

English as  
an  
Additional Language  
(EAL)  
Parent Handbook

**AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ROTTERDAM**  
**ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM**  
TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<b>Page</b>
Introduction	3
EAL Philosophy	3
Joining the School	3
The AISR EAL Program	3
EAL Push-In Support	4
EAL Language Instruction	4
EAL Content Instruction	4
Monitoring	4
Teacher Expectations	4
Placement	4
Progress Reports	5
Teaching Methods	5
Learning Strategies	6
Teaching Materials	6
EAL Parent Questions and Concerns	6/7/ 8
The AISR English Proficiency Scale	9

## **INTRODUCTION**

The American International School of Rotterdam, also called AISR, welcomes you and your children to our school community. We trust that your time with us will be rewarding and enjoyable. In the past, students who have joined our school with little or no knowledge of English have quickly adjusted to our school, made friends and learned English while continuing with their educational development.

Close communication between the school and the home is essential to your child's success at AISR. This handbook had been written to help you understand the purpose of our English as an Additional Language (EAL) Program and its place within our school. In addition, you may contact any of our teachers - class teachers, specialist teachers or EAL teachers - with any questions or concerns. Parent-teacher meetings can take place whenever there is a need. Please make arrangements through the office secretary if you would like to meet with one of our teachers.

## **ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY**

The program provides instruction with an EAL teacher that helps children to develop English proficiency according to their needs and abilities. EAL support is aimed at helping students to participate in the school's academic and social programs. We aim to make English learning an enjoyable experience. It builds on the student's cultural and language experiences. The program encourages Mother Tongue maintenance for the students.

## **JOINING THE SCHOOL**

EAL students are enrolled through the same process as other students. This includes the completion of all Application for Enrollment forms and a meeting with the school administrator or guidance counselor. Admission standards are the same for all students. Generally, a student is placed in a class with children of the same age. There is no requirement that a student knows English before he or she joins the Elementary or Middle School section of the school.

When students apply to be enrolled in High School, they are tested both orally and in writing in order to determine their proficiency in English. After this, an admissions committee meets to discuss each individual application. A student is accepted if the admissions committee believes he/she can cope with the High School course work.

## **THE EAL PROGRAM AT AISR**

The AISR EAL Program is designed to provide support to children as they move into a new school and a new language. All AISR teachers are EAL teachers. Students develop their knowledge and understanding of English in every class subject.

The EAL program at AISR is a "sheltered immersion" program. Students are immersed (placed) in an English-speaking environment (our school) and are given support so that they can interact meaningfully in the classroom. All teachers at the school, whose task it is to create an intercultural learning environment, complement the program.

## **SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR EAL STUDENTS**

### ***EAL Immersion (for new students)***

This course is an intensive beginning English course. Designed for students with little or no English in grades 5 through 9. Students spend 85 minutes every day in a class with other beginning EAL students. They are taught “survival” English to help them learn the social language and vocabulary they need to communicate effectively. As the year progresses they will develop the academic English needed for success in other courses. Students in the immersion program attend regular classes the rest of the day with modifications to help them cope with the content. Students in the Immersion program are graded on a pass/fail basis in most other classes until their English reaches the proficiency level (level 3 developing) for a letter grade.

### ***EAL Pull-Out Support***

Students come in grade level groups to the EAL classroom. During this time the EAL students receive small group instruction in a non-threatening environment. In these classes, EAL students develop concepts, vocabulary and structures that allow them to receive (listen and read) and express (speak and write) the English language. Students learn both life and school English, which enables them to interact socially with friends and to be successful in their classes. Specific EAL support for grades 1 to 5 is given 4 times per week for 45 minutes.

### ***EAL Push-In Support***

In many cases, the EAL teacher works with the subject area teacher in the classroom. This helps to promote the active participation of the student. This support can take the form of individual or of group work.

### ***Middle School and High School EAL***

These secondary courses are designed with two goals: to provide students with linguistic instruction and to provide content support. In this small group environment students develop their linguistic English skills –speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar. These may be skills such as how to use graphic organizers or how to write a persuasive essay. In addition, students receive support with their content classes and subjects (science, mathematics, social studies, etc.). The language used in these classes is more difficult and complex than social English. The EAL teacher works with the content teachers to provide the support needed for the students to be successful in all classes. Sometimes this consists of pre-teaching vocabulary from a social studies or science class, reading the same novel as a literature class, working on a skill such a public speaking, writing a lab report or studying for a test together. The EAL teacher tries to work closely with content teachers and provide the EAL students with as much support as possible.

### **Monitoring**

Students’ English proficiency levels are monitored and evaluated on a proficiency scale. Students remain in the support program until conferencing with all teachers involved indicates that the student no longer needs specific extra help in EAL.

## **TEACHER EXPECTATIONS**

Depending on the type of support necessary, your child will receive two to four periods of EAL support during a typical week. The remainder of the school day is spent with classmates, participating in the standard grade level program. We realize that students who join us with limited English cannot participate in the same manner as native speakers of

English. The class and subject area teachers modify their expectations for EAL students. It is important that you help your child understand that we do not expect him or her to do everything the English-speaking student does.

