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Language Policy of the European Schools

Approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting of 9th to 12th of April 2019 in Athens¹

Amended by:

Decision of the Board of Governors on 6, 7 and 8 December 2022 – Brussels (Hybrid) ²

Decision of the Board of Governors on 5, 6 and 7 December 2023 – Brussels (Hybrid)³

Decision of the Joint Teaching Committee by Written Procedure N° 2024/39 on 29th October 2024.⁴

Decisions of the Board of Governors on 9, 10 and 11 April 2025 in Nicosia (Cyprus) (Hybrid)⁵

Entry into force:

- **September 2025⁶**
- **September 2026⁷**

This updated document “Language Policy” 2019-01-D-35-en-9 cancels and repeals the following documents:

1/ From the document “*The European School Curriculum: Structure and Organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools*” 2019-04-D-13:

- The Chapter 2: General regulations for language teaching in the European Schools
- The Chapter 3: SWALS – mother tongue provision for pupils for whom there is no language section of their own in their school.
- and the Annex 1 Procedure for deciding to offer the Host Country Language as a Language 2 - Measure aiming at an effective entry into force in p1 in September 2023.

2/ The document “*Basic proficiency level*” 2013-08-D-11.

¹ Decisions of the BoG: 2019-04-D-12 – Entry into force September 2019.

² Decisions of the BoG: 2022-12-D-7 - Immediate entry into force.

³ Decisions of the BoG: 2023-12-D-9 - Immediate entry into force.

⁴ Decisions of the JTC: WP 2024/39 – 2024-09-D-47. Immediate entry into force.

⁵ Decisions of the BoG: 2025-04-D-2 – September 2025 and 2026.

⁶ Maintains of L1 courses for SWALS pupils in Category III.

⁷ Introduction of Catalan as an ONL language

- 3/ The document “*Languages of tuition for Economics in the European Schools system*” 2012-05-D-23
- 4/ The memorandum 2020-05-M-1-en-2 “*Decision of the Board of Governors of 15-17 April 2020 concerning the introduction of the Host Country Language as a Language 2 in the European Schools – doc. Ref.: 2020-01-D-25-en-4*”

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Purpose and Principles

The mission of the European Schools is to provide a **multilingual and multicultural education of high quality** from nursery level to the Baccalaureate, fostering a European and global perspective to educate children of different mother tongues and nationalities. **The European Schools is committed to giving pupils confidence in their own cultural identity as an integral part of their development as European citizens.** This aim is expressed in the foundation stones of all the schools:

“Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind European, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe.”⁸

From the establishment of the European Schools, and still today, languages and language education have played a key role in this very unique system.

The multicultural, multilingual nature of the schools and the particular teaching and learning context offer especially valuable opportunities for the development of language competence and cultural awareness.

A number of key principles are integral to and underpin the language policy and practice of the European Schools. These principles are listed below although definition and discussion of terms is provided later in this document. These can be divided into three **basic** principles and *three* further **scaffolding** principles which, though important, are essentially arrangement-related:

1. The primary importance of the mother tongue ⁹ (Language 1).
2. The recognition of and commitment to support the national languages of each Member State of the European Union.
3. The offer of a multilingual educational system that promotes plurilingualism.

The arrangement-related principles include:

- Enrolment of pupils into language sections.
- The promotion of plurilingualism by supporting the effective acquisition of the Language 1 and of two other languages (Language 2 and Language 3).
- The promotion of the development of linguistic competence through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), offering education through languages other than Language 1, present in the pupil's curriculum.

Education in the schools is organised on the basis of the above listed principles, which have been respected since the foundation of the schools.

Although the objectives of the European Schools have withstood the test of time, demands from the Society in recent years are suggesting the need for some changes to the System, not least in relation to the role and purpose of language education. Among these changes is the need to embed the overarching concept of the key competences into the curriculum.

⁸ Marcel Decombis, Director ES Luxembourg I, 1953.

⁹ In the European Schools system, the term ‘dominant language’ is used to refer to the language in which pupils, at the moment of enrolment in the system are the most proficient, especially in education-related domains of language use, and/or in which the children are most likely to perform well academically, linguistically and emotionally in the course of their education in the European Schools System. The dominant language will serve as the main language of learning for most pupils and will be fostered throughout the pupil's education as the basis for other learning.

“Growing internationalisation, the rapid pace of change, and the continuous roll-out of new technologies mean that European citizens must not only keep their specific job-related skills up-to-date, but also possess the generic competences that will enable them to adapt to change. People’s competences also contribute to their motivation and job satisfaction in the workplace, thereby affecting the quality of their work¹⁰”.

Among the eight key competences, Literacy and Multilingual competences (embracing the former Communication in the mother tongue and Communication in foreign languages competences) lie at the heart of every educational system. This is especially the case in the European Schools, where pupils are educated in an international, multilingual and multicultural environment, and where consequently languages play a fundamental role in successful learning.

Learning languages is a foundation for learning in general. Therefore, it supports pupils in becoming successful and contented citizens in their future career and throughout their lives. Since their establishment, the European Schools have proven excellence in providing high quality multilingual education, therefore, a language policy document is a priority.

The aim of the Language Policy is to define the pedagogical principles with a special focus on teaching languages and the use of languages, and to provide a source of information on the ways in which the European Schools put principles into practice.

Dominant language, multilingualism and plurilingualism

The concept of dominant language¹¹

Article 4 of the Convention lays down the linguistic principles of European schooling. A fundamental aim of the European Schools, which makes this system unique and characteristically different from all other systems, is that **every pupil should enjoy the benefit of learning in their dominant language**. In the European Schools, due to the increasingly global and multilingual environment described in the previous section, more and more children come from a bi- or multilingual family or have spent some time of their lives in countries different from the country where they were born. This growing experience necessitates that the Language Policy distinguishes the above-mentioned terms (*dominant language, multilingualism and plurilingualism¹²*).

In this policy, the term *dominant language* will be used as the language in which bi- or multilingual children “have the highest level of proficiency in especially education-related domains of language use, and which they use most often (or is likely to use most often) with significant

¹⁰ Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Reference Framework, European Commission, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 30 December 2006, [EUR-Lex - 32006H0962 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#), 2007

¹¹ In the scientific literature, the dominant language of a multilingual individual is defined in terms of (i) the relative language proficiency and competence (i.e. the language which they know best, feel most confident in and require the least effort to use in the majority of domains of language use) and (ii) frequency of use (i.e. the language which they use most often in the majority of domains of language use). Language dominance in multilinguals is not a static but a dynamic property which may vary in time and with domains of language use.

