

ACADEMIC MATTERS

– Section X

Philosophy and Aims of the EAL Department

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The EAL department exists as part of Taunton School to offer help and support to all students for whom English is not their first language. This help is a mixture of academic and pastoral and extends to all areas of school life, as these students are learning not only a second language but also how to survive and thrive in a new culture. We cater for all international students in the school, including the IB students who are taught as a cohort in the department for Theory of Knowledge.

Our main aims are:

- to support and foster a spirit of internationalism and respect for different cultures;
- to teach all aspects of the English language;
- to provide subject-specific support in all areas;
- to provide pastoral support, liaising with House and subject staff;
- to help students to achieve any English qualifications necessary for their continued academic progress.

The department hopes to be able to give international students a secure base in the school, so that they feel supported and able to ask for assistance when necessary. Even the most integrated and confident of students will occasionally need more specific help than can be given in the mainstream classroom and we try to be ready to cope with any of the problems they present to us. If these students are to gain from the English education system, we must provide them with the fullest possible backing in all areas of school life, understanding the impact their respective cultures will have on their learning and their relationships. The department also acts as a link between students and subject staff, working in all subject areas to help with communication and to resolve any learning difficulties. This will include working closely with the Academic Development department in cases of students with overlapping AD/EAL needs, of which there are growing numbers.

In Years 9, 10 and 11, some international students are timetabled to EAL whilst the rest of the year are studying a modern foreign language. These classes are specifically English classes with the focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. They are designed to support and reinforce as much as possible the work being done by the students in their mainstream English classes where they are studying English Language and Literature. In addition, EAL students are taught the syllabus for the IGCSE English as a Second Language exam. All these classes have a homework requirement which fills the time allotted to a foreign language for the other students and which is set in accordance with school policy. The students are also encouraged to bring with them any work in other subject areas which may be causing them concern so that we can resolve difficulties as quickly as possible.

Some international students are allowed to take a second modern foreign language which means that they do not have any timetabled time in the EAL dept. While every attempt is made to keep track of their progress, there are obvious difficulties in the situation and we can only rely on subject staff, particularly the English dept., to alert us to any problems. We do see many of them while supporting in other subject areas and they are aware that they can ask for individual help at any time.

The considerable increase in student numbers in recent years means that we work hard to ensure that we track all the international students whose first language is not English by liaising regularly with HODs, subject teachers, tutors and other parts of the school where the students might have been prior to TS.

In the sixth form, those students who choose to apply for universities in the UK will need to either have a grade C in IGCSE First language English or a valid IELTS certificate. We offer teaching for this examination as well as English for Academic Purposes, and many students take the IELTS Academic examination at the end of Y12 or at the end of the Autumn term in the Y13. The IELTS classes carry a homework requirement and all students are encouraged to spend as much time as they can reading and studying independently, taking part in co-curricular activities, watching films and so on. For many of them, their lack of background knowledge of British culture inhibits their learning as much as their lack of subject-specific vocabulary. The considerable increase in numbers of international students has led to some students not being timetabled for EAL so we work hard to reach each individual through the house system to ensure that they receive any extra help that may be needed. On the other hand, the international students who follow the IB course are less of a problem as the EAL HOD teaches both English and TOK and therefore is in contact with all the IB students.

Outside this timetabled time, staff are always available - providing there is room on their timetables - to see students individually or in small groups, either for the whole year or on a "first aid" basis as and when problems arise. Many Yr 10 and 11 students come to the department during their study periods, which we encourage provided a member of staff is there to assist them. We also offer some degree of support in the subject classroom in a variety of areas, either on a short or long term basis. This is an area which is particularly beneficial as we can deal with problems that arise as they occur and also have a clear idea of the tasks set for the students, which enables us to reinforce the subject back in the department in a follow up session. It is particularly valuable when there are several international students in a group. The main focus of our work is to make sure that the international students remain in mainstream classes, following a normal curriculum and taking GCSE and A-level exams in the subjects of their choice which will enable them to move on to university either in the UK or elsewhere. When it does become necessary to withdraw a student from a particular subject, we do our best to apply accelerated learning so that the student can return to the classroom as soon as possible.