As the EAL child gains proficiency in English, the teachers' expectations will rise to reflect that growing knowledge of English.

## **PLACEMENT**

### **Elementary**

Students in grades 1 to 5 are placed in their grade level classes. At the beginning stage of their enrollment, informed evaluation by classroom teachers and the EAL team determine whether an elementary student will receive EAL support.

### **Middle School**

Students in grades 6 to 8 are interviewed and tested for English proficiency. Those with little or no English will be placed in the immersion program. Students with intermediate English will be placed in the Middle School EAL program.

### **High School**

High School students will also be interviewed and tested for English proficiency. The admissions committee will then meet to decide if a student has enough English to be successful in the high school. Students who are accepted will be placed in the High School EAL program.

Each student's progress and adjustment both to the program and to the school are evaluated during the school year. As the student's English proficiency increases, the level of direct EAL support is decreased. Our goal for each student is complete integration into the social and academic life at AISR.

Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten students are not enrolled in an EAL support program. The language-rich and developmental nature of these classrooms is similar to what the students would receive in an EAL class. We believe that additional support or instruction is not necessary. When additional language learners enter grade one they are individually evaluated to determine any need for additional English support.

## **PROGRESS REPORTS**

Parents of students in the elementary school will receive reports on your child's progress four times each year (quarterly). These reports will be completed by both the EAL teacher and by the class teacher. Their evaluations of your child's progress, adjustment, participation and socialization will take into consideration his or her level of English. Conferences between parents and teachers are scheduled in October and April. In addition, other appointments can be arranged whenever there is a need.

Middle and High School students are assessed throughout the year in order to keep track of their progress in English. They receive a quarterly progress report and a quarterly grade in EAL. In consultation with subject teachers, the possibility exists that middle and high school students can receive modifications in content areas. There are two types of

modifications: those that do not affect the grade, in which case the student is assessed to the same standard as other students and for which there is no indication of modifications on the report card. The second type of modifications changes the content and assessments of the course. In this case, the student is graded as an EAL student and this is indicated with a # sign, indicating modifications were made. Finally, some students can be graded on a "pass" or "fail" basis in content areas. You will be informed of the type of modifications your child will receive in content classes.

## **TEACHING METHODS**

Many different teaching methods and techniques are used in the AISR EAL classes. Our program uses a wide variety of approaches, activities and techniques that help to create a comprehensive and dynamic learning experience for students. Concepts, topics and skills are integrated rather than taught in isolation. Skills are developed through a spiral approach where they are taught and re-taught in new ways over time. Active participation and involvement are stressed. It is through this involvement that children use and learn English.

## **LEARNING STRATEGIES**

EAL students at AISR take part in lessons that use a variety of learning strategies involving the child's visual (sight), auditory (listening), tactile (touch), and kinesthetic (body movement) skills.

Cooperative learning is used in both the EAL and in grade/subject classes. Students learn from each other and have meaningful opportunities to use and practice their new language.

Students also learn important academic skills such as organizing and classifying information, taking notes and evaluating materials.

## **TEACHING MATERIALS**

EAL is a support program not a language course. We use a wide variety of teaching materials: library books, reference materials, games, puppets, CDs/tapes, pictures, magazines, toys, computer software, etc. Since the focus of the program is the curriculum of the School, the grade level textbooks and themes play a key role in EAL classes.

## **EAL PARENT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS**

### ***What can I, as the parent of an EAL student, do to help my child learn English?***

Parents of EAL students should keep informed of their child's progress in the English language. You can also continue to support the development of your child's *first* language. One way to do this is to go over textbook readings with your child and discuss the material in your own language. You may also want to get books in your language that covers the same concepts and topics that your child is studying in school. It is also helpful for students to have easy access to a dictionary that translates English words into the language of your home and visa versa.

### ***How can I motivate my child to learn English?***

Providing opportunities for your child to use English is important. You can invite English-speaking friends and classmates to your home for play, and you can rent quality DVDs/videotapes for your child to watch. Playing family games is both enjoyable and worthwhile. It is helpful to your child when you become active in school through the P.T.S.A. or as a volunteer. Most importantly, parents should let their children know the value and advantages of gaining an additional language in an increasingly multicultural world.

### ***Should I speak and read to my child only in English?***

Parents of EAL students should continue to use the language of the home to communicate with their children. If there are already two other languages in your home, continue to use them both. If parents are proficient in English, they should let their children see them using English to communicate with others. It is important that additional language students see the value of bilingualism. Parents of EAL students should read to their children in the language that they feel most comfortable using. Reading practice in any language will help your child learn to read and use English, as reading skills transfer from the native language to the additional language.

### ***Should students' mistakes in English always be corrected?***

Children learn an additional language in stages. Mistakes happen at first, and then they gradually change and finally disappear. Successful language learning depends upon the freedom to make mistakes. By testing the limits of the *new* language system, they learn the rules of the language. Stressing perfection and accuracy in the early stages limits and slows down this natural process. (Children learn their first language in the same way.)

