

Vilnius International School

Learning Support Policy

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly common to have students with a range of learning difficulties and special needs in all schools, including international schools. The level of support required providing a student with learning difficulties access to the curriculum depends on the severity of the challenge. In many instances, students with challenges can be integrated into the regular classroom with minor accommodations and modifications. This process is referred to as inclusion.

Vilnius International School supports a policy of inclusion and accepts students with mild learning needs under the condition that he or she is able to meet the academic requirements of the education programme with the supports outlined in this policy. At present, VIS does not have a learning support department and cannot provide services for students that require more specialized interventions and accommodations.

Vilnius International School, though philosophically devoted to providing an inclusive environment that supports learners with cognitive, social, emotional, physical and other special needs, is restricted from doing so by financial and human resource limitations, i.e. local access to specialists. Our commitment to providing services to a greater range of learners will be revisited during the review of the VIS strategic plan in 2014.

Philosophy

The MYP programme is driven by three fundamental concepts that are reflected in the VIS mission statement. These concepts are: holistic learning, intercultural awareness and communication. Each of these concepts is equally relevant to the PYP programme and impacts the manner in which our school community accepts and respects the range and variety of learners among us.

In the handbook *MYP: From Principles to Practice*, a connection between the concept of holistic learning and its implications for learning support can be inferred from the following statement:

“Through acknowledging and attempting to meet the diverse needs of the student—physical, social, intellectual, aesthetic and cultural—schools ensure that learning in the MYP is significant, provocative, relevant, engaging and challenging” (pg. 10).

In order to ensure that the learning opportunities are available to meet a variety of needs within a diverse population, differentiated tasks and assessments are required, as well as accommodations, modifications, adaptations, alternative resources and

specialist teachers to ensure all students have access to a curriculum that is “relevant, engaging and challenging” and *developmentally appropriate* to the individual student.

The MYP handbook also explains that an IB school must embrace the concept of intercultural awareness. It states that “whatever the school, opportunities will exist to develop students’ attitudes, knowledge, concepts and skills as they learn about their own and others’ social, national and ethnic cultures. In this way, intercultural awareness can build understanding and respect” (pg. 10). Most anyone who has worked or lived with a person with special needs would agree that such individuals often live within a culture of their own. VIS seeks to promote greater acceptance of this type of diversity and demonstrates their commitment to do so by actively employing individuals with hearing and intellectual challenges.

Finally, if we are sincerely committed to the MYP concept of communication, we mean that that every student in our care meets the IB learner profile description of a communicator, i.e. “someone who can understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication” (pg. 11). In order to realize this goal, students may not only require language support from EAL and LAL teachers, but support in other modes of expressive language and receptive language, including social skill development.

Vilnius International School strives to realize these fundamental concepts throughout our continuum of programmes. The on-going development of learning support resources and the documentation of that process by means of this policy is evidence of our commitment to making it visible stakeholders.

Aims

The VIS Learning Support Policy aims are:

- To provide parents clear expectations about what VIS can and cannot do to support students with learning difficulties
- To ensure teaching practices and learning opportunities provide students with learning difficulties access to the curriculum content to the extent possible
- To provide students with opportunities to progress throughout the school programme and report that progress to relevant stakeholders
- To build awareness and foster respect throughout the school and surrounding community of the prevalence of learning difficulties and special needs no matter what their origin
- To create an atmosphere of trust and open, respectful communication when discussing individuals with learning difficulties; including those with social, emotional, physical and other challenges

Rationale for Aims

- Students make more progress when teachers supporting them work collaboratively as an effective team
- Assessment tools provide insight to teachers and students for setting goals and designing appropriate activities in line with their needs and abilities
- Curriculum is differentiated to address students' learning needs and fill gaps
- All stakeholders (teachers, parents and the student) have a shared understanding of learning needs
- Relevant information on student progress is communicated in a timely manner
- Teaching and learning is multi-sensory and practical and can take account of individual profiles and learning styles to the extent possible

Learning Support Committee

The establishment of a Learning Support Committee is required in all Lithuanian schools. The role of the Learning Support Committee is to determine whether or not children with a range of learning difficulties will benefit for the VIS education program and whether a child should be referred for education or other testing by the Children's Educational and Psychological Service. Unfortunately, this public service is only prepared to work with students whose mother tongue is either Lithuanian or Russian.

VIS makes every effort to have at least one teacher with a special needs background and at least one teacher with a social work background among the teaching staff. Both specialists together with one middle school classroom teacher, one primary teacher and the Director constitute the five-member Learning Support Committee. The Committee also makes recommendations for differentiation strategies or accommodations to support the children with learning difficulties and special needs in our care. The Committee may determine that a child with mild special needs can manage the academic program with the support of a classroom assistant or "shadow". In such circumstances, parents may be required to subsidize all or part of the cost of the personnel serving as the child's assistant or shadow, in addition to paying the annual tuition fee.

