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Directive no 49
of the Head of School
of Miina Härma Gümnaasium
8. March, 2022

MHG Language Policy

INTRODUCTION

Miina Härma Gymnasium (MHG) is the oldest Estonian-language secondary school in Estonia. Even in today's changing world, MHG emphasises the importance of learning Estonian. Learning the Estonian language in the national curriculum or a larger volume will ensure the future sustainable development of the Estonian language and culture. A correct command of the mother tongue is a prerequisite for learning a foreign language at a high level, which is also important for acquiring new knowledge in various areas of life.

This language policy document builds on the following legislative acts and documents:

- National Curriculum of basic and secondary schools
- Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy (IBO, 2008)
- Diploma Programme: From principles into practice (IBO, 2015)
- Middle Years Programme: From principles into practice (IBO, 2021)
- Primary Years Programme: Learning and Teaching (IBO, 2019)
- DP language courses: overview and placement guidance (IBO, 2021)

MHG's language policy is reviewed, and proposals for updating are made as necessary by the Management Board, the Student Council, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Studies. The Director approves the document by decree.

MHG mission and vision

Miina Härma Gümnaasium is a modern and safe educational institution open to the world. The learning environment, curriculum and professional teachers create ample opportunities for each student to realise his or her development potential. Miina Härma Gümnaasium is raising a generation that will change the world for the better. MHG is a student-centred world school that helps develop



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broad-based knowledge and skills through a modern approach to learning and a varied learning environment, opening up opportunities for further choices in education and employment. MHG gives confidence and initiative to contribute to the development of Estonia and the world.

The knowledge of foreign languages is the basis for understanding and respecting intercultural differences, which ensures a peaceful, sustainable and secure world as well as the development of economic prosperity and spiritual and material well-being of different people. Foreign language skills are important because they are the only way to stay in touch with global cultural and economic processes and societal developments and to have the prerequisites for learning mobility or mobility for work.

With this in mind, the aim of foreign language teaching at MHG is to offer students the opportunity to learn several foreign languages. This is also supported by the European Union's language policy, which considers that EU citizens should be proficient in at least two foreign languages besides their mother tongue.

THE AIM OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY

The language policy document has been developed in cooperation with the school's management and language teachers and discussed by the school's Board of Studies, Student Council and Parent Advisory Board. The document aims to overview the principles of language teaching at MHG across all school levels. This document is used as a reference by members of our school family in the development of the language skills of our pupils.



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Principles of language teaching at MHG

1. Each teacher is also a language teacher, teaching the terminology of their field and ensuring linguistic correctness. This means that language use is monitored in every lesson, and functional reading skills are developed, using both mother tongue and foreign-language teaching aids or media where appropriate and possible. According to the subject's specificities, language skills are taught in a real-life context.
2. MHG teaches mother tongue on the basis that a good command of the mother tongue is a prerequisite for the successful acquisition of all other subjects and is important as it provides access to the national cultural heritage and enables students to participate in present and future cultural life, i.e. to act as creators and transmitters of national culture. At the same time, a correct command of the mother tongue is the basis for better acquisition of foreign languages. For this reason, great emphasis is placed on teaching the Estonian language and literature, and many Estonian literature and periodicals are read in lessons.
3. Foreign language proficiency allows MHG students to understand the different developments and changes in the world around them, participate actively in these processes and become global citizens if they so wish. Accordingly, all students have the opportunity to learn at least two foreign languages.
4. To ensure the quality of foreign language teaching at MHG, modern language teaching methods are used, with a focus on foreign language communication, that supports and develops students' general communication skills and their broader thinking and comprehension skills. Language also plays an important role in making sense of the world around us and in giving and creating meaning to it. All this provides learners with an intellectual framework for developing conceptual and critical thinking skills. Modern teaching tools support the implementation of these methods.



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5. To support the teaching of foreign languages and the achievement of its objectives, MHG will, wherever possible, set up level groups to help students with different levels of preparation and learning skills to reach the language level set as the end objective of the course.
6. A variety of subject-based student competitions are important for ensuring language learning levels and motivating students to reach or exceed them. For languages, the aim is to participate, where possible, in all major regional, national and international competitions.
7. The language-learning experience helps to build closer relationships between students from different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to foster open-minded attitudes towards and tolerance of other people and cultures; to support the preservation of students' personal and cultural identity.
8. MHG library provides support for language learning with a wide range of teaching materials (a varied selection of fiction, grammar textbooks, dictionaries, popular science magazines, etc.). Thanks to the cooperation with the University of Tartu Library, students can access various scientific and fiction texts and databases in different languages and fields.

In every lesson...

