



**British School
Overseas**

Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

**The English College in
Prague**

Czech Republic

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1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

The Department for Education has put in place a voluntary scheme for the inspection of British schools overseas, whereby schools are inspected against a common set of standards that British schools overseas can choose to adopt.

The inspection and this report follow the Department for Education (DFE) schedule for the inspection of British Schools overseas.

The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's management on the overall effectiveness of the school, the standard of education it provides and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom.

The inspection and report will cover the key areas of quality of the curriculum; quality of teaching and learning; the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils; their welfare, health and safety; the suitability of the proprietor and staff; the school's premises and accommodation (including boarding); and the school's complaints procedures. An essential part of the inspection is considering the extent to which the British character of the school is evident in its ethos, curriculum, teaching, care for pupils and pupils' achievements.

This inspection was completed by Penta International. Penta International is approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools overseas. As one of the leading inspection providers, Penta International reports to the English Department for Education (DFE) on the extent to which schools meet the standards for British Schools Overseas.

During the inspection visit, 38 formal lesson observations took place, as well as a series of learning walks. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, and a range of teachers, parents and groups of pupils. The inspection team were in school on three days.

The lead inspector was Mark Evans. The team members were John Nolan and Sheila Smith.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The English College in Prague meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The English College in Prague is a good school with a number of outstanding features: the standards of academic attainment, the care and support of the students, and much of the teaching are very good. It has a unique history: this lives on in its current special status as part of the Czech school system, and one of very few schools that can offer both the International Baccalaureate and the *Maturita*, harmonising a British-style education with one compliant with Czech educational standards.

The College provides a good quality of education: the curriculum is excellent. The students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are a credit to them, and to their families and school. They are confident without being arrogant, articulate and very aware of the special opportunity being provided for them. The quality of learning, teaching and leadership is good, with some outstanding aspects. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is excellent, as is the high quality pastoral care.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the College, including:

- the unique and highly successful manner in which the Headmaster has merged British and the international models of education with Czech curriculum requirements;
- the relationships between students and teachers, which are professional, friendly and supportive of excellent attitudes, behaviour and personal development;
- the best of the teaching, which is inspiring and innovative;
- the impact of the pastoral system, in supporting students and valuing their opinions and thoughts;
- the academic attainment levels, which are very good;
- the high standard of spoken English;
- the Headmaster's persistent but thoughtful drive for improvements in all aspects of school life;

- the strong team feeling amongst the staff that has been built up since the last inspection, bolstering the overall progress made since that visit;
- the excellent progress made since the last inspection;
- the manner in which the Governors protect and celebrate the legacy of the school.

3.2 Points for improvement

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following development points:

- embed the new assessment and tracking system to strengthen further the overall framework for monitoring and ensuring students' academic progress;
- improve teaching further so that the overall quality matches that of the best, by
 - continuing to promote and encourage appropriate innovative teaching techniques in all subjects
 - enhancing expectations and challenge in all lessons for the most able students
 - maintaining and developing the impact of the already rigorous performance management process
- review and refresh the manner in which the Governors monitor the standard of education provided by the College.

4. The context of the school

The English College in Prague (ECP) is a co-educational school, providing a British-style education for Czech and international students from the age of 12 to 19 years. The school was founded in September 1994 after the Velvet Revolution, with HRH Prince Charles and Václav Havel as Patrons.

The College is licensed under the jurisdiction of the Czech Ministry of Education. It is both on the register of Czech Schools (as six-year bilingual *gymnasium* allowing those students who wish to sit the Czech *maturita* examinations), and an international-style independent school offering IGCSEs and the IB Diploma programme.

It is situated on two sites which are 5 minutes' walk apart. The main school is in older building leased from the municipality, whilst the top two years receive most of their lessons in a dedicated Sixth Form centre in a nearby modern office block.

There are 382 students on register, representing more than 35 nationalities. There are more girls than boys, the gender split being 55:45. Most (66%) students are Czech. The other larger groupings by nationality are Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese and British. Considerably more than 90% of students have a native language other than English. The youngest students at the College are 12 years old and are placed in Year 1 - the equivalent of Year 8 in the UK.

The majority of teachers are UK-trained and professional development is focused around UK training courses, mainly through HMC and IBO-accredited training programmes, as well through the Association of Central European Schools. UK universities remain the destination of choice for around 50% of students.