In the European Schools system, the term ‘dominant language’ is used to refer to the language in which pupils, at the moment of enrolment in the system are the most proficient, especially in education-related domains of language use, and/or in which the children are most likely to perform well academically, linguistically and emotionally in the course of their education in the European Schools System. The dominant language will serve as the main language of learning for most pupils and will be fostered throughout the pupil’s education as the basis for other learning.

¹² Multilingualism and plurilingualism are often used interchangeably, but there may be some nuances. The term plurilingualism is often used to emphasize the use of several languages by an individual as a fluid and integrated whole, encouraging interlingual transfer and the use of all linguistic resources to communicate, while the term multilingualism generally refers to the teaching of several languages within a society, school, or educational system. It aims to enable proficiency in several languages, often through the teaching of different subjects in different languages or by offering courses in several languages. In summary, plurilingualism is more focused on the flexible and holistic use of languages by an individual, while multilingualism emphasizes the structured teaching and societal use of several languages. See also terminological Database of the European Schools: <http://www.ester.eurisc.eu> .

interlocutors (e.g. parents, siblings, caregivers, close friends, teachers)".¹³ This term neither replaces, nor diminishes the significance of the concept of **mother tongue or home language**.

In this sense, the dominant language is considered an underlying principle, one that is well documented and supported by researchers in the fields of linguistics, pedagogy, social sciences and psychology. The European Schools have always defended and will continue to defend the status of the dominant language, to avoid the danger of devaluing it, in the pupil's best interest.

The role of the dominant language in a multilingual system

According to a widely known and acknowledged theory on bilingual education¹⁴, pupils learning in a multilingual environment will frequently, by dint of interacting with children and teachers who are native (or as it is often the case in the European Schools, highly fluent) speakers, acquire basic skills in a foreign language, such as speaking and listening, much more quickly and easily than their counterparts in a monolingual system. By starting to learn foreign languages at a young age and by thus learning these basic communication skills within a very short time, they become near-native speakers as far as communication in everyday school life is concerned, but they need a few more years to be able to acquire the academic language which is required to follow tuition in more abstract subject matter. **Immersion in a foreign language environment makes it easier for them to communicate in everyday contexts but being confident and competent in more complex learning situations takes more time.**

This is the main reason why the European Schools, different from all other systems, offer part of the education in the dominant language of the pupils at all levels, so that the competence of pupils in that language will never cease to improve. **Competence in all the other languages** that pupils have in their curriculum **is built on the dominant language.**

Research and common experience show that **continued improvement in competence in the dominant language is conducive to the learning of other languages and leads to better academic progress in other subjects.** *"Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible."*¹⁵

On the grounds stated above and in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe, language learning is considered in the European Schools an underlying individual competence, which stays with all citizens during the whole of their private life and academic/professional career.

Multilingualism and the linguistic repertoire of pupils

Language competence *"needs to be developed not just for utilitarian or professional reasons but also as education for respect for the languages of others and linguistic diversity."*¹⁶

The system of the European Schools is **a multilingual environment**. Pupils of the European Schools should acquire the "linguistic repertoire" which is recommended to any European citizen by the end of their secondary studies¹⁷.

¹³ The definition has been provided by Professor Alex Housen, Dean and Professor of English Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at Vrije Universiteit Brussel: The definition is based on a summary of the literature in the field of language dominance.

¹⁴ The paragraphs which follow are based on the articles by Professor J. Cummins, whose theory is commonly cited. The summary here is based on a publication *Second Language Acquisition – essential information*. Cummins uses the terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) as fundamental concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism.

¹⁵ Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters p. 39.

¹⁶ *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe – Executive Version* (Council of Europe 2007), p. 7.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 7.

A pupil from a family where the parents share the same dominant language and have the same cultural background can usually speak a standard national language, (often accompanied by a regional or minority variety) and at least two foreign languages at a later stage.

The level of language acquisition and the skills can be different from pupil to pupil, but some minimum standards of competence are aimed at. This stock of language competencies builds up during the entire period of schooling.

This picture is even more colourful in situations where the parents are of different nationalities and speak different languages at home.

After completion of secondary studies, our pupils are likely to further their studies in a different country, which results in another layer of complexity.

Besides the curriculum, the exposure to languages in and outside the school environment, (e.g. the influence of the media and the social networks of the parents) enhances the child's language acquisition.

Language sections

The creation and role of language sections

In other (multilingual) educational systems, early learning of foreign languages usually comes at the expense of the dominant language. **In our system, the dominant language accompanies the pupils permanently throughout their schooling**, keeping the dominant language (Language 1) up to the Baccalaureate and increasing the number of subjects taught in a foreign language over time. Teachers are expected to demonstrate that all pupils' languages and cultures are valued. The multinational atmosphere of the schools strongly supports the coexistence of languages and cultures.

Based on the principles above, schools organise **language sections**, i.e., groups of pupils who share the same first language of instruction at any given European School. The enrolment of the pupils in the section of their dominant language is guaranteed, provided that such language section exists in the school.

An essential document¹⁸ lays out the guidelines for opening and closing language sections in different school locations. There is a minimum required number of language sections in a school and in order to create a language section in a school, a "critical mass" of pupils of the same Language 1 should be enrolled. This rule translates into the existence of 21 different language sections from amongst the 24 official European Union languages taught in the European Schools as Language 1. In the case of some languages, the number of pupils speaking these languages does not and probably will not reach the "critical mass". Some sections exist only in larger schools/sites (mainly in Brussels and Luxembourg), but not in the other schools/sites. This leads to a large (and increasing¹⁹) number of pupils who do not find the language section corresponding to their dominant language in their own school.

Language sections play a vital role in the schools by contributing to the multicultural and multilingual atmosphere of each school, as well as providing pupils with a sense of security and identity, therefore they are fundamental elements of the organisation of the school. Naturally, they are the foundation stones of the curriculum and the timetable, as especially in the earlier years, the dominant language and the subjects taught in Language 1 play a key role in the timetable of the pupils who have their own language section in a school.