- ...students have the opportunity to learn a language to develop reading, writing, research and presentation skills.
- ...reading and writing skills are taught through appropriate contexts by encouraging the use of various methods for understanding, interpreting, analysing, composing and presenting texts.
- ... students are encouraged to use methods to feedback on their work and correct mistakes.
- ...students are given opportunities to use various technologies to find and work with information.
- ...students are encouraged to express themselves orally and in writing in different situations and through different means.



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- ...students are encouraged to use language as a tool for reflection, exploration, feedback and learning.
- ...students are guided to value their own and their fellow student's mother tongue and culture.
- ... students are given a chance to become fluent in several languages.
- ...students are offered a varied selection of literature that presents different perspectives and cultures.
- ... students' love of language and literature is nurtured.
- ...students receive constructive and relevant feedback from teachers and fellow students.
- ...students can give feedback, analyse their learning, and plan their future activities accordingly.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AT MIINA HÄRMA GÜMNAASIUM

The language of instruction at school is Estonian. The school also implements an English-language curriculum based on the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) curriculum, which is implemented according to the Ministry of Education and Research agreement. Accordingly, English is the language of instruction in all international classes.

Students applying for an international class are expected to have a level of English that will enable them to participate in class. Students applying for the IB Diploma Programme (IB DP) are expected to have at least an intermediate English (B2) level, enabling them to follow the demanding programme.

Communication between the school family takes place in Estonian. For extra-curricular communication, we encourage international students to communicate with each other in their mother tongue. International students and their parents are communicated with in English when necessary.



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TEACHING AND LEARNING LANGUAGES IN GRADES 1–4

Teaching home languages

In the Estonian-language primary classes, the mother tongue is taught for six lessons (in grades 1 and 2), seven lessons (in grade 3) and five lessons (in grade 4) per week. In international classes, English is taught as the language of instruction for five weekly lessons, which may or may not be the pupils' mother tongue.

To support the learning of the home languages of international students, we encourage all international families to use their home language when communicating at home to preserve the student's personal culture and identity. We support communication in the home language wherever possible in the school environment. In addition, to support the home language learning of international students, we offer the opportunity to attend a paid class twice a week. The school offers home language lessons in Russian, German, French, Latvian and Lithuanian at the parents' request and subject to a teacher's availability. In the absence of a teacher, or the case of a more exotic mother tongue, we support parents' initiative in organising independent language learning by providing premises in the school building or by helping to find a teacher from outside the school.

Teaching foreign languages

Due to a long historical tradition (the in-depth teaching of English started in 1961) and also the needs of the near future, English is taught as the first foreign language (A foreign language) at MHG from grade 1 (nationally from grade 3). The number of lessons is double the national curriculum requirements (two lessons in grade 1, three lessons in grade 2, and four lessons per week in grades 3 and 4). The international classes study Estonian for two weekly lessons as their first foreign language.



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In grade 4, pupils with Estonian as their language of instruction start learning a second foreign language (B-foreign language; nationally in grade 6), which can be German, Russian or French. As the international classes study on a combined class basis, their second foreign language (German) starts in grade 3. All foreign languages (Estonian, German) are taught in level groups (beginners and advanced) in international combined classes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING LANGUAGES IN GRADES 5–9

Teaching home languages

At MHG, students in grades 5 and 6 study Estonian language and literature for five lessons a week; in grades 7-9 for four lessons a week. Language and Literature are integrated, and the subject is called "Language and Literature" (in the national curriculum, Estonian language and Literature are separate). Teaching is based on the national curriculum, and appropriate textbooks are used.

To better support language learning, English is taught in two groups in the international classes - one for native speakers and one for foreign language learners. If the mother tongue is English, students receive four hours of English lessons per week in grades 5-9 and five lessons per week in Pre-IB (10e).

To support the learning of the home languages of international students, we encourage all international families to use their home language when communicating at home to preserve the student's personal culture and identity. We support communication in the home language wherever possible in the school environment. In addition, to support the home language learning of international students, we offer the opportunity to attend a paid class twice a week. The school offers home language lessons in Russian, German, French, Latvian and Lithuanian at the parents' request and subject to a teacher's availability. In the absence of a teacher, or the case of a more exotic mother tongue, we support parents' initiative in organising independent language



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learning by providing premises in the school building or by helping to find a teacher from outside the school.

Teaching foreign languages

Pupils in Estonian-medium classes study English as their first foreign language for four hours a week in grade 5 and five hours a week in grades 6-9.

By the end of basic school, pupils reach level B2 in English. Around 85% of pupils choose English as the optional examination for leaving basic school.

Pupils have chosen a B foreign language (Russian, German or French) in Grade 4 and continue to study this language for two weekly lessons in Grades 5, 8 and 9 and three lessons a week in Grades 6 and 7. By the end of basic school, pupils will have reached level A2/B1 in foreign language B.