Since the creation of a National Curriculum in the Czech Republic, it has become necessary to find a closer synthesis between the UK and Czech systems. The school has created a single programme of study for all students in Years 1-4, which meets the requirements of the Czech National Curriculum (RVP) and prepares them to take IGCSEs and the IB Diploma. In Years 5 and 6, students can opt for taking IB **or** choose to study for IB and the Czech *Maturita*. Until August 2014, ECP students were exempt from taking *Maturita* examinations, only being required to study Czech A at Higher Level. But from last year, students wishing to obtain *Maturita* were required to sit the National Examination in Czech Literature and Language in addition to taking the IB.

The Board of Governors is responsible for the financial and strategic direction of the school. It comprises members drawn from many walks of life in the Czech Republic and the UK. Board member positions are honorary and as such, unpaid. About half the governors live in the UK.

The Headmaster has been in post for just over two years. He is supported by a leadership team which includes the Deputy Head (Academic), Deputy Head (Pastoral), Deputy Head (Co-curricular), the Director of Czech Educational Matters, the Head of Academic Administration, the Director of the IB, and the Business and Operations Manager.

4.1 British nature of the school

The school is supported by a charitable trust in the UK, the English College Foundation. The Foundation entrusts the daily management of the College to the Headmaster and his team, but they are overseen by a group of nominated Governors. The Governors bring to the College a range of professional expertise from the positions they hold in the UK and in the Czech Republic. Governors meet three times per year, twice in the college and once in London.

The Foundation organises a programme of work experience in London twice a year giving students valuable opportunities to experience the world of work.

There are currently two patrons of the school: HRH The Prince of Wales and Karel Schwarzenberg, a renowned senior Czech politician.

Culturally the school's links with the UK remain strong and there are frequent school cultural trips and exchange visits to the UK. Recent examples include a visit to the London International Youth Science Forum and a visit to the Cheltenham Literature Festival. Some 80 students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh programme. The vast majority of fiction books and magazines in school library are UK publications.

Since the creation of a Czech National Curriculum, and the requirements of the Czech Ministry of Education, the school has created a single programme which combines the English curriculum with the local Czech requirements. This prepares all students to take IGCSEs, as well as IB. All subjects are taught in English apart from Czech language and literature and Modern Languages. The vast majority of students are not native speakers of English, but many aspire to study and work in the English speaking world. Around half the students predict that they will study in the UK, if costs do not increase further.

The Headmaster is a member of the International Division of HMC. He attends the annual conference as well as other HMC training: this is another means by which close ties with the UK are maintained.

The pastoral support reflects closely the best practices of UK schools. The majority of teachers are UK-trained and ongoing professional development is focused around UK training courses (mainly through HMC), as well as through IBO-accredited training programmes and the Association of Central European Schools. The language of the classroom is English and much of the educational terminology used derives from the UK.

5. Standard 1

The quality of education provided by the school

Overall the quality of education provided is good, with aspects that are outstanding. The College fully meets the standard for BSO.

5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is excellent. It supports the College's aims for breadth and balance of provision. It also successfully addresses the needs of the English national curriculum with adaptations for local requirements. Thorough planning was evident and up-to-date departmental handbooks are available to support teachers.

IGCSE examinations are taken by students in nine or ten subjects, at Year 4. Students choose either internal examinations with four external ones, or all/mostly external exams.

There is strong evidence of students' rapid progress in learning the English language by this stage, and students are fluent and confident communicators. A strong programme to support students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) complements the immersion approach to language acquisition. It is appropriately geared towards supporting academic English and creating reflective and self-directed users of the language. Support for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is provided by the Learning Department, and a number of students have personalised learning plans.

The curriculum is responsive to student needs. The policy of sitting IGCSE examinations in Year 3 and providing a Year 4 introduction to IB has been replaced by a policy of all students sitting IGCSE in Year 4 as described above, and introducing key elements of IB into the lower years. The Ideas course at this level is informed by the needs of Theory of Knowledge (TOK), for example, and opportunities are afforded to prepare for the IB Extended Essay. IB taster courses are offered after IGCSE examinations conclude in Year 4. Subjects offered in the first four years cover a wide range, including Czech in addition to German, Spanish and French, and non-examination subjects such as PE, Personal, Social and Moral Education (PSME) and Combined Arts. Czech and English are the core languages, and (as a bilingual *gymnasium*), all students study both to the end of Year 4.

