



LE ROSEY

# English-French Bilingualism and Other Languages at Le Rosey



## An Outline for Parents

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# 1. Introduction: the 21<sup>st</sup> century is multilingual – and multicultural

For much of the twentieth century it seemed possible that English could become the world language. It is now clear that we are moving into a multi-lingual world – a world where English looks set to remain the dominant *lingua franca* but where only one language is no longer enough.

Speaking and writing are only half the story. Behind different languages lie different ways of thinking and different cultures – and Google Translate and artificial intelligence are not enough to access these. Being international means opening your mind to other ways of seeing the world. And young people are uniquely privileged to learn these skills and aptitudes as a fundamental part of their education at Le Rosey.

“International Education” is therefore much more than English-speaking schooling in a British or American tradition.



**Institut Le Rosey, une école suisse à vocation internationale**, has a claim to being the most international boarding school in the world. Le Rosey’s uniquely international community includes:

- 450 students and 200 teachers and staff from all over the world living together
- well over 70 nations represented on campus
- a quota system that guarantees that no more than 10% come from a single country.

This creates an extraordinary and egalitarian mix of languages, cultures, ethical backgrounds and religions. And there can be no more appropriate home for an international community than Switzerland, a peaceful, polyglot country and a democracy for over 700 years with a long-standing commitment to international understanding and multilingualism.

## 2. The benefits of bilingualism

Studies show that bilingualism not only provides extra opportunities and abilities for the child but that it also boosts cognitive development and enriches and enhances educational programmes.

À quoi bon ?  
What's the point?

**Above all bilingualism opens an alternative world to students.**

By studying in French and English (which may be a “foreign”, additional, or home language) – with French-speaking teachers from France, Switzerland, Belgium and Canada, or with English-speaking teachers from the UK, Australia, Ireland, the USA and elsewhere – students are exposed to two world languages, at least two cultures, and two different ways of studying, learning and relating to people.

And, of course, for many *Roséens*, English and French may be their second and third languages.

This could be seen as a complication but, like the roots of the Kahikatea tree (or “White Pine”), languages are closely linked and fluency in one helps fluency in others.

This is one of the reasons why many *Roséens* often become gifted polyglots.




### 3. Le Rosey: a bilingual (or “dual language”) school – how does it work?

Most students arrive at Le Rosey with a very good level of either English or French, and effectively all are able to follow classes in at least one of Rosey’s two principal languages of instruction, French or English.

French and English are heard around the campus in all sorts of contexts and for all sorts of purposes, and learning is enhanced by this exposure, but there is more to language than social communication.

**Le Rosey’s bilingual system is quite simple but is tailored to individual needs and abilities:**

1. French or English becomes students’ “L1”, their main language of instruction for subjects such as History, Biology, Mathematics, etc.
2. All *Roséens* also have English and French language classes at an appropriate level: home language (or “mother-tongue”) classes for native-speakers and intermediate or beginner-level classes for others.
3. As soon as they are ready – and this is often immediately – students begin to study at least one of their subjects in their “other” language. So, with advice and guidance, a student whose L1 is English might study one subject or even more than half the curriculum in French.
4. And finally, *Roséens* will choose between the IB Diploma in English (or English and French) and the *baccalauréat français*.



Learning in the foreign language, sometimes called **CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)**, is a key component of Le Rosey’s bilingual system. As time passes, *Roséens* pass through different stages on their route to bilingualism, and acquire the ability to operate academically, professionally and socially in different cultures and languages.

### 4. Le Rosey: beyond English and French

**Roséens come from over 70 countries.** If we include English and French, they have over thirty home languages, and all are encouraged to study Literature in their own “Home Language” (also called “mother tongue” or “first language”).

People used to think that our brains could only “fit” a limited amount of information or languages. The general idea was that to learn English or French, the “home language” had to be forgotten or even forbidden. Not any more.