German, French, Spanish and Russian can be studied as a third foreign language (C-foreign language) from 6th grade onwards (280 academic hours in total in 6th-9th grades). The lessons use the IB MYP methodology and criterion-referenced assessment, similarly to extra-curricular lessons. In C foreign language, level A2 is reached by the end of basic school.

International classes study Estonian as their first foreign language for two lessons a week and German as their second foreign language for two lessons a week. In international classes, foreign language learning occurs in different groups (beginners and advanced).



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TEACHING AND LEARNING LANGUAGES IN GRADES 10–12

NATIONAL CURRICULUM OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

Teaching Estonian

There are eight Estonian language courses in upper secondary school; three are in grade 10, two in grade 11 and three in grade 12 (the national curriculum has a total of six Estonian language courses). Estonian mother tongue is taught according to the national curriculum. Language knowledge provides the theoretical basis for developing practical language skills. Therefore, each language knowledge course is followed and integrated with a practical language course. In Grade 12, students take a course on "Working with basic texts", which is preparation for the national exam.

There are six literature courses in upper secondary school: two in Grade 10, three in Grade 11 and one in Grade 12 (there are five compulsory courses in the national curriculum). In addition to the courses in the national curriculum, there is an additional course in Estonian Literature in grade 11. The MHG also offers electives: 'Myth', 'Speech and Debate', 'Literature and Society', 'Drama' and 'Literature and Film'.

English

Nine English language courses are added to the five compulsory courses at the upper secondary level, including Academic English and English Literature (455 academic hours total). As electives, students can choose from various English electives such as Business English, British Studies, Keynote Proficient, Mass Communication, Personal Finances and Investing, Guiding Tour for English, Creative Writing and British Art and Design. By the end of upper secondary school, students will reach the B2/C1/C2 level.



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Other foreign languages

In upper secondary school, one course (210 academic hours in total) is added to the five courses of the national B foreign language curriculum. It is possible to switch from one B language to another, i.e. if a pupil has studied a language as a C language in primary school, he or she can choose it as his or her B language in upper secondary school. By the end of upper secondary school, students will have reached B1/B2 level in B. If they choose C as their second foreign language, they can choose one of the following options.

We also teach Finnish and Spanish as B foreign languages in an upper secondary school upon demand.

At upper secondary school, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Finnish and Swedish are available as optional A2 level languages (four courses, 140 academic hours in total). Estonia has historically close cultural and economic ties with the countries of origin of these foreign languages, and/or they are among the most widely spoken foreign languages, either in the world, European or regional level.

IB Diploma Programme

Teaching home languages

In the IB Diploma Programme, it is possible to study Language and Literature at Advanced Level (HL) or Standard Level (SL) in Group 1: Studies in Language and Literature. In the Language and Literature group, both the language of study and the target language are the same, which means that Literature is studied in Estonian and Language and Literature in English.

Estonian A: Literature is a compulsory course for all native speakers of Estonian. Non-native speakers of Estonian can choose either English A: Language and Literature from Group 1 or, where possible, learn their mother tongue. When a pupil wishes to learn his/her mother tongue but does not have a qualified teacher, the school will endeavour to offer School-supported self-taught Language A (SL) individual tuition.



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Teaching foreign languages

In the IB Diploma Programme, the following languages are offered in Group 2: Language Acquisition:

- for beginners: French ab initio, Spanish ab initio.
- for advanced learners: German (German B) SL/HL, French (French B) SL/HL, Russian (Russian B) SL/HL.

Group 3-6 and Theory of Knowledge (TOK) subjects are taught in English, so all students in the IB Diploma Programme use English as a medium for learning, communicating and sharing knowledge.

STUDENT COMPETITIONS AND EXAMS TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE LEARNING

Competitions and Olympiads

Our students take part in competitions in the Estonian language, literature and foreign languages. The foreign language competitions are primarily regional, while English and German are only open to secondary school pupils at the national level.

Estonian

The National Mother Tongue Olympiad, organised alternately by the University of Tartu and the University of Tallinn, is an annual competition for students in grades 7-12. Within that contest, students of MHG have written some very good language essays. The Literature Olympiad is held every 4 years for the same age group. In addition, MHG students participate annually in the Tartu City Spelling Olympiad for grades 4-12. Pupils can also demonstrate their language skills in an e-dictation held on Mother Tongue Day, in which both pupils and teachers participate.



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English

In English, MHG students participate in the regional Spelling Bee contest for students in grades 3-4, the regional language quiz for grades 5, and the national history quiz for grades 6, as well as the regional study skills competition for grades 7-9, regional English and Natural history trivia for secondary school, national English Olympiad for secondary school students and the international English contest Best in English. English language skills are also developed through other English language competitions, such as the English Open debating tournament organised by Tallinn English College.