The curricula and syllabuses (except in the case of Language 1) are the same in all sections.

¹⁸ See document 2015-04-D-18 *Criteria for the setting up, closure or maintenance of European Schools*.

¹⁹ With the increasing number of official EU languages.

Determination of the dominant language and the language section

The European Schools, as explained earlier, respects the pupils' right to receive tuition in their dominant language. Pupils are therefore enrolled in the section corresponding to their dominant language. Mostly, the determination of the dominant language and the enrolment is obvious, nevertheless, in certain cases, a decision regarding the child's dominant language needs to be taken (see previous examples of multilingual familial backgrounds that are frequent phenomena in the system). **Determination of the child's first (i.e., dominant) language is the sole responsibility of the Director**, whose responsibility is to determine the dominant language, based on the information provided by the legal representatives²⁰.

When deciding on the admission into a language section, the director must follow the stipulations of the General Rules. These regulations need to be respected in the best interest of the children in order to identify the language in which they can best follow classroom tuition ensuring their educational development is optimal.

When necessary, specific comparative language tests are set up to assess the level of the child in the different areas of language competence. The procedures followed are made public and clearly communicated to the parents before assessment takes place.

A procedural document stipulates the main criteria to be met in the procedure of testing²¹: This document defines the rules regarding the organisation and assessment of the language tests.

The outcome of the tests is communicated in a harmonised assessment report template, which gives precise information on the child's language competences in the languages tested and summarizes the testers' conclusion regarding the level of those languages and the statement whether or not the child is capable of being educated in the language tested.

Languages in the European Schools curriculum

In the European Schools, all pupils have to study at least three compulsory languages:

- 1) The language designated as their **dominant language** (referred to as **Language 1**) from Nursery 1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 2) The **second language (Language 2**, English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school) from p1 up to the Baccalaureate
- 3) The **third language (Language 3**, an official language of the European Union) from s1 to s5.

It is possible to choose a **fourth language (Language 4**, an official language of the countries of the European Union) as an option in secondary year 4 and a **fifth language (Language 5)** as a complementary subject in secondary year 6.

It should be noted that no language can be studied at more than one level simultaneously and the existing regulations rule out the possibility of different languages being studied at the same level at the same time. Level refers to the different possibilities: L1, L2, L3, L4, ONL (see below) and L5.

Moreover, pupils can also study:

Latin is an optional two-period course in secondary years 2 and 3 and an optional four-period course in secondary years 4 to 7 offered in the language of the section or in a Language 2, Language 3 or the Host Country Language, respecting the rules for the creation of groups.

Greek-speaking pupils taking Greek as Language 1, from the second to the fifth year of secondary education, can benefit from further education in **Ancient Greek** at the rate of two periods per week.

²⁰ General Rules, Article 47 e).

²¹ 2018-09-D-23 Establishment of a harmonised procedure for the organisation of language tests.

Ancient Greek is also an optional four-period course from secondary year 4 to secondary year 7. This course can be taught through in Greek, in another L1, L2 or the Host Country Language respecting the rules for the creation of groups.

Other National Languages

Specific provisions are in place for the teaching of the **Other National Languages** (ONL) in the case of pupils whose countries of origin have more than one national language **recognised** in the European School system, **i.e., Finland, Malta, Ireland and Spain.**

Only category I and category II pupils are entitled to the teaching of ONL, which can take place from nursery up to s7. Category III pupils may join existing courses, but courses cannot run exclusively for category III pupils.

For pupils of Finnish origin²², Swedish/ Finnish can be requested as Other National Language regardless of the language section the pupil is enrolled in.

For pupils of Irish origin, Irish as Other National Language can be requested regardless of the language section the pupil is enrolled in.

For pupils of Maltese origin, Maltese can be requested, regardless of the language section the pupil is enrolled in.

For pupils of Spanish origin, Catalan²³ can be requested, regardless of the language section the pupil is enrolled in.

There is a specific syllabus designed particularly for ONL pupils. Contrary to the minimum numbers of groups in other subjects, Other National Language groups will be created with fewer than seven pupils.

- In the **nursery and in primary years 1-2**, the Other National Language is taught three times 30 minutes per week.
- In **primary years 3-5**, the Other National Language is taught two times 45 minutes per week.
- In **secondary years 1-3**, the Other National Language is taught two times 45 minutes per week.
- Starting from **secondary year 4** and up to **secondary year 5**, the Other National Language is a 4-period option. Pupils choosing the Other National Language cannot choose Language 4.
- In **secondary years 6 and 7**, the Other National Language is a 4-period option. Students choosing this course cannot choose Language 4.

²² For origin, it is understood the nationality of the pupil or the nationality of one of the parents.

²³ Catalan will be offered as an ONL as of September 2026. The Catalan ONL course could be created on the condition that the Spanish delegation seconds the necessary teachers to teach Catalan ONL

Minimum language proficiency level at the end of the different sub-cycles

The definitions of the basic proficiency level were agreed in all modern languages according to the levels of Common European Framework of Reference for languages.

	Nursery	Primary	S3	S5	S7
L2		A2	B1	B2	C1
L3			A1+	A2+	B1+
L4				A1	A2+
L5					A1
ONL	A1.1 oral	A1.2	A2	B1	B2

It must be specified that these levels correspond to the 'basic proficiency level' and that higher performance levels can be achieved.

Use of languages

Starting with an essentially monolingual curriculum in the nursery, pupils gradually learn more languages and at the same time other subjects are taught in one of those languages. The privileged status of Language 1 creates a sound basis for increasingly confident command of other languages. In addition to the use of Language 1, the organisation of studies (and the general atmosphere of the schools, including after-school activities and other aspects of school life) contributes to extremely effective language acquisition.

In addition to the teaching of (two or potentially more) languages other than Language 1, the courses taught in these languages have been a pioneer feature of the European Schools: (Content and Language Integrated Learning; CLIL²⁴).

The early introduction of Language 2 makes it possible to teach subjects such as Human Science from Secondary s3, History and Geography from secondary s4 in the pupils' Language 2, and the number of CLIL subjects increases in the Baccalaureate cycle, depending on pupils' choices. As a means for learning content, learning a foreign language becomes more an important goal for the pupil.

