

# Nurturing the 'bilingual brain'

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION

*A new program at Deutsche Schule is open to children with no prior German language skills.*

According to the students of Deutsche Schule Melbourne in Fitzroy North, they possess a “superpower”.

“I think that is a really nice way to look at being bilingual and having a bilingual education,” says the school’s newly appointed principal Jörg Dopfer. “The children see it for what it is – something special and hugely advantageous.”

In the school’s intensive immersive model, the 140-plus students take classes in German and English, meaning they solidify their learning through conversation and play, improving their vocabulary and grammar almost by osmosis.

“When speaking to the year 5 students here, I am so impressed by how well they speak German,” Dopfer says. “Even with no family history of German, their German language skills are outstanding.”

“German education is very focused on problem solving, enquiring, critical thinking, asking and exploring, rather than pure learning by heart. It greatly enriches the Victorian curriculum when the two are taught together.”

Until now, children have enrolled in the school’s Foundation Year, but from term 1 2023, Deutsche Schule will open its doors in years 3 to 5 to students with no prior German language skills.

To encourage children to take up the challenge, partial scholarships are available for the Accelerated Pathway program for the first 12 months at the school.

Before joining Deutsche Schule Melbourne, Dopfer ran a similar program in Germany, teaching the language to refugees. While he was initially sceptical about how easily older children could learn German alongside their regular schooling, he was impressed by the results.

“The experience was amazing. I saw students manage all the tricky parts of their education while also learning another language – many progressing to the highest levels of academic success in Germany.”

Dopfer says he is excited to



**Deutsche Schule students graduate “with an adaptable skill set, greater future job opportunities and a far wider understanding of the global community”, says principal Jörg Dopfer (pictured above).**

implement all he has learned and see new students embrace the challenge of the transition and tap into the benefits of bilingualism.

Research shows the “bilingual brain” is better equipped for multitasking, creativity and communication, and enhances problem-solving skills.

“Our kids are naturally curious,” says Dopfer. “They are authentic, confident individuals who are willing to ask the tough questions and have a desire to know more about the world.”

Starting out, a bilingual environment can be demanding, Dopfer explains, but for children who are curious and creative, who love thinking outside the square, it can be incredibly rewarding, too.

“When our students graduate, they speak two languages to a near native speaker level – it develops their intercultural awareness and boosts their self-confidence,” he says.

The new program combines three

elements: German language lessons, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classes, and immersion classes with the students’ regular classmates.

CLIL classes help students learn a new language by teaching content – such as maths, sciences and humanities – in German, with help in English where needed.

Dr Averil Grieve, an applied linguist at Monash University, has worked with Deutsche Schule to develop the program and says the cognitive, social and academic benefits of a bilingual education are well established.

“And Deutsche Schule Melbourne’s approach of combining intensive language classes with CLIL is best practice for helping children thrive in that environment.”

The program has been specifically designed for students in years 3 to 5, a period that Dopfer says naturally lends itself to exploring new ideas.

“At those ages – 9, 10 and 11 –

*‘A bilingual education gives students a global mindset.’*

Jörg Dopfer

children start to engage more with the world around them,” Grieve says. “So, it’s an exciting time to introduce them to different languages and cultures.”

Each student will have a personalised learning plan to ensure their lessons are in keeping with their progress.

“Our goal is to have children fully integrated into the existing bilingual program within six-to-18 months, moving into more immersion classes as they develop the language skills they need to do so,” says principal Dopfer.

The benefits of a bilingual education reach far beyond the everyday. Dopfer says it’s as much about the possibilities it opens later in life as the cognitive abilities you gain along the way.

“A bilingual education gives students a global mindset. Language is a vehicle for culture, so it is also a bicultural way of educating. Our children move on with an adaptable skill set, greater future job opportunities and a far wider understanding of the global community.”

“It really is like having a superpower.”

The DSM Accelerated Pathway program begins in February 2023. The school invites families who are interested in the program to inquire today.

NEW

Deutsche Schule Melbourne

## Start a bilingual education in Years 3, 4 or 5

Designed for older primary school children who don’t yet speak German, the DSM Accelerated Pathway gives students the language skills they need to join the school’s main immersion program within 6-18 months.

In our Accelerated Pathway, your child won’t just learn a second language. By applying learning from both Victorian and German curricula, our students will develop the problem-solving and conceptual thinking skills they need to flourish in a complex world. Students will receive individualised support through staff who specialise in differentiation to prepare them for a smooth transition into the mainstream program.

### Get in touch

If your child has natural curiosity and a love of learning, help them rise to new challenges with a bilingual education. To find out more, please call us on 03 9489 9364.



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