

A Helping Hand

English as an
Additional
Language



THE BRITISH SCHOOL
OF BEIJING, SHUNYI
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

*Some information
about our
EAL programmes
and a few ideas to
help you support
your child at BSB*

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Introduction

Coming to a new school can be daunting for a child – new teachers, new friends, new surroundings, new subjects and a completely different school life from what they are used to.

If a child cannot speak the same language as others in the school, this becomes even more difficult. Life can be hard at first and everyone needs a little help during stressful times.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) at The British School of Beijing is designed to help students develop their language skills, learn about school

life, how to talk and interact with people and get the best out of their education.

It allows students to learn English with others in a relaxed and friendly environment where they can make friends and learn how to express themselves in a different language both socially and academically.

We offer an intensive support programme that assists students in immediately accessing the school curriculum. This is done through EAL lessons, withdrawal lessons and in-class support if necessary.

Whether your child is a beginner in English, in the early stages of learning English or just needs a little extra help, EAL is here to help your child enjoy their time at school and acquire the tools they need to perform to their full potential by becoming an independent language learner and user.

What is EAL?

EAL refers to English as an Additional Language. A child who does not speak English as their first language might need EAL support to help them access an English language curriculum. Academic English, needed for study purposes in both primary and secondary, requires a longer period of study than functional, social English and EAL aims to give the students the necessary skills for both of these language registers. EAL lessons are integrated to give the students practice in all the major skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking – as well as training in vocabulary and grammar acquisition.

How do I know if my child needs help?

All students for whom English is not their first language take an English language test upon application to the school to determine their level of

English. We use a globally recognized online test that takes about 30 minutes to assess a student's level and gives an immediate level using the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) assessment scale. A speaking interview is also sometimes given to preliterate primary students.

How does my child join EAL?

The EAL department has set entry and exit levels, based on the CEFR.

In KS1, if a child is assessed at being below CEFR level B1 in listening and speaking in Year 1 before Term 2, they will be required to join the EAL programme and if they are below B1 in listening, speaking, reading and writing from Term 2 of Year 1 onwards, they will be on EAL. In KS2 and KS3, students who are assessed as being below CEFR Level B1 in any of the four main

skill areas (reading, writing, listening and speaking) will need EAL support. In KS4 and KS5, because of the increased academic load, students assessed as being below CEFR B2 will be required to do EAL or English B.

In these cases, the child's admissions file is marked 'EAL' and the parents informed about the EAL programme and its related costs.

The school then checks that there is space for an EAL student in that year group. If the child is accepted, then this entry information is passed onto the class teacher in primary and the Head of Year in Secondary.

This process allows us to integrate students as quickly as possible and provide immediate and individual support for their particular language learning needs.

When does my child do EAL?

In the primary school, Intensive EAL takes place during the classroom literacy time for 4 hours per week. In order to access the National Curriculum for English, students need a minimum language level which is CEFR B1+. Students whose English is lower than this level are generally unable to meet the demands of the course.

Students who are below B1 and are on the EAL programme follow a language-focused curriculum that incorporates elements of the National Curriculum for English which are suitable for their level. In KS2, when students reach the B1 threshold, they follow a blended language and literature course that prepares them to undertake literature studies in the mainstream classroom when they reach the EAL exit level. All EAL students continue to study phonics and have library time with their year group and, of course, are present for all other subjects.

Secondary students receive 4/5 hours of Intensive EAL per week. These classes take place during English literature classes for native speaking and high level English language users.

Because of the complexity involved in studying English literature in secondary, students need

to have an appropriate language level in order to access the texts and be able to undertake the detailed study required.

In KS3 and 4, depending on need, there is also the possibility for students to study an extra EAL option, to give even more support.



What do students learn in EAL?

In both primary and secondary, the EAL programme follows a core curriculum that is tailored to the specific needs of the class and the individuals in it.

Students in both primary and secondary are assessed across all four skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking – at least 4 times a year to monitor their progress and to inform the EAL teacher’s planning for the students in a particular class.

Our integrated skills approach, means that in each class, students will be exposed to reading, writing, listening and speaking, with vocabulary and grammar also included. Lessons will have the strongest focus on the area that students need the most development in.

Research shows that successful language learning requires exposure to the language and a focus on form. In their main classes, students at BSB have a fantastic

opportunity to have maximum exposure to the English language and in their EAL classes they are able to have access to the specific features of the language that must be acquired for fluency and independence.

We have found this to be a very successful combination in maximizing students’ learning and allowing them to make progress in English at as fast a pace as is suitable for them.

Our experience at BSB has shown that the skill that improves fastest is listening, as a result of the exposure to the language they receive. The skills that follow quickly on from this are reading and/or speaking, depending on the student’s own nature and focus.

In almost all cases, the skill that takes the longest to develop is writing. This is because students are required to master academic writing for study purposes and achieving

independence in this area requires an ability to manipulate complex linguistic structures.