Nursery cycle

In the nursery cycle, in principle, Language 1 is taught from the age of four and is the language of the section in which the pupil is enrolled. Language awareness activities are organized in the nursery cycle according to their local conditions and needs. The objectives and learning outcomes are integrated into the Early Education Curriculum.

²⁴ Content and Language Integrated Learning is a term describing both learning a content subject through the medium of a foreign language; and at the same time learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject. See <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/content-language-integrated-learning>.

Primary cycle

Language 1 is taught from primary year 1 and is the language of the section in which the pupil is enrolled.

From as early as primary year 1, pupils start learning a second language (**Language 2**), from amongst English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school. This language must be different from the first language. Language 2 is compulsory up to the Baccalaureate level and is the medium of instruction in a number of subjects in the secondary school. In the European hours course sections are mixed and therefore, the subject is taught in different languages, offered by the school.

The concept of learning and use of Language 2 in the primary cycle is based on a common assumption that at this early age, exposure to the language is more important than its systematic teaching. Emphasis is placed on creating a motivating atmosphere. Pupils are just starting to learn languages in a formal way, which implies that the teaching of Language 2 and teaching *through* Language 2 focuses on oral skills and activities that match their level of development.

Secondary cycle

An important element in the role of foreign languages is that as from Secondary 3, Language 2 gradually becomes the language of tuition of Human Sciences, History, Geography, Economics, Religion and Ethics. In the case of Music, Art, Physical Education and to an extent ICT, education is provided in mixed groups of pupils from different language sections through a language in the pupil's curriculum. This means that the mainly monolingual teaching in the primary gives way to the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach in the secondary school, where pupils start to learn an increasing number of subjects through a language different from their Language 1. Learning actual subject content in a language (or languages) other than Language 1 enhances the learning of the language itself.

Pupils start learning a third language (Language 3) as a beginners' course in the first year of secondary school. It may be any official language of the European Union which is not studied as Language 1 or Language 2. This language is a compulsory subject in secondary years 1 to 5 and may be taken up to the Baccalaureate level.

Language 3 is a 4 weekly period option. Compulsory teaching and learning of this language result in a proficiency level corresponding to a minimum of A2+, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, pupils may also choose this language in the Baccalaureate cycle and reach a minimum language proficiency level of B1+.

The following table shows the teaching and use of languages in the **secondary years s1-s3**.

Subjects	S1 – Use of languages		S2 – Use of languages		S3 – Use of languages	
	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities
L1	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
L2	Language 2		Language 2		Language 2	
L3	Language 3		Language 3		Language 3	
Maths	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
Human Sciences	Language 1		Language 1		Language 2	
Integrated Science	Language 1		Language 1		Language 1	
ICT	Courses taught to mixed groups of pupils from different language sections in any language in the pupil's curriculum					
Music						
Art						
Physical Education						
Religion / Ethics	Language 1	Language 2, HCL, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, HCL, Language 3	Language 2	Language 3, HCL, Language 1
Latin			Language 1	Language 2, HCL, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, HCL, Language 3
Ancient Greek			EL		EL	
Other National Language (ONL)	ONL		ONL		ONL	

As a matter of principle, as from secondary year s3 onwards, courses in religion and non-confessional ethics are also taught in Language 2 (English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school).

The following table shows the teaching and use of languages in the **secondary years s4-s5**.

Subjects	S4 – Use of languages		S5 – Use of languages	
	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities
L1	Language 1		Language 1	
L2	Language 2		Language 2	
L3	Language 3		Language 3	
L4	Language 4		Language 4	
Maths	Language 1		Language 1	
Biology	Language 1		Language 1	
Chemistry	Language 1		Language 1	
Physics	Language 1		Language 1	
History	Language 2		Language 2	
Geography	Language 2		Language 2	
Economics	Language 2	Host Country Language Language 1	Language 2	Host Country Language Language 1
Art	Courses taught to mixed groups of pupils from different language sections in any language in the pupil's curriculum			
Music				
ICT				
Physical Education				
Religion / Ethics	Language 2	Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 2	Host Country Language, Language 3,
Latin	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3
Ancient Greek 4p	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3
Ancient Greek for pupils with EL as L1	EL		EL	
Other National Language (ONL)	ONL		ONL	

From secondary year s4 onwards, History, Geography and Economics courses must be taught in Language 2 (English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school) and may not be taught in Language 1.

From secondary year s4, the **Economics** course, where this is chosen as an option, is organised in Language 2.

If that proves impossible, because of the small number of pupils requesting it (min. 7 pupils in s4, min. 5 pupils in s6), the course may also be created in the language of the school's host country (HCL), provided that the required minimum threshold of pupils is reached.

If the course cannot be organised in the pupils' Language 2 (DE, EN, FR or HCL if offered by the school), they may be authorised to take it in another Language 2 (DE, EN, FR or HCL if offered by the school) or in the language of the host country, provided that this is not their Language 1.

Only if the course of Economics is organized in a language the pupils do not know, as a way of an exception, may the Director derogate from the rules and authorise them to follow it through L1.

Learning a **Language 4** is an option (4 periods) and starts in secondary year 4. This elective language is taught from year s4 onwards and may be any official language of the countries of European Union, which is not studied as Languages 1, 2 or 3. In secondary year s4, Language 4 is a beginners' course.

Baccalaureate cycle

Languages 1 and 2 are compulsory up to the Baccalaureate. Language 2 is normally English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school, but pupils may request a Language 2 other than English, French, German or the Host Country Language if offered by the school for secondary years s6 and s7. The new Language 2 may be any official language of the European Union. The starting point of this new Language 2 will be B2 proficiency level. This may be accepted subject to the rules governing the creation of groups.²⁵

In secondary years s6 and s7, Mathematics is taught through L1. Science Technology and Society (STS) and Philosophy 2p are also taught through L1. Scientific options (Biology 4p, Physics 4p and Chemistry 4p) and the option Philosophy 4p are also taught in L1 but if they are not organised due to small numbers, pupils can follow these options in another language provided they can demonstrate the necessary language competences.

