A young boy with dark hair, wearing a light blue school shirt and a striped tie, is focused on writing in a notebook. He is holding a yellow pencil. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom elements.

Specialist English as an Additional Language Support (SEALS) Handbook





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Introduction

At the Nord Anglia International School Guangzhou, all classes (except for foreign languages) are taught in English. In order to succeed at school, to learn and enjoy learning, and to participate actively in school life, students must be able to use and communicate in English at a level suitable for study at that age.

Coming to a new school can be daunting for a child – new teachers, new friends, new surroundings, new subjects and a completely unfamiliar school life. It can take students some time before they feel confident and relaxed in their new environment. If a child cannot speak the same language as others in the school, this becomes even more difficult. Imagine trying to start a new job in a company where you cannot understand anyone. Life can be difficult at first and everyone needs a little help during stressful times.

The SEALS programme at NAISGZ is designed to help students whose English level is below the standard needed to study successfully alongside their classmates. It helps them to quickly develop their language skills, understand school life, talk and interact with teachers, classmates, and others, and get the best out of their education. It allows students to learn English with others in a relaxed and friendly environment, with specialist teachers, where they can make friends and learn how to express themselves properly in a different language alongside other English language learners.

“The goal of SEALS is to help students reach a level of English proficiency where they can successfully access their mainstream studies in English alongside their peers.”

It is important to remember that needing English language support is in no way a criticism of a child or a suggestion that they are not intelligent. English, like any second or additional language, is a skill that has to be learnt, just like playing the violin, or flying a plane. Nobody would criticize Bill Gates because he isn't an expert pianist! And like other skills it takes time, diligence, and enthusiasm to master. What is in fact remarkable is that most SEALS students do successfully become fluent in English and can use it to a very high level. In fact, many former SEALS students have gone on to achieve great success at GCSE and A level, to be school leaders, and to contribute hugely to the NAISGZ and wider community.

“English is a language, not a measure of intelligence.”

Whether your child is a complete beginner in English, in the early stages of learning English, or needs to progress beyond social English to Academic English, the SEALS programme is here to help your child enjoy their time at school and acquire the language tools they need to perform to their full potential in all their lessons.



What is the SEALS Programme?

SEALS is our programme to support EAL learners in Primary and Reception. EAL means English as an Additional Language. This programme has been developed for children who do not speak, read or write English as their first language and therefore need EAL support to help them improve their level of English and be able to succeed in their mainstream study at an age-appropriate level. It is delivered by specialist teachers, trained, experienced and qualified in additional language acquisition.

Students who do not speak English as their first language may find that life can be difficult in an English-speaking school. They might find it hard to understand and be understood by their classmates and their teachers or understand subject specific vocabulary. Reading and writing might be very difficult for them because they are still working on English grammar. Socially, they might find it hard to make friends or talk to people because they do not feel confident speaking English. If a child has any of these issues, they will benefit from SEALS.



How are EAL needs determined?

When applying to NAISGZ, all students take a pre-entry assessment, which includes an assessment of their English levels in relation to the level needed to study successfully at that age group. If the school determines that a child needs EAL support they will be enrolled on the SEALS programme.

During the programme children are regularly assessed (on our Progress in EAL scale). After progressing through this scale, a child will have sufficient English to succeed in the mainstream, at which time they will graduate from the SEALS programme into the mainstream where, of course, they will continue to develop their social and academic English alongside their classmates.

It is important to note that the English language demands of our curriculum get increasingly advanced as children get older. Therefore, a child may be succeeding in improving their English, but still require support as they move to a higher year. As mentioned above, children learn languages at very different speeds, and language acquisition can become more difficult as a child gets older. For these reasons our SEALS provision and students' EAL needs change significantly in different phases and key stages, from Early Years, through lower primary and upper primary.



Reception

Young children are able to learn new knowledge and skills at an amazing rate. All students in Reception are in the process of learning how to communicate, whether this be in English, or another native language. The role of the SEALS programme in EYFS is to complement this learning in English. Dedicated Early Years EAL teachers take small groups of children out of the mainstream classroom and, using an exciting curriculum involving games, songs, and other age-appropriate techniques, lead the children in developing their speaking, listening, and vocabulary. The EAL department also works extremely closely with mainstream teachers, helping to plan and co-teach appropriate English instruction within the mainstream classroom. The students, armed with their new English skills, are rapidly able to participate alongside their classmates, in the broader study of communication skills, reading, writing, and learning in English that are developing in all children at this age. It is an absolute delight to observe many young children who enter the SEALS programme with no English ability playing with their friends and actively participating in school in English after just a few months. Children who graduate the Reception EAL programme have the opportunity to develop their English skills in school alongside native-speaking children, as their education progresses.