VIS is able to support students by:

- Providing accommodations such as frequent breaks or down time

- Utilizing instructional strategies and materials that support different learning styles
- Allowing extended time periods for assessments
- Assisting student in goal setting and planning
- Modifying summative assessments
- Modifying the student's schedule to reduce stress and promote success
- Providing small group instructional support after school
- Allowing use of technology to support learning needs in class
- Facilitating collaboration with other teachers
- Communicating regularly with parents, teachers and students to build awareness
- Assisting parents with arrangements for testing or other support outside of school
- Providing assessments of progress as well as achievement
- Making recommendations for formal assessment

VIS is unable to:

- Provide a self-contained learning resources education program
- Provide an alternative curriculum
- Guarantee enrolment through continuous grade level
- Provide support services such as speech or physical therapy
- Accept students with limited intellectual capacity
- Provide educational or neuropsychological evaluations

Expectations of Stakeholders

VIS regards open communication with parents essential to successful integration and support of students with learning difficulties and special needs in the mainstream classroom. When considering whether or not VIS is the optimal learning environment for a child with learning difficulties or special needs we request the following:

- An evaluation of the student by a psychologist, neurologist, or other related specialist valid within two years

- Frequent and open communication with the parent/s
- On-going communication from specialists (if any) working with the student outside of school
- Parental support for educational testing, consultations or other services thought by the school or outside specialists to benefit the student's opportunity for success
- An understanding that in the event that the child's needs cannot be met by differentiated instruction and other interventions provided by a mainstream classroom teacher, it may be necessary to seek placement in another school
- An understanding that students with special needs require a long-term commitment on the part of the parents and the school and that regular informal evaluation by the Learning Support Committee is necessary to ensure appropriate process in meeting the educational objectives has been achieved;
- Any formal evaluation, therapy, or tutoring recommended by the school and conducted by outside specialists must be financed by the parents.

Procedure for Referring a Student for Internal Evaluation

In the event a teacher or teachers observe a behavior that appears to interfere with a student's learning or impedes the learning of others, he or she should refer to the following procedure:

1. Teacher seeks verbal feedback from other members of grade level team
2. Teacher reports concerns to director via e-mail
3. Teacher records observations of student behavior in the form of anecdotal records
4. Teacher contacts parents for informational interview and copies director
5. Director may decide to join the meeting depending on level of concern or recommend that PYP or MYP coordinator or a member of the Learning Support Committee is present
6. Teacher prepares agenda with key talking points in advance of parent meeting
7. Teacher adds parent comments or concerns and both parties sign minutes (students may be present at the meeting if both parties agree that it is appropriate and helpful)
8. Teacher shares one copy of minutes with parents and keeps other copy in student file
9. Teachers with ongoing concerns about academic process, behavior or other issues may request an observation from the director or other teachers

10. Teacher and Learning Support Committee may decide to initiate an intervention such as a behavior plan or learning plan if concerns persist
11. Teachers may use results of MAP testing to write learning goals for learning plan (student should be involved in the goal setting process)
12. Teacher should request follow-up meeting with parents and director to review goals and discuss expected progress
13. Teacher together with Learning Support Committee should determine a timeline for interventions and copy director
14. Teacher and director, together with Learning Support Committee should communicate monthly to evaluate progress and determine whether referral is necessary
15. Director will be present at any meeting with parents that involves a referral for outside evaluation

Procedure for Referring a Student for Educational Testing

1. Teacher fills in *Teacher Evaluation Form* (appendix 2).
2. Child's Educational Psychological Service evaluation requires a parent's/guardian's consent form in order for their child to be evaluated. There are 2 parental/guardian consent forms (appendices 4 and 6) that have to be obtained prior to evaluation.
3. Once the two forms have been completed and signed by a parent/guardian the Learning Support Committee prepares an evaluation of the child.
4. The Learning Support Committee completes *Special Needs Assessment Form* (appendix 5).
5. Once appendices 4, 5 and 6 have been completed and signed, the forms are given to a parent/ guardian who contacts the Child's Educational Psychological Service and arranges an appointment for further evaluation.

Learning Support Strategy

The VIS staff continues to do the best we can within the limits of our resources to serve and integrate students with learning difficulties and other special needs in the regular classrooms. We sincerely hope that as our school develops we can provide more services to the members of our school community. In the short-term we hope to compile a resource handbook for parents identifying specialists available in the local community as well as a list of the literature available to parents at VIS. Please do not

hesitate to schedule an appointment with the director if you suspect that your child is experiencing learning, social or emotional difficulties.

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