In secondary years s6 and s7, Language 2 (EN, FR, DE, HCL if offered by the school) continues to be the language of tuition of History, Geography, Economics, Religion and Ethics. If the 4-period History, Geography option courses cannot be organised in the pupils' Language 2, they may follow it in another language, provided that:

- (1) it is not their Language 1,
- (2) the pupils are able to demonstrate an adequate language proficiency level and,
- (3) Directors give their permission; the Class Council's opinion being taken into account.

For Economics the rules mentioned above apply again with the new choice of this subject for s6-s7. Derogations on the language of Economics must be communicated to the Baccalaureate Unit at the end of each school year for pupils going into s6 the following school year.

In the case of Music, Art, ICT, Physical Education, tuition is provided through a language that the pupil knows. The same applies for complementary subjects.

²⁵ See document 2019-04-D-13 *The European School Curriculum: Structure and Organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools*.

The following table shows the teaching and use of languages in the **secondary years s6-s7**.

Subjects	S6 – Use of languages		S7 – Use of languages	
	Language of tuition	Other possibilities	Language of tuition	Other possibilities
L1 and Advanced L1	Language 1		Language 1	
L2 and Advanced L2	Language 2		Language 2	
L3	Language 3		Language 3	
L4	Language 4		Language 4	
L5	Language 5		Language 5	
Maths and Advanced Maths	Language 1		Language 1	
Science, Technology and Society STS	Language 1		Language 1	
Philosophy 2p	Language 1		Language 1	
Biology 4p	Language 1	If not organised in L1 in any other language the pupil can demonstrate the necessary language competences	Language 1	If not organised in L1 in any other language the pupil can demonstrate the necessary language competences
Chemistry 4p	Language 1		Language 1	
Physics 4p	Language 1		Language 1	
Philosophy 4p	Language 1		Language 1	
History 2p and 4p	Language 2		Language 2	
Geography 2p and 4p	Language 2		Language 2	
Economics	Language 2	Host Country Language Language 1	Language 2	Host Country Language Language 1
Art 4p	Courses taught to mixed groups of pupils from different language sections in any language known by the pupil.			
Music 4p				
Physical Education				
Complementary subjects				
Religion / Ethics	Language 2	Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 2	Host Country Language, Language 3
Latin	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3
Ancient Greek 4p	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3	Language 1	Language 2, Host Country Language, Language 3
Other National Language (ONL)	ONL		ONL	

Changing languages

It should be remembered that determination of L1 at the time of the pupil's enrolment is, in principle, definitive. Requests to change Language 1 will be dealt with in accordance with the arrangements laid down in Article 47(e) of the General Rules. **A change of Language 1 may only be authorised by the Director for compelling pedagogical reasons, duly established by the Class Council and on the initiative of one of its members.**

In principle, changes in L2, L3 and L4 are not envisaged, except on entry to year 6, when the following changes are possible:

1. Pupils may request a L2 different from DE, EN, FR or HCL if offered by the school for secondary years 6 and 7. This may be accepted subject to the conditions below and to the rules governing the creation of groups. The new L2 may be any official language of the EU.
2. For a given language, change from a lower to a higher level. (E.g.: change from L4 to L3).
3. For a given language, change from a higher to a lower level. (E.g.: from L2 to L3) in justified cases.

Should a change of language at any age or level be requested, the decision lies with the Director, subject to the following conditions:

- The existence of a reasoned written request from the parents, guardians or from the pupils themselves if over the age of 18.
- Deliberation and judgement by the Class Council on the request.
- Clear evidence established by the School of the pupil's ability to follow the course requested. The School may require the pupil to pass a proficiency (written and oral) test at the required level.
- The absence of significant administrative obstacles to the change requested, such as the compliance with the rules for the creation of groups.

In the case of a change of L2, careful consideration must be given to the role of L2 as a medium for teaching other subjects. When a change of L2 is approved before year s6, the new L2 becomes the medium for the teaching of History, Geography and Economics. When a change of L2 is approved on entry to year s6, the previous L2 remains the medium of teaching for History, Geography and Economics.

The applicants will be notified of the decision and the reasons for it.

Students Without a Language Section (SWALS)

In schools where the section of the dominant language of the pupil does not exist pupils will be enrolled into one of the existing sections of a second language (English, French, German, HCL if offered by the school).

Category I and Category II pupils in this situation are entitled to **tuition in their L1**, working on the assumption that the School has at its disposal a duly qualified teacher, or can recruit one.

These pupils are called "**Students Without A Language Section**" (SWALS).

In the nursery and primary p1 and p2, L1 courses for SWALS shall be allocated 2 hours 30 minutes and for p3, p4 and p5 3 hours 45 minutes.

In the secondary cycle, L1 courses for SWALS are organised according to the same rules as any other L1.

At all levels, consecutive year groups may be combined in order to avoid reductions in teaching time.

Category III pupils can also have the SWALS status, being entitled to tuition in their L1, only if a course already exists and if it does not create a new group. However, once category III pupils acquire the SWALS status, this remains until the end of their schooling to ensure pedagogical continuity.²⁶

In this way, SWALS pupils benefit from the provision of their dominant language tuition until the end of their studies, with an important number of subjects taught in the language of the section that they join, **which becomes their second language (Language 2)**.

SWALS are entitled to receive support when lack of knowledge of the language of the section in which they are enrolled is a barrier to communication, integration, and learning. This support focuses on the acquisition of this language and thus facilitates these pupils' access to the curriculum and will be organized according to the "Policy on the Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools – 2012-05-D-14".

SWALS pupils are exposed to a **second language** in a more intensive way than their counterparts who are enrolled in the language section of their dominant language. So, from the beginning of their studies, they must follow tuition in non-language subjects in the language of the section. The competence in the dominant language is not abandoned: the case is rather the contrary. The competence of the pupil in that language is cultivated up to the end of the secondary studies during the Language 1 course. Schools make all necessary efforts to cater for the needs of SWALS pupils in their dominant language, providing them with the teaching of their Language 1, when finding a qualified teacher within the school or upon specific recruitment or through lessons given at distance. The protection of the dominant language (Language 1) of SWALS pupils is a priority in order to counter-balance the effect of the multilingual environment and the lack of use of the dominant language in most of the subjects.

Experience shows that due to the above-described situation, progression in competence in Language 2 for SWALS pupils is faster than for other pupils. They often reach the required level of proficiency (E.g.: B2 in secondary 5 or C1 in secondary 7) earlier than their peers. Although their level of Language 2 is usually higher than the ones of non-SWALS pupils, they may often need support, as they learn most of their subjects in their Language 2 together with native speaking pupils.