Key Stage One

As with Early Years children, students studying in KS1 are still in the process of developing their cognitive and language skills in general. This means that mastering basic English skills at this age will allow a child to continue to develop and progress in English study alongside and at a similar level to their classmates. SEALS students in Years 1 and 2 study functional and practical communicative English in small groups with dedicated and experienced KS1 EAL teachers, and a carefully planned and fully interactive curriculum. These teachers also work alongside students in the mainstream classroom, where, alongside mainstream teachers, they plan and co-teach to support the children in their understanding, use of, and learning in English. It is in this stage that all children are developing their skills and understanding in phonics, reading and writing, as well as general cognitive and communicative development. Children who receive SEALS support from teachers and parents at this time have a fantastic opportunity to go on to become fully fluent and developed English users, with a true love of learning, as they develop and progress through their schooling in English.



Key Stage Two

Most children in Upper Primary (Y3-Y6) will already have learnt (to some extent) to speak, read and write in their native language(s). Learning English as an additional language at this stage therefore presents different challenges than with the youngest children. The SEALS programme at KS2 is designed to help students develop and practice the four key skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, alongside introducing and using key vocabulary and grammar. These are taught by specialist EAL teachers in small groups. Students at this stage may show a wide range of English abilities, from absolute beginner through to students who can use English quite fluently but may need help in improving their vocabulary or writing to an age- appropriate level. Therefore, Progress in EAL targets have been developed for each age group to ensure that all students are working towards reaching English skills levels that they need to succeed in their broader education. Individual needs and progress are carefully monitored, and EAL teachers co-teach alongside mainstream teachers with carefully targeted instruction and help for individuals and small groups as required. SEALS programme students will also receive some extra homework (up to one hour a week) to help them practise the language they have been learning at school.

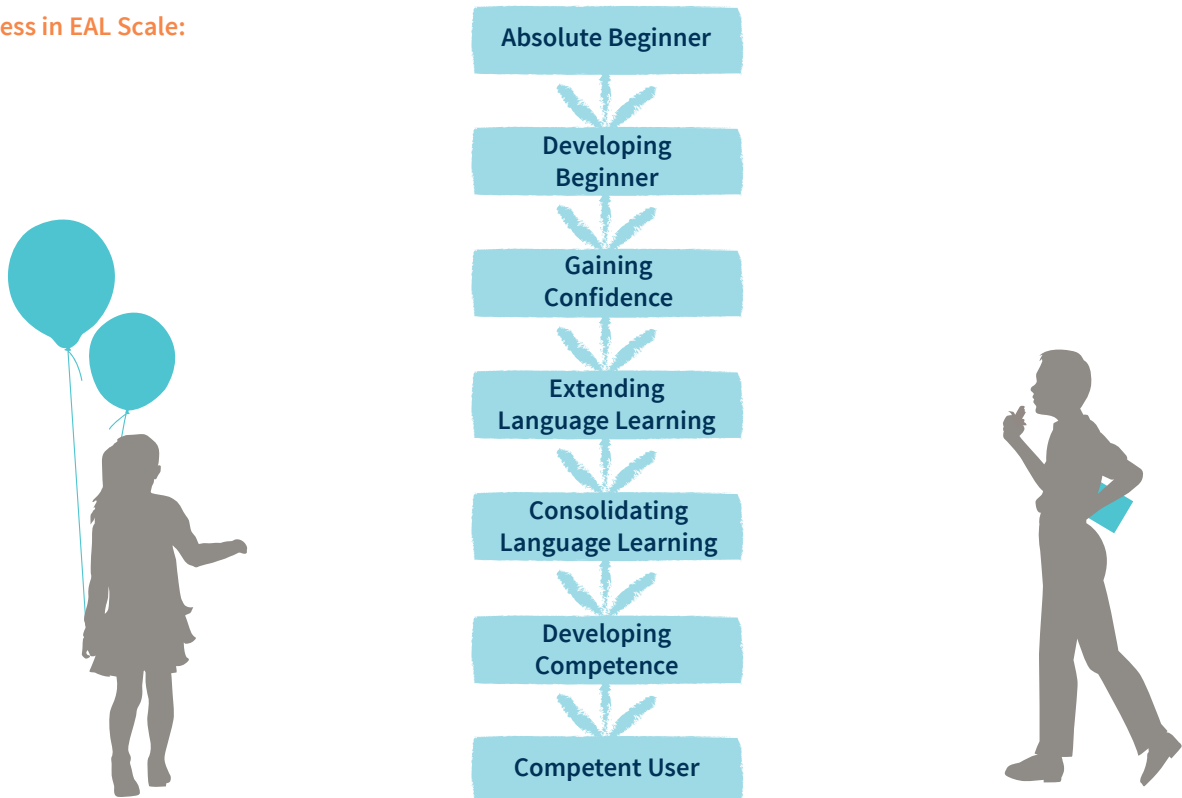
For students who join this phase with no previous English experience, the school has an Accelerated English Programme to give students the functional English needed to survive a school day. This programme runs for an hour every day for the first 10 weeks.