Russian

In Russian, MHG students take part in the national Russian language olympiads for 7th and 8th graders, the national Russian language festival for 9th graders, the national Russian language study skills competition for upper secondary school, the translation competition for upper secondary school and the national Russian language olympiads for 9th-12th graders and the Russian language competition for native Russian-speaking upper secondary school students.

German

In German, there will be national quizzes for 8th and 9th graders, national German translation competitions for 8th and 9th graders and upper secondary school students, a national German poetry competition for 8th and 9th graders, a national German sub-skills competition for 8th and 9th graders and a national German language competition for 8th and 9th graders. German-language orienteering competition Stadtralley on the historical monuments of the city of Tartu for pupils in grades 5 to 7 and a regional German-language orienteering competition on the traces of Baltic German for secondary school pupils, a national German language Olympiad for pupils in grades 10 to 12, DSD (Deutsches Sprachdiplom) school pupil competitions in the framework of the Jugend Debattiert International, Lesefüchse and Vorlesewettbewerb projects.



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French

There will be a national French-language olympiad, a French recital organised by the Gustav Adolf Gymnasium, and a French Lyceum songwriting competition as part of Francophonie Month.

Other languages

To enable Swedish and Finnish students to compare their language skills with those of other schools, they participate in events organised by teachers from their respective subject associations or organisations from the languages' countries of origin, including the Finnish language Olympiad.

Every year, according to the possibilities, students participate in the European Union translation contest *Juvenes Translatores*.

Traditional language events at MHG

On Estonian Mother Tongue Day, the whole school family can participate in an e-dictation and have a traditional recitation for primary school pupils. Several well-known linguists and writers have also visited the school during the day. The Foreign Languages Group is also responsible for celebrating European Day of Languages and Europe Day. The lessons commemorate the various anniversaries of the countries of origin of the languages, highlight the most important cultural events in the countries of origin, and introduce pupils to current issues in these countries. Traditionally, a compulsory part of the English Literature course is the study of Shakespeare's Hamlet soliloquy and its presentation in English to classmates. On the school's birthday, 14 October, there will be a festive ring-awarding ceremony for Grade 10 students, at which MHG alumni will perform Hamlet's soliloquy. Thanks to the school's status as a DSD school, the school will participate in various events organised by the German Centre for Foreign Education (ZfA) for DSD schools.



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Level exams in foreign languages

The final goal of foreign language teaching at MHG is seen as the achievement of language proficiency levels, which, among other things, enables students to pass recognised international examinations successfully.

English

In English, the aim is for students to pass the Cambridge Assessment English C1 Advanced exam (level B2, C1 or C2) by the end of upper secondary school. MHG students first took the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) exam (now known as the C1 Advanced exam) in 2016, and MHG was one of the first schools in Estonia to offer the CAE exam to its students. C1 Advanced is an English as a foreign language exam administered by the internationally recognised testing organisation Cambridge Assessment English. Preparing for this exam helps students acquire the skills that will enable them to study, work and live successfully in an English-speaking environment. More than 90% of MHG graduates take the C1 Advanced exam each year, preferring it to the National English Examination (which can only be taken at the B1/B2 level).

German

The DSD is a German language diploma approved by the German Council of Ministers of Education and administered by the ZfA (German Foreign Education Agency), which certifies German language proficiency at the A2/B1 level (DSD level 1) and the B2/C1 level (DSD level 2) and is recognised for entry into the German-language post-secondary education system (DSD I - vocational schools, technical colleges and DSD II - universities). In addition, the DSD is an even more general document certifying German language proficiency in German-speaking countries, which gives an advantage when competing for jobs requiring German language skills. The DSD Diploma has unlimited validity. Only DSD schools officially recognised by the German Council of Ministers of Education and the ZfA can offer the DSD examination. The MHG has had this status since 2009.



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French

Since 2013, HARNO has been organising the DELF (Diplôme d'études en langue française) scolaire examinations in French as a foreign language, internationally recognised. Suppose a student passes the exam with a positive result. In that case, he/she will be awarded the internationally recognised DELF Scolaire diploma, valid for life, attesting to his/her level of French. The DELF scolaire examinations are aimed at primary and secondary school pupils. Miina Härma Gümnaasium has been offering DELF exams since 2013. The DELF diploma is the only internationally recognised French language qualification accredited by the French Ministry of Education.

Russian

From spring 2014, graduates of Estonian schools will be able to take the international Russian language proficiency examination ТРКИ-1 (Level I of general proficiency in Russian) or ТРКИ-2 (Level II of general proficiency in Russian), which correspond to the Council of Europe language proficiency levels B1 and B2. MHC students have been taking the ТРКИ-1 and ТРКИ-2 exams since 2014.

Passing the DSD, DELF scolaire, ТРКИ-1 and ТРКИ-2, as well as the corresponding exams in Swedish and Finnish, are counted by the school as upper secondary school exams.