Experience shows that the needs **of SWALS pupils** in terms of language support are different from those of non-SWALS pupils. Schools are aware of these needs and within their capacities offer remedies to bridge the gaps. Dedicated support for these pupils **in Language 2** can be offered within the framework of the Educational Support Policy.

²⁶ Decisions of the BoG: 2025-04-D-2: This provision applies to all Category III pupils except for those enrolled before the 2013/14 school year.

Educational support

The complex and diverse communities of the schools justify a well-pondered and personalized support system. The general educational support policy is well described in a document, which can be found on the official website of the European Schools²⁷. This document gives an overview on the principles and implementation of differentiation practices and the types of educational support.

As explained earlier, the pupil population of the European Schools is extremely complex, which results in a wide range of individual learning needs to be served. Special provisions are in place to support the integration of pupils who join the system at a later stage of their educational career, or whose familial background justifies certain support measures, for example in mobility cases when due to the parents' change in their profession children need to move from one European School to another or from a national system to the European Schools system.

The European Schools are, within the framework of the Educational Support Policy, committed to assess the individual needs of those pupils who, due to their special situation (SWALS' Language 2 courses, mobility cases, etc.) cannot follow mainstream language teaching without additional support.

Revision of the Language Policy

This Language Policy will be revised on a regular basis when changes require it and at least every ten years.

²⁷ 2012-05-D-14 *Policy on the Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools.*

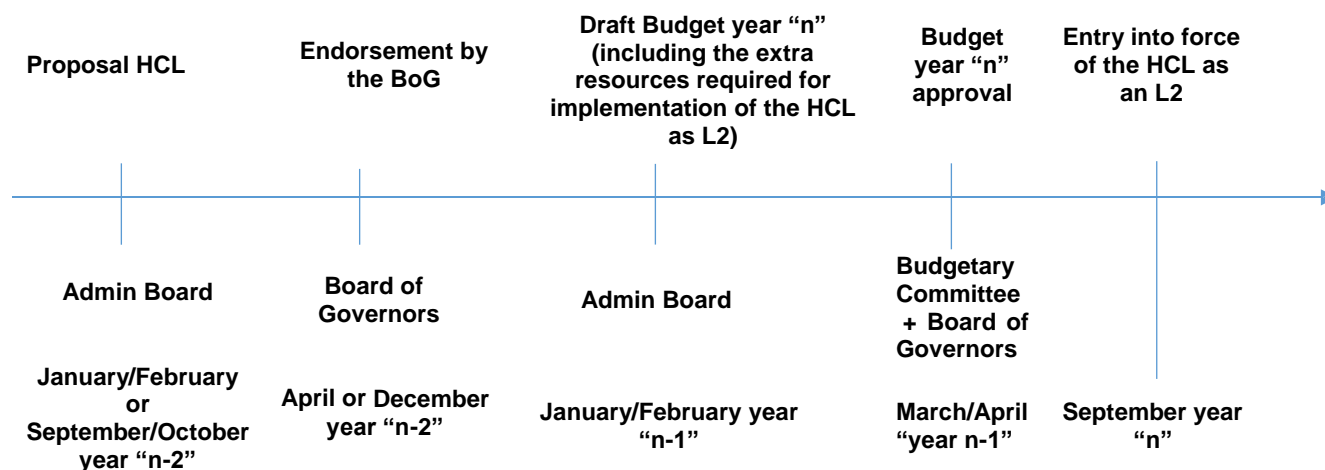
Annex 1: Procedure for deciding to offer the Host Country Language as a Language 2²⁸

If a European School is willing to offer the Host Country Language as a Language 2, it must also obtain the agreement of its Administrative Board. The budget for the school year concerned shall be prepared accordingly. Finally, the proposal from the Administrative Board must be endorsed by the Board of Governors.

The introduction of HCL as L2 should be done gradually from p1. Schools may also propose to introduce it gradually from p1 and s1. Other possibilities can also be considered by the Administrative Board of the School.

For schools aiming for effective entry into force in September of the **year “n”**, the proposal to the Administrative Boards should be made during the January/February or the September/October **of the year “n-2”** rounds of Administrative Board meetings. This proposal should be accompanied by an assessment of the extra resources required, based on an estimate of the impact of this measure on grouping and on the number of resulting L2 groups. The measure will then be presented to the Budgetary Committee in March/November **of the year “n-2”** for information and to the Board of Governors in April/December **of the year “n-2”** for endorsement. This measure will need to be reflected in the **year “n”** Budget.

According to the Financial Regulations, the **year “n”** draft budget will be presented to the Administrative Board during the January/February **of the year “n-1”** round of meetings. The draft budget will then be presented to the Budgetary Committee in March **of the year “n-1”** and to the Board of Governors in April **of year the “n-1”**. That draft budget should include the impact of inclusion of the Host Country Language in the offer of Languages 2. These steps are summarised in the following timeline.



Accredited European Schools

This measure is also applicable to Accredited European Schools. When an Accredited European School decides to include its Host Country Language in its offer of Languages 2, the Delegation shall inform the OSGES on the needed modification to the approved Conformity File. This will also be brought for information to the relevant Bodies of the European Schools. The Pedagogical Development Unit in the Office of the Secretary-General will ensure a draft translation of the syllabus. The final proof-read language version will be provided by the corresponding national inspectorate.

²⁸ Excerpt from the Memorandum 2020-05-M-1.

Annex 2: Information for Parents on Determination of the Dominant Language



Schola Europaea

Office of the Secretary-General

Pedagogical Development Unit

Ref.: 2024-09-D-47-en-4²⁹

Orig.: EN

Information for Parents on Determination of the Dominant Language³⁰

Approved by the Joint Teaching Committee by means of the Written Procedure Nr. 2024/39 on 29 October 2024

²⁹ FAQ 8 & 13 have been amended to be in line with the “*Regulation for the organisation of language tests in the nursery classes and primary year 1*” Annex 1 doc ref 2018-09-D-23.