How is EAL progress measured?

All EAL students at NAISGZ, on and off the SEALS programme are assessed using the Progress in EAL Scale. This is a seven-point scale which teachers use to track language acquisition progress and set appropriate targets for learning. All children on the SEALS programme will have a detailed language tracker which is shared with parents in reports and at Parent Teacher Consultation days.

Progress in EAL Scale:



EAL and mainstream teachers work together to assess whether a child is at their age-appropriate level of English using this scale, based on teacher observations of classwork, homework and assessments. Once they are at the Consolidating Language Learning stage, then they can graduate from the EAL programme.

EAL Outside the Classroom

Students at NAISGZ certainly receive a great deal of English input, instruction, practice and use both within their EAL classes and within mainstream classes. However, learning English (or any language) proficiently requires both time and effort, and students will also need to use as much English as possible outside the classroom.

Reading in English is fundamental to improvement. For younger children, being read to, or reading with, an adult every day will help develop both language skills and a love of reading. As children get older, they should read for themselves for enjoyment: any source material (books, newspapers, websites, etc.) is fine if the child is interested in it (as long as it is in English). Guided readers, graded at different levels of English are also available from the EAL department and the school libraries. For EYFS and KS1, Bug Club also provides online reading resources.

However, reading alone is not enough. In order to use English effectively children should also produce language through speaking and writing. It is this that fully embeds the language in the brain and allows students not only to recognize but also to access and use it. There are numerous websites that can be accessed, often for free, (e.g. the British Council Learn English websites <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/> to help with independent English study, as well as Bug Club (<https://www.activelearnprimary.co.uk/login>) which allows students to listen to books being read in English and to read independently and answer questions to check comprehension.

There are a number of free apps that students can use on the iPad at home to practice different skills. Your child's EAL teacher will be happy to provide you with an up to date list of apps that are appropriate for your child's age and suitable for their academic needs.



How to succeed with SEALS

Your support is fundamental to your child's academic success and language development will increase their ability to learn a new language. Helping with a child's homework, reading to them and listening to them read, are simple ways to get involved in your child's language learning journey. If English is not your first language, there are other ways to help. Language learning is most effective when children are exposed to as much language as possible in both academic and social contexts. When students listen to English being spoken and practice speaking English to others, they will begin to understand and communicate more effectively. Therefore, exposing your child to as much English as possible outside of school will dramatically help their ability to acquire language and communicate effectively. Helping your child access suitable apps, websites, watch English TV shows or movies, play or interact with other students who are confident speakers of English or visit countries where English is the language are several ways to succeed in EAL outside of the classroom. Success in SEALS depends on a number of factors; however, support, persistence, hard work and practice will go a long way.

In addition to this, students need to develop as independent language learners. They need to be active in their use of English, always seeking out new ways to increase their understanding, practice and improve their current knowledge, and keep their motivation high. EAL teachers are more than happy to discuss with parents and students methods to practice and improve English, but in the end it is the student who has to grasp the challenge and make the efforts to achieve this important goal.