The provision for gifted and talented is currently being developed further. These high attainers are provided for largely through the setting of groups.

Czech language and literature are taught from beginner level upwards. Czech culture and history are celebrated, for example with a visit and talk by writer Ivan Klíma to discuss the events in 1968.

The academic curriculum is supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include strong and established traditions in the arts, music and drama. The range of sports is similarly impressive: ECP recently enjoyed success in winning the finals of the U18 Girls' ISSAP Football.

The College manages the needs of students destined for local universities or employment well, and engages effectively with the local Ministry of Education to ensure that, at IB level, students may also study for the Czech *Maturita*; ECP is highly successful in offering this combination. After some difficulties with examination date clashes across the two systems, students will in future take the written components of *Maturita* at the end of Year 5.

Transitions within the school are effectively prepared for and managed. Students' university choices and career options are supported by an informed and established system. Around 80% of students gained acceptance to their first choice university or college, last year. The Annex Building contains a well-resourced library of college and university information. There are individual consultations, and the careers rooms create a mature and welcoming space. Alumni visit the school to offer advice, and the College boasts 95% sign-up of graduates for their alumni association.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good: the best teaching is outstanding. Through the school, teachers enable students to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability. Students increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects that are taught. In many instances, teachers encourage students to apply real intellectual, physical and creative effort, to show interest in their work, and to think and learn for themselves.

Students across all year groups enjoy school. Behaviour in nearly all lessons is exemplary. Any off-task behaviour was usually dealt with very effectively by the teachers. Students and teachers enjoy very good professional relationships. This ensures a safe and productive learning environment in which students feel confident both answering and asking questions. In nearly all lessons across the school, they are enthusiastic about their learning and they work with interest at the tasks set.

At its best, teaching is inspiring. Whether students are learning about the transformation of graphical functions in mathematics or exploring the development situation in endogenous and exogenous economies for example, teachers are energetic, thoughtful and innovative. In these lessons, there are excellent relationships, which encourage debate and critical analysis, because the students feel safe. A Year 6 lesson on the domestic policies of Leonid Brezhnev demonstrated significant trust in the students, as they managed much of the learning process themselves, and even some of the teaching elements of the class. The main characteristic evident in the best teaching across a wide range of subjects, is the high level of expectation and challenge.

Overall, lessons are well planned, teaching methods are effective, and suitable activities are used. The range of techniques used though is limited in some lessons. Teachers demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter they teach. Students are familiar with rules and routines, including the relative complexity of learning on a split site.

Scrutiny of students' work books shows teachers' marking, but there is a range in the quality and effectiveness of the feedback given. Some students spoken to during the inspection did not feel confident talking about how to make their work better, or how to improve their grades.

Classroom resources are of sound quality, quantity and range. The library has a good selection of English-language books, and sets of books in Czech and other modern languages. It is well managed.

There is a framework in place to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, though because it is relatively new, the full impact has yet to develop. The information from the assessment system is increasingly utilised to plan teaching, so that students can learn more and faster, but the tracking of progress is at an early stage. Because it is still developing, the value added to students by teachers is difficult for staff to gauge. Ensuring that each individual is being challenged sufficiently and achieving what they are capable of, is currently a challenge – one of which the school is well aware. Nevertheless, the styles of teaching, learning and assessment equip students well with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter (or re-enter) the UK educational system at an appropriate level.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

Students are well behaved and display a positive attitude to their learning. Where teaching is good or better, they are quick to respond with enthusiasm. In many lessons, students ask questions which extend their knowledge beyond the requirements of the syllabus.

Most students have an excellent level of English and are able to access the curriculum, which is delivered mainly in English. Where this is not the case, good quality extra support is given.

Student attainment is very good. School examination data shows that results in IGCSE, 49% of all results were graded A*-A and 91% were A*-C grade. The average score for the International Baccalaureate was 33 points. This reflects last year's results which were above the world average score.

Attendance was an issue in 2014-15. The new school code, whilst it is early in its implementation, appears to be having a good effect, as attendance is improving. The school is now able to (and does) follow up non-attendance very quickly.

