



Frequently Asked Questions About the Bilingual Programme

The Bilingual Programme at Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS) offers our Lower School learners the opportunity to grow academically and socially in an intercultural community and language rich environment. Optimizing a child's natural curiosity, our dual-language programme helps guide children's language and cultural fluency in a nurturing but rigorous learning environment.

Starting in Early Years, your child will experience the best of Eastern and Western traditions as they develop their love of languages and cultures. Currently implemented in the Early Years and Prep for 2023-2024, the Bilingual Programme at CDNIS provides a cross-cultural learning experience that teaches students to care deeply for the people and world around them.

If you have any further questions after reviewing these Frequently Asked Questions, please contact the Admissions Department @ admissions@cdnis.edu.hk.

How is the Bilingual Programme structured?

CDNIS offers 15 classes across Early Years to Prep. In the Bilingual Track, 50% of class time is in English and 50% of class time is in Mandarin Chinese. Students are immersed in each target language for the entire school day by English and Chinese teachers rotating alternate days. All classes have bilingual Educational Assistants (EA) to assist teachers and students in teaching and learning, as well as pastoral care. Early Years 1 (EY1) and full day Early Years 2 (EY2) classes also have extra EAs allocated for additional support.

In the International Track, students learn in English with Chinese language classes provided regularly. In the Early Years, students receive Chinese lessons every day. In Prep, 7 Chinese language classes are provided each 6-day cycle in order to ensure consistent Chinese language instruction and exposure.

Early Years and Prep Bilingual Programme (2023/ 2024 School Year)			
Grade levels	Number of classes in the grade	Seats in each class	Total number of seats in the grade
EY1	2 AM classes <i>2 Bilingual Tracks</i>	20 students per class	80 students
	2 PM classes <i>1 Bilingual Track 1 International Track</i>	20 students per class	
EY2	2 AM classes <i>1 Bilingual Track 1 International Track</i>	20 students per class	120 students
	2 PM classes <i>2 Bilingual Tracks</i>	20 students per class	
	2 Full Day classes <i>Bilingual Tracks</i>	20 students per class	
Prep	5 Full Day classes <i>4 Bilingual Tracks 1 International Track</i>	24 students per class	120 students

**Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, Bilingual Programme classes will all be in the Bilingual Tracks.*





Is the Bilingual Programme only for students who have prior exposure to the Chinese language?

No, all students are welcome to join the Bilingual Programme from EY1 to Prep. The programme is for all families who wish their child to become bilingual.

Does having the Bilingual Programme mean the Lower School is no longer PYP?

No, the IB PYP is our inquiry-based, transdisciplinary curricular framework from EY1-Grade 5, and that will not change. Students will learn within a bilingual PYP environment to enhance their understanding of big ideas through both English and Mandarin Chinese.

Will the Bilingual Programme extend beyond the Lower School?

The Bilingual Programme will roll out one new grade level per year until including Grade 5 in the 2028-2029 school year. At that time the entire Lower School will be implementing the Bilingual Programme. The MYP and DP will remain the same from Grades 6-12 with no plans to expand beyond the Lower School.

What is the learning approach for the Early Years to Prep Bilingual Programme?

Our Early Years to Prep Bilingual Programme is designed to provide our youngest students with a holistic and balanced introduction to school life, setting a proper foundation in the shift from Early Years to Primary. Our IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) offers a varied and "hands on" approach to all aspects of learning, providing a strong base for future academic and social success. Students participate in learning engagements and experiences that promote continuous growth in their social emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development. Fostering positive character attributes through the IB Learner Profile, and nurturing age-appropriate communication, self-management, thinking, social, and research skills equips them well for a challenging, multicultural and multilingual world.

Is EY1 too young to start a Bilingual Programme?

Learning to go to school and understanding school routines and procedures in a new environment with new people is a major transition for children, but it can happen in any language. The sooner a child is exposed to other languages, the more comfortable they will be, and will ultimately attain higher levels of proficiency in both languages with an early start and longer experience within a bilingual learning environment. Research supports students being in a Bilingual Programme for 6 or more years for optimal results.

What is the EY2 full day Bilingual Programme schedule like?

