

Foreign students at the Derksen School

German as a foreign language

Our school is a coeducational grammar school (Gymnasium), educating young people to "Abitur" level (similar to Advanced Levels in the United Kingdom).

With a world-embracing outlook we continuously strive to excel in standards and adapt ourselves to the needs of a global society. Our academic strengths are grounded in social responsibility and a commitment to cultural and intellectual diversity. The Derksen School is open to students of different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. Through the years we have been a home to foreign students for example from Bulgaria, China, the Czech Republic, Greece, Korea, Israel, Russia, Spain, Turkey and the Ukraine while cultivating exchange programs and cooperations with schools from nine countries.

At first the foreign students have the status of "guest pupils". Some guest pupils arrive at the school with no knowledge of German whatsoever, others may have a limited knowledge of the language. New foreign pupils are regularly instructed in German either individually or in very small groups by qualified teachers until such times as they are able to communicate sufficiently in German both orally and in written form as to be assessed in terms of the normal grading system. In the case of pupils who had no prior knowledge of German, this often takes two years. The pupils concerned must then (usually at the beginning of the new school year) pass entrance examinations in all key subjects which, within limits, must be passed in order to successfully proceed through the school system from one class to the next. If successful, they then surrender their guest pupil status and become "regular" students. If necessary or if so desired, German tuition can, however, still continue after the attainment of regular pupil status. (Later also, the possibility exists that the mother language of the pupils concerned can become one of their set subjects, replacing the obligatory second foreign language.)

During the initial stages of integration at our school it is possible for pupils to attend normal courses in their respective classes in those subjects in which the German language does not play a primary role – subjects like maths, sport, art and foreign languages. Later on, an increased degree of school and social integration and an extension of the courses attended is naturally gradually possible.

The first period in this entire process is, of course, by no means easy, involving a great deal of frustration and calling for a considerable degree of patience and hard effort. A lot depends on the overall attitude and the abilities of the individual student and on the understanding and support he receives from his family and environment. In addition, the influence of the school system from which the pupil comes also makes itself felt.

Within the framework of inclusive education, we have been providing a supportive and quality education to an increasingly diverse student population for more than 65 years. Our pupils are not only from diverse ethnic and linguistic but also from different ability backgrounds. Pupils with disabilities are taught together in the same class with their non-disabled peers. The smaller size of our classes is to the benefit of all our students.

In order to promote an environment of social learning we have enhanced our curriculum by an extra hour once a week for every class particularly emphasizing the acquisition of social competence. In addition, this process is accompanied by experts in the psychoeducational and psychosocial field. And to get to know each other better there are regular school trips to a small place in Austria where the school has a wonderful house situated near a lake and surrounded by mountains.