³⁰ This document has been revised by the OSGES Legal Department

Introduction

Following the mandate given to the working group Task Force Dominant Language in the meeting of the Board of Inspectors N/P in February 2024 a document for parents has been created to help the parents asking for admission of their children the European Schools to better understand the need, purpose, organisation of assessment and consequences of the final admission of a child to certain language section.

The document consists of:

- Rationale for dominant language testing, which is informed by research.
- Answers on FAQ section focusing on family and pupil language contexts where the dominant language is not immediately obvious.
- Annexe: references.

I. Rationale:

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE SECTION FOR YOUR CHILD

One of the founding principles of the European Schools is that, as far as possible, children are enabled to learn in their mother tongue/dominant language (L1) and that at the same time, they are offered a multilingual curriculum that allows them to develop a high level of proficiency in two (and sometimes more) additional languages (L2, L3, etc.). This makes it unique and **characteristically different to the system of international schools and most other education systems.**

For some families this is a relatively clear choice as the language the child uses at home with their parents corresponds to one of the language sections on offer. However, not all family language profiles neatly correspond to a language section. For example, perhaps a child uses a different language with each parent, who may themselves use a different language together. SWALS pupils (Students Without a Language Section) by definition use a different language to that of the section they will enrol in. Additionally, some pupils may have had a multilingual educational trajectory, i.e. they have been educated in one language elsewhere, and then have moved to a European School and will potentially join a section using another language.

In order to place a child in the language section that best corresponds to their language profile and thus provide them with the best learning experience it is sometimes necessary to first identify their dominant language.

What does dominant language mean?

In the European School Language Policy (Ref.: 2019-01-D-35-en), the term 'dominant language' refers to *"the language in which bi- or multilingual children have the highest level of proficiency in especially education-related domains of language use, and which they use most often (or is likely to use most often)"* (p.4). 'Language proficiency' refers to how well a language is known. It includes a person's receptive skills (what they can understand when reading or listening), and their productive skills (what they can say or write). 'Language use' refers to how frequently a person uses their different languages and how this is divided across the different domains of their life, e.g.: home, work, and school. When identifying the 'dominant language' of a child, the European Schools also take into consideration how a child's 'language use' is likely to evolve over time.

Traditional conceptualisations of bilingualism relied on the idea that a bilingual people had equal competences across both or all of their languages. However, this idea has now been updated to recognise the fact that bilingual people do not generally have exactly the same competencies or skills in their two languages. Although ‘balanced bilingualism’ does exist, it is far more common for ‘plurilingual’ people to be ‘dominant’ in one language (this also depends on the context in which the language is being used and can change over time).

Principle: The European School’s commitment to education in a child’s first or dominant language is what makes it stand out from other education systems.

Why is it important for your child to be enrolled in the section of their dominant language?

Quite apart from the principle of recognising and supporting the national languages of the member states of the European Union, **the importance of enrolling a child in the section of their dominant language is based on decades of research about how a solid language foundation constitutes an essential key to effective learning and academic success.**

What is important here is the fact that **the stronger a child’s first language, the more likely it is they will do well when learning other languages, and when acquiring academic content and skills.** For example, longitudinal research in the USA (Thomas & Collier 2002, Collier & Thomas, 2017) looked at the learning outcomes for Spanish speakers when they followed different models of language education. When the home language was nurtured and studied in school (i.e., children learned through Spanish *and* English), the pupils performed above average compared to the global school population by the time they finished secondary school. However, when they *only* learned through their second language i.e., English, their results were significantly below average. This is partly because the successful pupils were given a maximum of opportunities to build on their existing knowledge and skills (in Spanish), but also because they were able to exploit in a productive way the rich language resources at home and in their local community.

Research also underlines the importance of developing or supporting literacy skills (i.e. reading and writing) in the first language, or in the case of children growing up bilingually, the benefits of dual-literacy in both languages. This is partly because **children are able to transfer their knowledge and skills across the languages they know** (i.e., if a child can read in one language, they will use these skills to learn to read in another; if they understand what a ‘metaphor’ is in one language, they can transfer it to another). So, whilst a parent might be able to keep up oral language at home, it is much harder for them to develop the cognitive and academic language that is associated with school and learning.

Principle: The most powerful model for multilingual education is one which favours ‘additive bilingualism’ i.e., the child keeps developing conceptually and academically in their first/dominant language and adds another language to their repertoire. **We want to avoid ‘subtractive’ situations i.e. where a new language comes to replace the child’s first language.** Dominant language testing aims to identify the most likely scenario to promote ‘additive’ situations.

Why is the home language so important for my child? What if there is a language section that will have more practical benefits for them?

Beyond the language and learning benefits of maintaining the child's first language to a high level, it is important to remember that languages are not in competition with one another – and that in additive bilingualism, they are working in co-operation. Furthermore, the language provision in **the European Schools has been designed to help ensure that each child's cultural identity (as a European and in terms of their specific background) is affirmed, respected and enriched.**

It is also important to take a long-term view, both in terms of the levels in L2 and L3 that your child might reach, but also how they will maintain a home language that they are not using in school. Research shows that speakers of minority languages which haven't been maintained can come to regret this later on in life.

Principle: When considering your child's future path, aim to keep their language options open as much as possible, including the possibility of maintaining their L1 to a high level.

What levels of language proficiency will my child reach in the European School system over the course of their school career?

In the context of the European School, it is important to be aware of the language learning aims for L2, L3, etc. The language policy lays out the **minimum** proficiency expectations at the end of each sub-cycle of the educational trajectory:

	Nursery	Primary	S3	S5	S7
L2		A2	B1	B2	C1
L3			A1+	A2+	B1+
L4				A1	A2+
L5					A1
ONL	A1.1 oral	A1.2	A2	B1	B2

Many students go beyond these expectations, meaning that you can expect your child to become highly proficient in at least two languages other than their L1. In many cases, pupils attend university in the language of their L2. Indeed, a 2022 “PISA for schools” evaluation of the European Schools showed that pupils' level of L2 reading was significantly above European Union (L1) and OECD averages. It is possible that this high level of achievement is in part due to the fact that the European School system specifically ensures that its pupils are enabled to learn in their dominant language, thus creating a sound foundation for learning new languages.

Principle: New languages can be added progressively to your child's repertoire, and they will still achieve a high level of proficiency, whilst ideally maintaining their dominant language.

How do the schools test for dominant language?