EY2 is similar to EY1 in that alternating days in the target language provide 50% Chinese, 50% English immersion. The extended day also allows for students to engage in an even wider range of learning engagements in the target language. Students are able to dive deeper into inquiries and engage in specialist classes in both languages, such as art, PE, and music. They also have designated times for lunch, outdoor play, and rest.

If my child is a Cantonese speaker, will this be a problem in an English/Mandarin bilingual classroom?

As mentioned above, we welcome students from any language background, so Cantonese speaking backgrounds are no different. We believe that continuing to support your child's first language is equally important.





Will my child be able to speak English in class until they are able to communicate in Chinese?

Yes, students will be able to speak and respond to their teachers in English during Chinese days until they have enough vocabulary to transition and respond in Chinese. The term used is 'translanguaging' which plays a role in our learning environment. However, Chinese teachers will be speaking fully in Mandarin Chinese and will use gestures, visuals, and other tools to convey messages. Only through sufficient input of the target language will your child begin to produce the language themselves.

Which Chinese characters (traditional or simplified) are used?

Following the IB stance of respecting each school's local language context, the Early Years to Prep Bilingual Programme aligns with the whole school Chinese Studies curriculum within which traditional Chinese characters are used. In early language learning there is an increased emphasis on listening and speaking, and a lesser emphasis on reading and writing. Students are introduced to traditional characters at this stage, and engage in age-appropriate pre-reading and pre-writing to familiarize with basic Chinese characters. Pinyin is introduced in Grade 2 in order for students to first lay a foundation of English letters, phonological awareness and phonics without confusion.

How will I be able to support my child at home if I don't speak Chinese (Cantonese or Mandarin)? Do I need to learn Mandarin and/or hire a tutor to support my child?

The most important thing you can do at home is read to your child in your mother tongue. Reading in any language supports the acquisition of reading skills such as fluency, vocabulary building and comprehension. There is no need for parents to switch to or learn Mandarin at home. That said, exposing your child via access to Mandarin books and visual/audio stories frequently is highly recommended, which can be a means of support you provide. Other ways to support are to be involved in their learning by checking communications from their teachers, accessing provided materials shared via the Parent Portal and Toddle, providing opportunities for learning outside the classroom (e.g. Mandarin playgroups, labeling items with words in your home, clicking and listening to resources together, etc.) and expressing encouragement and excitement in their language learning. Hiring a tutor is a family choice that some families find as another option, but is not mandatory.

What curriculum is used for Chinese?

Similarly to the English language curriculum, Chinese learning will follow the PYP curriculum framework. In regards to curriculum content choices for Chinese literacy skills development, relevant texts and materials have been selected from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore to build knowledge of Chinese characters and literacy devices across a range of materials.



How is math taught in the Bilingual Programme?

The Bilingual Programme math curriculum follows the current CDNIS framework for mathematics which utilizes the Early Years Learning Outcomes for EY students, and the Ontario curriculum and selected standards for Prep students. Teachers use IB PYP pedagogical approaches to teach mathematics. In the International Track, math is taught in English. In the Bilingual Track, math is taught in both English and Chinese depending on the immersion day in the cycle. Teachers in the Bilingual Track do not repeat math lessons done in the other language, instead they work closely in collaboration with each other for continuous math learning and assessment while building conceptual understanding and key vocabulary needed for math in both languages.

Will the English curriculum be changed?

The English curriculum within the Lower School will remain based on the Early Years Learning Outcomes, and Ontario Language standards, and teachers will continue to use the same pedagogical approaches and resources for the teaching of phonological awareness and phonics, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Assessments and benchmarking for students will remain in place in order to appropriately identify and provide support to our diverse learners.

Do students also take specialist classes in both languages?

Yes, students in our full day Bilingual track enjoy the benefit of specialist classes taught through both English and Mandarin. In the Early Years, students are offered library, PE, music, dance/movement, art, and Discovery Time. In Prep, students are offered library, PE, performing arts, and visual arts. All classes are taught across both languages to provide a 50/50 balance between programme languages. Specialist classes are taught by qualified teachers.

Will Mandarin be streamed for language ability in the Bilingual Programme?