### ***Are students required to speak English in school at all times?***

Students have many opportunities to use their developing English (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at AISR. This is important because often EAL students have the chance to practice their new language only at school. They need to use their English with teachers and with classmates. However, it is natural for children to speak their native language to each other. While English is the primary language of the classroom, students may communicate through speaking and writing in their native languages.

### ***What should be done with the native language of the EAL student?***

It is important that students who are learning English continue to learn and develop their first language. This support can be provided at home or in after-school programs. The skills that students learn in their own language can easily be transferred for use in English. The study of English is an addition to the child's native language and literacy development.

### ***Does the learning of more than one language at the same time confuse students?***

The human brain can store many languages at the same time, just as computers do. In some countries and cultures children become fluent in five or more languages. Having strong skills in one language helps children to learn other languages more easily.

### ***Should my child be learning English and Dutch at the same time?***

EAL students are usually enrolled in Dutch courses (or French or Spanish courses at the middle and high school levels). There is no reason for students grounded in their first language not to take Dutch lessons at the same time that they are learning English as an additional language. The school feels that it is important for the child's social development that the student takes part in as *many* mainstream classroom activities as possible. In addition, this practice assists student in adapting to their new Dutch environment.

### ***Why do some students speak English well, yet have difficulty with the English in their classes?***

There are two kinds of language proficiency - social language and academic language. The ability to use English among friends or with teachers in a social setting is more easily learned than the ability to use English to read and solve problems. Students who have good social language skills in English can learn the kind of language needed in the English-language classroom with the aid of a content-based curriculum.

### ***Should I worry if my child is not learning English as quickly as other EAL students?***

Learning an additional language is not the same as learning a native language. Whereas most children develop their first language at approximately the same rate, the rate of learning an additional language varies greatly. Parents should not be concerned if their children are not learning English as quickly as other children. Remember, learning an additional language to an academically fluent level, where additional language and *first* language children perform on the same level, can take three to seven years. Additional language students are usually conversationally fluent in one-to-two years.

### ***Why do children learn an additional language at different rates?***

Children show wide variation in their rate of learning an additional language. Some pick it up very quickly, while others take longer. This variation in the rate of learning is due to a number of factors. Some of these are:

- The student's motivation: Does the student want to learn the language?
- The student's personality and learning style: Is the student shy or outgoing?
- Does the child need to see something to learn?
- The nature of the language instruction program.
- What methods does the school use to teach EAL?
- Access to native speakers of the language.
- Does the student regularly listen to and talk with native English speakers?

### **IN SUMMARY:**

All children can learn a language into which they are socialized. The more they feel socially accepted and a part of the school, the more success they will have. With time, teacher assistance, parental support and motivation, their academic English will develop as will their overall progress in school.

## THE AISR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY SCALE

\*This proficiency scale, shared with us by Dr. Virginia Rojas of Trenton State College in the USA, is used by the professional staff at AISR to identify the functioning level of English for additional language students in our school.

- 9 **BILINGUAL AND LITERATE** (Comprehends academic language with little difficulty. Speaks fluently with few errors. Reads and writes both concrete and abstract materials. Manipulates language with relative ease and evidences metaphorical expression. Able to work up to potential in all academic subjects.)
- 8 **FLUENT AND LITERATE** (Comprehends much conversational and academic language. Idioms still present a little difficulty. Makes occasional spoken *errors*. Reads and writes materials commensurate with cognitive development. Works up to grade level.)
- 7 **NEAR ENGLISH FLUENT AND LITERATE** (Comprehends substantial parts of academic conversations. Sometimes requires repetition in context-reduced discourse. Has confidence in speaking but some errors are common. Reads and writes text containing complex vocabulary. Some difficulty expressing abstract language. Nearly up to grade level.)
- 6 **THRESHOLD LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY** (Experiencing dramatic increase in vocabulary recognition, both oral and written. Idioms are difficult. Knows what he or she wants to say but gropes for utterances. Frequent errors in grammar, word usage and pronunciation.)
- 5 **USES LANGUAGE TO EXCHANGE SOCIAL INFORMATION AND TO EXTRACT MEANING FROM SIMPLE TEXTS** (Some difficulty with comprehension. Speaks hesitantly, making frequent errors in grammar, word usage and pronunciation. Lapses into silence. Reads very simple texts. Writes with fairly restricted structures and vocabulary. About two years below native speakers in language skills.)
- 4 **ADEQUATE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS USED IN HIGHLY CONTEXTUALIZED SETTINGS** (Decodes written symbols. Writes dictated items.)
- 3 **ROUTINE CONVERSATIONAL EXCHANGES** (Comprehends when speaker repeats, gestures and uses concrete referents. Speaks haltingly if at all. Shows some recognition of written segments. Not literate in English.)
- 2 **BASIC SURVIVAL ENGLISH** (Receptive and somewhat expressive. Occasionally comprehends chunks of discourse.)
- 1 **THE SILENT PERIOD** (Receptive vocabulary but depends almost entirely upon gestures, facial expressions, objects, pictures, a phrase dictionary and often a translator.)
- o **NO ENGLISH**