Students also learn vocabulary skills. This involves training in how to deduce meaning from context and strongly discourages the learning of vocabulary in list-form, which is de-contextualised and proven to be ineffective. Students are trained in how to use vocabulary items and the features of vocabulary that are needed for successful and full acquisition.

Grammar is also taught in a contextualized manner and is given great importance in EAL classes, whether implicitly or explicitly, as it is the building blocks of language and provides a strong foundation for all the student’s future study. A faulty acquisition of grammar is often the reason for a student’s inability to progress and this can causes issues across all subjects.

What is the environment like in EAL?

The EAL department puts prime importance on the natural and accurate acquisition of the structures of the English language.

Furthermore, the EAL department and the classroom and subject teachers communicate on a regular basis and incorporate the needs of their other classes into their learning in EAL.

Linguistic studies have highlighted the importance of affect in language learning. This means that if a student is unhappy, stressed or uncomfortable, their language learning progress will be negatively affected.

For this reason, we place a great deal of importance on students enjoying their study environment.

Classes take place in a caring, fun and supportive atmosphere where students can feel comfortable to speak out and make the mistakes that are vital for language learning.

As students' confidence grows, this spreads out into other lessons and they begin to join in paired, group and whole class activities more effectively.



*"Learn your language well
and command it well,
and you will have the
first component to life."
Edward Roscoe Murrow*



How will my child's English be assessed?

Regular and targeted assessment is vital in language learning both to track progress and to assist in developing a specific programme for students that targets the areas they need to make progress in most.

In the primary school, after students are initially assessed to ascertain their level, they are then tested three times throughout the rest of the year.

This testing involves assessment of all four skill areas - reading, writing, listening and speaking – and the student is given a CEFR level in each skill.

The tests given are level step tests and they are fundamentally the same across the primary school, with some differences in format depending on age. These are not the type of tests one can study for, rather they provide a snapshot of a child's overall English level at that time.

In Secondary, as well as our internal testing, students also take part in external examinations.

In KS3, these are the Key English Test (KET) and the Preliminary English Test (PET), administered by Cambridge English Language Assessment, part of the The University of Cambridge.

At BSB, we run these as computer-based tests which means that the test responses are immediately uploaded to Cambridge on completion of the test and we are able to receive the results within two weeks, which allows us to use these tests as part of the regular assessment cycle.

In KS4, students sit the Cambridge First Certificate in English and/ or the Cambridge Advanced Certificate in English.

At BSB EAL, we feel it is important that students receive an international certificate proving their level of English that can be used when their family relocates or when they go on to study at a higher level.

Teachers in both the Primary and Secondary EAL department are certified as examiners in a range of external examinations by international bodies and receive training in assessment on a regular basis.



How long will my child need EAL support?

This depends on a variety of factors:

- Your child's current level of English.
- Your child's age.
- Your child's fluency in their home language.
- Your child's motivation.
- Family support.

For all of these reasons, it is impossible to say exactly for how long an individual child will need EAL support.

However, a typical Primary or Secondary intensive EAL student will be able to come off this program within two academic years.

Having studied the department data, eighteen months is the average amount of time spent on the programme and this is independent of first language.

At BSB we use the internationally- recognised level of CEFR B1 as the exit level for the EAL programme from KS 1, 2 and 3.

Another advantage of regular testing is that we can know when students are fully ready to exit the programme.

In primary school, there are four opportunities throughout the year for students to demonstrate their achievement of a full B1 level and proceed to literature study and in KS3, a minimum Pass Merit in the Cambridge PET test, which takes place 2-3 times per year, allows students to begin their study of English literature.

If a student is still below B1 level at the end of Year 9, they will be required to stay

on the EAL programme for Years 10 and 11.

IGCSE English literature is a demanding course and requires a suitable level of language to approach the texts.

If a student does exceptionally well in the Cambridge Advanced certificate, this will give them the option to widen their opportunities for studying Literature in our Year 12 and 13 IB Diploma programme.

How can I help my child to learn English?

To help speed up the process of your child's acquisition of English, you can:

- Read with your child everyday if possible. This helps them with learning grammar, vocabulary and spelling patterns.
- Create a quiet place and a regular time to do homework and study.
- Talk to your child about what they are doing and learning at school. This can be done in English or in the child's home language.
- Encourage your child to show you their school work and ask them questions about it in English or their home language.
- Learning in a new language takes a lot of energy. Make sure that your child gets plenty of rest.
- Help your child find opportunities to use English outside of school.
- Be patient. Understand that learning a language is a complex, long journey which can be very emotional for some children.
- Continue to use your child's first language. Current research shows that if a child has a highly developed first language, they will be more successful in acquiring a second language.

Finally, should you have any questions about the EAL programme, please make a time to talk to your child's EAL teacher.

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