

## **Statement by EIS Staff: PRINCIPLES OF PUPIL ADMISSION FOR ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

There are several challenges in implementing the proposed changes for pupil admissions, which we would like to lay out for your consideration. We cannot be in favour of the proposal, unless you can present viable solutions to these problems.

### **Equal entrance process and criteria for both Kivimies School and Espoo International School**

We advocate for identical entrance criteria for both schools. Navigating the entrance process is already complex for families new to Finland, and having different criteria for each school only compounds their stress. A uniform set of entrance criteria streamlines the process and alleviates unnecessary burden for these families.

### **Support for English language learning at EIS**

Espoo International School caters for students who study the Finnish national curriculum at a fluent level in English. The curriculum does not provide English as a second language tuition to students who do not use English at a mother tongue level. Currently, the lessons allocated for mother tongue learning have been split between Finnish and English so that all the grade levels, have only 2, 3 or 4 English lessons per week.

Mastering English proficiency in just one year of study poses a formidable challenge and may fall short in adequately preparing a learner for a comprehensive basic education program conducted entirely in English. Simply participating in an English-medium program for a year does not guarantee the ability to comprehend class instructions fully, leading to a decreased likelihood of active engagement in the learning process. The learner-centric approach, endorsed by educators universally, flourishes when students possess a strong command of the instructional language. This approach empowers learners to propose ideas, pose questions, respond to queries, and actively contribute to the generation and dissemination of new knowledge with enthusiasm. It instills confidence in learners and validates their cultural identity, subsequently fostering a positive perspective on the school's relevance to their lives.

If EIS were to accept students who have only one year's studies in English before entering the school, they would not have access to any English as a second language support for their learning with the current resources. Alternatively, emphasis will change to learning English rather than actually learning IN English, putting the mother tongue speakers at a disadvantage.

*Challenge 1. Espoo International School will need to update its curriculum to begin providing tuition for English as a second language.*

*Challenge 2. The school will also need to recruit qualified teaching staff for teaching English as a second language by August 2024. With the increase of different language proficiency levels in classes, it is likely that additional learning support resources such as classroom assistants will also be required. Recruitment needs to start immediately in April 2023, without knowing how many of these students would be starting in August.*

You can find numerous articles online supporting this point-of-view.

At EIS, the staff unanimously support the notion that the current system, involving an English-language entrance test for all students, stands as the most transparent and equitable criteria for school entrance. This approach ensures that every applicant has an equal opportunity to showcase their skills, fostering fairness in the admission process.

In the case of reserved seats for report card-based admission, students must have completed a minimum of two years, preferably three, in a comprehensive English-medium program.

### **Admissions workload and lack of resources**

Espoo International School has English-language entrance exams and a relatively high student turnover, which produces additional work to administration and teachers compared to Espoo's Finnish-language schools. International families come and go throughout the year. When a new student joins our school, we must find out about the study background of the child as well as their choices when it comes to Religion or Ethics, A2 languages or other elective subjects. The staff also needs to evaluate the new students for any potential need of support, which takes time. When students come and go, there are sometimes challenges in the formation of new groups, and it is difficult for the staff to keep an eye out for all new students.

The entrance exams take up multiple days of work from numerous teaching and administrative staff members, who must prepare, administer, and assess the exams. There is also a huge workload in ensuring transparency and appeal processes. With the proposed changes, none of these commitments will go away, but more workloads will ensue to cater for the new group of school report-based applicants. The workload will fluctuate unpredictably throughout the academic year, adding additional strain to the daily running of the school.

*Challenge 3. New admissions policies will need to be produced and communicated to the applicant families as soon as possible. In order to ensure that the new report-card based applicants receive appropriate pedagogical assessment when they arrive, we would need teachers with reduced contractual lesson hours to work on these throughout the next academic year.*

If new students are admitted to Espoo International School based on their former school's report card only, there needs to be a rigorous verification procedure to ensure that forged documents are detected.

### **Introducing temporary study places**

We understand that one proposed option for supporting new English-language learners is to provide temporary study places where students can be admitted for a maximum of three years and then later, apply to the mainstream classes. The Espoo International School staff do not support the proposed introduction of temporary study places. If however, the Committee for Growth and Learning decides to approve the proposal, we strongly feel that the number of students occupying the temporary study places should be limited to 5 students per year group.

If the concept of temporary study places is approved and introduced, we recommend that these students be exempted from studying Swedish and they could instead, focus their efforts on Finnish language studies. What happens to those temporary students whose three years are up in the spring of 8th grade and they end up staying in Finland, if they need to sit the grade 9 entrance exam in order to finalize their basic education in English? What occurs if other applicants achieve higher scores on the entrance exam, leaving the temporary students without placement? They will have limited Finnish skills and their only remaining option would be preparatory education.