No, unlike offering Mandarin classes as a world language in a monolingual programme, the Bilingual Programme provides 50% of learning time in Mandarin. This includes learning across all subjects. Students are placed in mixed ability classes and teachers provide differentiation in tasks and learning goals for students of varying levels. Chinese materials are clearly differentiated and cater to a wide range of language levels from beginners to proficient speakers in the Early Years to Prep curriculum. Students needing additional support are identified and given it through CAL (Chinese as an Additional Language) specialists joining classes as push in support and working with small groups as needed.

What is CAL, and how is that support implemented?

CAL (Chinese as an Additional Language) is available to all students within the Bilingual Track. A group of qualified language specialists works closely with homeroom teachers to identify and provide support to students. This happens both in the classroom and for short pull out sessions to work on targeted language skills to build students' foundational Mandarin and support learning in the classroom. In the Early Years, CAL support is provided for EY2 students scheduled on Chinese days. In Prep, CAL support is available for 7 periods per 6-day cycle.





How are you ensuring your Chinese teachers are qualified for the Bilingual Programme?

All teachers within the Bilingual Programme are qualified teachers with experience in the PYP and many with experience in other bilingual schools. All Chinese teachers and EA's also hold an EDB approved Putonghua proficiency certificate. Early Years teachers are fully qualified Early Childhood teachers, some with Early Years Principal certifications, and some also serving as PYP workshop leaders and school evaluators. EY Chinese EAs also have Early Years teaching qualifications. Prep Chinese teachers are fully qualified primary school teachers, PYP trained, and many are PYP workshop leaders with extensive bilingual teaching experience; averaging 10+ years. Lower School Chinese homeroom EAs also hold primary teaching qualifications and many are university trained in PYP pedagogy. Additionally, all teachers receive professional training in literacy and numeracy teaching.

How do teachers collaborate on teaching and communicate about students?

Bilingual Programme teachers have purpose-built schedules to facilitate collaboration and communication on multiple levels in order to plan for teaching, as well as discuss student progress and next steps across their learning. These levels include full team meetings, language team meetings, co-teacher meetings, and individual planning time. Discussions amongst teachers are ongoing and collaborative with a high focus on student support and success.

How will you benchmark Chinese proficiency for students?

Chinese proficiency benchmarking options for the Bilingual Programme include referring to the Hong Kong Territory-Wide System Assessment (TSA) for Mandarin Chinese, Junior Level Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK), and online Chinese proficiency assessments available via the US and UK (ranging from Novice to Superior levels). Benchmarking using external assessments will not take place in the Early Years or Prep as students are still too young for such assessments. Similarly to MAP Growth Testing in English, these test options will be considered for implementation in later Lower School grades.

How will my child be supported in the move between the International and Bilingual tracks?

After 2023-24, there will no longer be an International Track; therefore, there are many supports built into the Bilingual Programme to support the transition from the International to Bilingual Track. Intensive CAL support structures and homeroom support by designated teachers/EAs have been put in place for students. CDNIS offers optional language support sessions after school as well as optional term break programmes to support bridging language gaps. Our ASA (After School Activities) Programme also has bilingual options. Parents and students have access to the Bilingual Programme Resource Center to access key resources, and Bilingual Track resources are available to all parents, including those of International Track students. In 2023-24 there has been an increase of Chinese lesson frequency to daily lessons for the Early Years International Track to support students' transition. Teachers also supply differentiated small group instruction to all learners to meet them where they are and support language development. Lastly, weekly language resources are shared by teachers in their Weekly Messages.






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If you are aiming to have your child in the Bilingual Programme beyond Early Years, maximising their exposure to Chinese beyond the classroom setting is vital. Ways you can do this include using tech tools available for daily access to games, stories, shows and movies in Chinese. You could also join playgroups that use Chinese as the language of play to immerse them further. To be able to listen and speak Chinese comfortably is the first step in a child's bilingual journey; reading and writing will follow later. Doing activities together with them demonstrates encouragement and support, and the value of it for your family. Most importantly, it provides many shared language experiences between you and your child.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Admissions Department @ admissions@cdnis.edu.hk.

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