



## Guide to languages case study

### St. George's School (Colegio San Jorge de Inglaterra), Colombia

St. George's School (SGS) is an international, bilingual (Spanish–English) school in Bogotá. Students are primarily Colombian citizens and Spanish is the country's official language. The school community also includes people from other countries who speak other first, second and foreign languages including Portuguese, Arabic and Chinese.

#### School language policy

The language policy takes into account the whole school community including students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and alumni. It serves as:

- a foundation for the school's identity as an international, bilingual school.
- a guide to its curriculum and the teaching–learning methodology.
- a support for communications decisions and practice, both day to day and long term.

The language policy creates clear definitions for the three languages the school teaches and uses: Spanish is defined as the first language and, in the majority of cases, is the home language; English is defined as the second language for academic, cultural and personal purposes; and French is defined as a foreign language.

Writing the policy encouraged the school to look at language from many perspectives and throughout the whole school. It led the school to:

- complete an analysis of its library collection and access to languages in the online library database
- identify reading promotion activities in all three languages
- identify physical and digital resources (for students and teachers) and in which languages
- review its own institutional communications (e.g. print, website, parent communication, signage) and increase the amount of bilingual messaging
- identify special activities that take place in one or more languages e.g. events with other schools
- highlight student travel or exchange opportunities and the corresponding languages

#### Curriculum design

Apart from art and music (Grades 6 to 12), all students in the same grade level take the same classes and have the same learning objectives and expectations.



SGS meets the requirements and standards of the Colombian Ministry of Education for each grade level. Before secondary school graduation, all students in Colombia are required to sit standardised state exams, which are conducted in Spanish (except for one English as a second language test).

The school follows Cambridge International syllabuses and curriculum frameworks in nearly all academic departments.

The curriculum is reviewed and adjusted by teachers, department heads and academic coordinators annually to guarantee continuity and progression of learning objectives as well as teaching–learning methodologies.

Students take both Spanish and English classes in every year of the curriculum. French classes start in Grade 4 (ages 9 to 10). About 50 per cent of the overall curricular programme is Spanish language study or other coursework in Spanish, 46 per cent is English language study or other coursework in English, and 4 per cent is French language study (Grades 4 to 12).

Although the profile and expectations for instruction, production and assessment in each language are different, the communication competencies are transversal. These

competencies include listening, speaking, reading, writing, researching, application of grammar knowledge, demonstrated fluency in speaking and writing activities, and exploration and understanding of text types.

For primary and lower secondary, the school has transitioned to a first language English curriculum. All students currently take Cambridge Primary Checkpoint English and Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint English. Students then take Cambridge IGCSE™ English as a Second Language and Cambridge Assessment English IELTS.

SGS continues to use English as a second language speaking interview materials from Cambridge English for all grade levels to provide students with additional challenging speaking experiences.

The school now uses the Cambridge IGCSE First Language Spanish syllabus, which requires students to read and analyse texts from different Spanish-speaking countries. This led to meaningful discussions about definitions, and the school now defines both English and Spanish as international, academic languages. This acknowledges the role that both languages play in students' current and future lives, and in the world.

### Identifying and providing language support to learners

Teachers are aware of students' progress or difficulties with language through formative and summative assessment, regular meetings in language departments, and regular meetings in each grade level.

For primary and secondary learners who require support, the school has a school-wide, after-school space known as 'reinforcements'. In pre-school levels, teachers create a brief 're-teaching' space during school hours to review specific areas or skills with individual learners.

The school invests in physical and digital resources that support language competencies and vocabulary development. It also has co-curricular and extracurricular activities that are

in one, two or three languages. Activities include music, art, drama, improvisation, filmmaking, poetry, story writing, storytelling, Model UN and oratory. Optional international exchange travel provides students with opportunities to practise second and foreign languages in authentic situations.

SGS also offers annual parent workshops on the theory and practice of being part of a bilingual family and in a bilingual educational community.

### First language development

The school's focus is on communication competencies and what skills languages have in common. It maintains a balance of teaching hours in both first and second languages, and the Spanish and English departments meet to review and align learning objectives in the two programmes. Certain projects are developed in both languages. For example, the two language departments work together with school library staff on a standardised citation and referencing policy for the whole school. There is also an annual cultural day dedicated to languages.

### Teacher development

SGS has 100-plus teaching staff with approximately half teaching in Spanish and half in English. The French department has four teachers. More than half of the teaching staff are Spanish–English bilingual.

The school subsidises training programmes and ongoing education for teachers, promoting that they study in the second language where appropriate.

For implementing the Cambridge curriculum, the school has four key principles. These are: include everyone, one step at a time, focus on assessment and think beyond exams.

The first principle involves making all resources available to the whole school community, regardless of what grade level or academic subject the teacher is dedicated to. Resources are also available to non-teaching staff. Useful Cambridge resources include education briefs, *Getting Started With...* and the *Great Teaching Toolkit*. Visit: [www.sgs.edu.co](http://www.sgs.edu.co)

**Learn more!** For more information please visit [www.cambridgeinternational.org](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org) or contact Customer Services on +44 (0)1223 553554 or email [info@cambridgeinternational.org](mailto:info@cambridgeinternational.org)

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