on integrated language instruction will be offered throughout the year. The school is committed to providing embedded professional development for language learning across the curriculum. The Coordinator ensures that staff receives on-going professional development opportunities and monitors that strategies are successfully implemented.

## Language Policy Revision

Process of development of the whole School Language Policy

The current policy has been written in September 2015. The pre-work for this policy started in January 2014. A language policy steering committee was formed which included the Head of School, PYP Coordinator, all facilitators and Teacher librarian.

The following key steps have been undertaken in the development of this policy:

- Brainstorming with the school community about their beliefs regarding language learning including collecting data via questionnaires and focused discussions
- Study of literature related to language and language learning.
- Construction of language profile of student community by collecting data from parent community.
- Preparation of 1st draft of the policy.

The language policy will be reviewed after a period of 2 years. (Next review: October 2016). The review committee will be led by a member of the academic leadership team and will include librarians, teachers, students and parents of the school. The review committee will make sure that any revision to the policy is coherent with the beliefs and values of the IBO, the school's philosophy towards language and language teaching, changes in student and community demographics or other circumstances which justify the need for revision.

The leadership team will review the implementation of the policy in classrooms and throughout the school on a regular basis as part of the appraisal process.