The determination of the child's dominant language is the responsibility of the Director of each school and is based on information provided by the legal representatives of the child and an evaluation carried out by the school.

- **The Director decides whether or not to conduct tests on the basis of the information provided on the school's enrolment form.** The tests are comparative and aim to determine the dominant language.
- Parents are notified by e-mail about the languages to be tested, the time and the location. **The tests take place exclusively 'in situ'** at the school where the language section is present.
- All tests take place on the same day with an appropriate break (approximately 15 minutes) in between. Exceptionally, the tests may be held on different days i.e., if the languages that need to be tested are not taught in the same school.
- The tests are carried out by native speaker teachers of the school where the test takes place. For children in the nursery cycle and p1 the test is oral, for older children, there are also written and reading tasks.
- Parents are not allowed to be present during the test. The only exception is that parents can stay for 10 minutes in the case of children to be enrolled to n1.
- One test lasts between 20 and 30 minutes in the nursery cycle and p1, and between 40 and 45 minutes for p2 - p5.
- The parents do not receive any feedback immediately after the test. Afterwards, the teacher prepares a report which is sent to the Director of the first-choice school. On the basis of the reports of all the tests, the Director makes a decision and determines the dominant language. Parents receive this information electronically, together with the teachers' reports. The procedure for appeal against the decision is described in this e-mail.

Background Documents

- Language Policy of the European Schools Ref.: 2019-01-D-35-en (published on the www.eurasc.eu)
- Establishment of a harmonised procedure for the organisation of language tests (Article 47(e) of the General Rules of the European Schools) + Guidelines for testing dominant language in n1, n2 on entry to p1, p2 - p5, ref.: 2018-09-D-23-en including:
 - Regulations for the Organisation of Language tests.
 - Assessment Report to determine the dominant language.
 - Guidelines for testing dominant language.

II. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

1. Can the dominant language be identical as the mother tongue/home language/family language...?

Yes.

2. Can the dominant language be different from the mother tongue/home language/family language...?

Yes.

3. How is the dominant language determined?

The schools follow the regulations set up in the documents listed above. There are harmonised procedures and criteria for assessment and the schools complete a uniform report.

There are harmonised assessment tasks (for n1, n2, p1, p2-p5).

Nursery 1, nursery 2, p1: Listening, Speaking (fluency, vocabulary, grammar)

P2 – P5: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Understanding, Writing (fluency, vocabulary, grammar)

The criteria for evaluation have been established according to the relevant syllabus and age-appropriate expectations.

4. Are the language tests uniform across the European Schools?

The individual Schools have a certain degree of autonomy in organising the language tests. However, the requirements for comparability of the language tests must be met. The language tests must be conducted in such a way that an objective comparison of the results is possible.

5. How is the dominant language determined for children who do not read (nursery cycle, p1), or especially shy children who do not want to talk?

Children entering n1, n2 and p1 are only orally tested in Listening and Speaking. The teachers who lead the tasks are experienced professionals and use a variety of strategies to make children feel comfortable and confident.

6. Are comparative tests necessary when both parents are of the same nationality and/or speak the same language at home and want to enrol their child in their home language section, but where the child attended nursery cycle in another language?

The language tests are not always necessary. However, language tests are mandatory whenever there is a dispute about the pupil's L1.

7. What happens if there is no section in the school corresponding to a child's dominant language?

The child can be enrolled in one of the three vehicular language sections (EN-FR-DE) or in the Host Country Language section (HCL). They will become a SWALS pupil (**S**tudent **W**ithout **A** Language **S**ection) and will have their dominant language as their L1.

8. Can a parent be present at the test?

For pupils entering in Nursery cycle, the parents may stay for the first 10 minutes of the test. From p1 onwards, parents cannot be present.

9. When and where are the tests carried out? Are they in person or can they be carried out remotely?

The tests are conducted during the second semester of the school year preceding the year in which the pupil intends to start attending the European School. The tests are carried out in person.

10. Who evaluates the child's performance in the language test?

Native speaker teachers from the relevant language section or L1.

11. Who evaluates the test results?

The test results are evaluated by the Director.

12. Who decides whether the test is necessary?

The Director.

13. What happens if the parents don't agree with the school's decision?

The parents can follow the General Rules of the European Schools regarding appeals. The procedure is explained in the email which communicates the schools' decision. For the Brussels European Schools, the parent can appeal the pedagogical decision upon receipt of the notification of the decision of the Central Enrolment Authority.

14. If a child speaks several languages at similar level, who determines the section? Can parents choose the language section in this case?

The Director makes final decision based on the tests results and information provided in the enrolment form.

15. What happens if a child needs to be tested in two languages which are not taught in the same school?

This only applies for Brussels and Luxembourg. The child is tested in two different schools. The decision is made by the Director of the first-choice school.

16. Does a child have to take the test if they have a certificate from a language school indicating a certain level?

Yes, if the school Director decides that the testing is needed. Note that no external language proficiency certificates can be taken into consideration.

17. Is it possible to enrol a child in a language section that is different from their nationality? If so, under which conditions?

Yes, depending on their dominant language and the educational history. The decision is made by the Director of the school.

18. Is the test valid for the following academic year if the parents refuse a place in the year of the test?

No.

19. Does a child have to take a language test if their older sibling is already in a particular section? If yes, why?

Yes. Each child is considered individually. The decision is made by the Director of the school.

20. Can you move a child from one language section to another (e.g. after Nursery cycle or after Primary)?

No. The determination of L1 at the time of the child's enrolment is definitive, in principle, A change of L1 may only be authorized by the Director for compelling pedagogical reasons, as established by the Class Council and on the initiative of one of its members (Article 47e) of the General Rules).

21. How will the choice of language section influence pupils' future choices regarding options at the secondary cycle?

More information can be found in the Organisation of Studies page of the official website of the ES <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/studies/studies-organisation>

22. How do you test children with special educational needs?

It is critical that the parents give the school as much information as possible in advance, regarding the abilities and special educational needs of the child. In this way the school can make the necessary adaptations to the test procedures.

ANNEX 2: References

Here you can find more information about raising plurilingual children:

<https://onraisingbilingualchildren.com/>

<https://bilingualfamily.eu/resources-for-parents/>

<https://www.childlanguage.org/resources-for-families-and-educators>

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