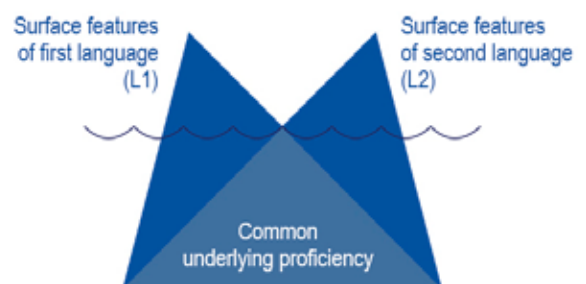
Contemporary research tells us that maintaining and developing the home language is good for the child’s cognitive development, for relationships with the “home families”, for overall cultural understanding and – of course – for their professional life in the future.

What is more, many will later follow the A Literature course in their home language as a key part of their IB diploma.

We could think of the intertwined roots of the White Pine, but the most common image today is the “Dual Iceberg”.

Languages – whatever their differences – have much in common, and developing our ability to think and reason in our “first language” helps the second.

#### The “Dual Iceberg” Model





## 7. And what is the parents' role?



Roséens' language background can be extremely complicated so it's probably best to sum up our advice in a series of answers to questions parents most commonly ask.

### What are the best ways of improving the language(s) that my child will need in life?

At Rosey, our job is always to push Roséens on to the next level – using words and structures that challenge them to go one step further forward. Asking young people to explain, describe, justify, analyse and criticize things is always useful. In short, intelligent conversation that encourages them to think and to reflect on their ideas. And ... reading, reading and reading. Even “Free Voluntary Reading” helps but doing the sort of reading teachers recommend works even better!

### What about their “mother tongue”: isn't it best to put that to one side since they may not need it and it will get in the way of learning English?

Absolutely not – as earlier parts of this booklet have explained. And it's probably not enough just to speak the home language with friends and family during the vacation.

### But my child is really fluent in Italian/German/Korean/Polish ... surely there's no need for classes. What more do they possibly need to learn?

Being able to speak fluently and with a native accent is important but this may hide a lack of vocabulary or difficulty in mastering more complicated registers of language. Chatting with friends is not the same as discussing ideas or business proposals. Learners need to be challenged.

### Isn't it a problem for children to learn English and French at the same time?

Not in our experience. Of course, we often need to ensure progress in one before moving on to the other and we have many levels of both English and French classes.

### Does Rosey teach all languages in the same way?

No. We encourage teachers to be true to their own cultures and pedagogical methods within Rosey guidelines.

### Isn't there a danger of “interference” – of one language getting confused with another?

Not really. Occasionally, we all transfer words or structures from one language to another where they don't really work, but it's rare and we soon learn to avoid this. In fact, contemporary research suggests that it's OK to mix languages as long as we know we're mixing them.

### How do I get my child to speak the Home Language with me when they insist on using English (they know I understand)?

Good question! The answer is probably habit and showing children that it enriches family life and allows us to understand each other fully – and, of course, organizing vacations to places where they have to use the home language. Some families also use different languages at different times – almost as a game, which keeps parents on their toes too! It's probably a bad idea, however, to insist on the home language unnaturally.

### Aren't games, movies, TV series and social media a good way of learning English?

Yes and no. Movies and TV can be useful (and can have subtitles of course) but they can also be time consuming. The same is true of video games and the amount of time spent may be out of all proportion to any gains. The language used in social media may help fluency but may teach bad language habits too. What's more, social media language is often very limited and will not challenge your child. It's easy and it's meant to be easy! Challenge is important for learning. And the problem with movies, social media and Netflix is that they're designed to keep you hooked and not to push you to improve your language skills.

### How do we use the holidays best?

Holidays are for relaxing but most Rosey parents (and Roséens) are keen to sign up for courses. There are multitudes of these but there are some which may foster home languages – and in particularly difficult or different writing systems (Arabic, Chinese and Japanese, for example) it may be a good idea to organize classes.



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