

## Whole School Language Policy

### Introduction: the 21st century is multilingual – and multicultural

For much of the twentieth century it seemed possible that English could become the world language. It is now clear that we are moving into a multilingual world – a world where English looks set to remain the dominant lingua franca but where only one language is no longer enough.

Speaking and writing are only half the story. Behind different languages lie different ways of thinking and different cultures – and Google Translate and artificial intelligence are not enough to access these. Being international means opening your mind to other ways of seeing the world. And young people are uniquely privileged to learn these skills and aptitudes as a fundamental part of their education at Copperfield. “International Education” is therefore much more than English-speaking schooling in a British or American tradition.

Copperfield Verbier, une école suisse à vocation internationale, Copperfield’s uniquely international community includes students, teachers and staff from all over the world, with over 27 nationalities represented on campus. This creates an extraordinary and egalitarian mix of languages, cultures, ethical backgrounds and religions. And there can be no more appropriate home for an international community than Switzerland, a peaceful, polyglot country and a democracy for over 700 years with a long-standing commitment to international understanding and multilingualism.

### The benefits of bilingualism

Studies show that bilingualism not only provides extra opportunities and abilities for the child but that it also boosts cognitive development and enriches and enhances educational programmes. Above all bilingualism opens an alternative world to students.

By studying in French and English (which may be a “foreign”, additional, or home language) – with French-speaking teachers from France, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Spain, Brazil and with English-speaking teachers from the UK, the USA, Greece,

Ukraine, Germany and elsewhere – students are exposed to two world languages, at least two cultures, and two different ways of studying, learning and relating to people.

And, of course, for many Copperfield Students, English and French may be their second and third languages. This could be seen as a complication but, like the roots of the Kahikatea tree (or “White Pine”), languages are closely linked and fluency in one helps fluency in others. This is one of the reasons why many Copperfield students will often become gifted polyglots.

### A bilingual (or “dual language”) school – how does it work?

Most students arrive at Copperfield with a very good level of either English or French, and effectively all are able to follow classes in at least one of Copperfield’s two principal languages of instruction, French or English. French and English are heard around the campus in all sorts of contexts and for all sorts of purposes, and learning is enhanced by this exposure, but there is more to language than social communication.

Copperfield’s bilingual system is quite simple but is tailored to individual needs and abilities: all Copperfield students also have English and French language classes at an appropriate level: home language (or “mother-tongue”) classes for native-speakers and intermediate or beginner-level classes for others.

Learning in the foreign language, sometimes called CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), is a key component of Copperfield’s bilingual system. As time passes, Copperfield students pass through different stages on their route to bilingualism, and acquire the ability to operate academically, professionally and socially in different cultures and languages. Copperfield students may choose between the IB Diploma in English or the IB Diploma in English and French.

### Beyond English and French

Copperfield students come from over 15 countries. If we include English and French, they have over ten home languages, and all are encouraged to study Literature in their own “Home Language” (also called “mother tongue” or “first language”).

People used to think that our brains could only “fit” a limited amount of information or languages. The general idea was that to learn English or French, the “home language” had to be forgotten or even forbidden. Not any more.

Contemporary research tells us that maintaining and developing the home language is good for the child’s cognitive development, for relationships with the “home families”, for overall cultural understanding and – of course – for their professional life in the future. What is more, many will later follow the A Literature course in their home language as a key part of their IB diploma.

We could think of the intertwined roots of the White Pine, but the most common image today is the “Dual Iceberg”. Languages – whatever their differences – have much in common, and developing our ability to think and reason in our “first language” helps the second.

Our students often achieve remarkable levels of achievement and fluency in their “foreign” language learning. Three languages – English, French, and a third language - are a standard part of the Copperfield curriculum, with “foreign” language and home language classes offered at many levels. Within clearly defined guidelines nearly all Copperfield students learn a fourth or fifth language. Increasing numbers of students also opt for an “extra-curricular” language, sometimes as a private class and sometimes as part of their timetable. PUTONGHUA (Standard Mandarin Chinese), ARABIC, RUSSIAN and LATIN, for example, are available at many levels for an additional payment.

Some students’ home languages are called “extra” because they do not figure regularly or predictably on the curriculum. But they are important, so Copperfield employs an outstanding team of fully qualified native-speaker teachers.