A database of progress and attainment measures is being established. This database will be used to monitor individual, group and cohort progress more closely, by senior academic leaders, departmental teachers and the pastoral team.

The College is very successful in helping students to develop their personal skills and qualities. Students are thoughtful and well behaved. By the time they leave school, they have the personal and social skills needed to move successfully to the next stage of their lives.

6. *Standard 2*

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. It is a key strength of the College.

Relationships within the College are very positive. Between students, interactions are supportive and respectful, and students report on the fairness and commitment of staff. This enhances their confidence: students are ready and articulate communicators with a strong sense of their own identity and worth.

The aims of the College and the context in which it was founded have assisted students' awareness of community, an appreciation of fairness, tolerance, freedom of expression and individual responsibility; these values are strengthened in many cases by the personal family narratives of the students. Much of the personal development of the students is covered through the teaching of a personal, moral and social education programme, in conjunction with a MPP (a programme which has a core element prescribed by the Czech government, but also reflects the annually updated needs of young people). The programme underlines concepts of right and wrong, and contributes significantly to the understanding of citizenship and its responsibilities.

ECP students are very international in outlook. Their curriculum, with its Czech, UK and IB components, is itself a statement on internationalism. An annual Vietnamese Festival recognises and celebrates the sizeable cohort of students from that country. The language provision, encompassing minority as well as the school's mainstream languages, enables students to value their respective cultures. Czech language, history and culture are celebrated and marked in displays, visits and trips within Prague. The presence and roles of Czech staff also promote an appreciation of the host country. As a core subject, all students learn Czech in Years 1-4, at levels appropriate for native speakers or beginners. UK visits, for work experience or to the Cheltenham Literature Festival, and UK trained staff and curriculum content, also ensure that British culture and its democratic and liberal traditions feature prominently.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted through the ECP sports activities and clubs. Students feel safe and secure in the school. They speak enthusiastically about their school's culture in comparison to the local primaries which they attended, and to other international schools in Prague. The extra-curricular provision is varied, and in drama and music is particularly impressive. Students can opt for an aesthetics club, and have opportunities for theatre and concert visits in Prague.

The school affords opportunities for charitable and community work, through its 'Creativity, Action, Service' (CAS) and Caritas programmes. There are also some impressive student-led

initiatives such as their response to the recent European refugee crisis. Fundraising events are regular, and usually student-led.

7. Standard 3

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of the students are excellent: the pastoral care and systems for support of students in the College are outstanding. Clear aims, policies, staffing structures and delegation of responsibilities ensure that learners are safe, secure and able to make good progress. The house system reinforces the academic and pastoral work of the College very effectively. Student needs and opinions are reported through MPP questionnaires.

Behaviour throughout the school is excellent, and students enjoy a high degree of responsibility and growing opportunities for independence. At break times and moving around the main building, students are polite, respectful of others and conscious of safety. They are aware of the code of conduct. Given the split site and the off-site location for PE and some extra-curricular activities, procedures for moving between sites are efficient and managed effectively. Staff duty rotas and expectations are explicitly outlined in the staff handbook.

Student welfare is supported by clear and detailed policies on health and safety, bullying and child protection. Staff receive first aid training, and the Child Protection Officer and Deputy Child Protection Officer have also received appropriate training, as have teaching staff. A governor maintains oversight of this aspect, and she appropriately takes her responsibilities very seriously.

Students who are ill may report to the pastoral office, and a 'quiet room' is available for students who need to rest or recover. A doctor and psychologist are available off-site; there is no full-time nursing provision in the College.

Site access in the main school and annex is controlled effectively, and registers are taken at the beginning of each lesson. Visitors' passes are issued. Lock-down procedures are outlined in the staff handbook. Fire evacuation drills are held termly. During a genuine fire alarm that took place during the inspection, students and staff responded well and vacated the building efficiently. The policy of doing so in silence was not 100% observed, and there was some variation in student behaviour while waiting for instructions to return to the building. Procedures for risk assessment and managing school trips are detailed and comprehensive.

Students report feeling safe and secure at ECP. The staff deals quickly with any rare instances of bullying. Fairness was an attribute regularly associated with the staff, and students feel they receive very good pastoral support, as well as support in their EAL needs and transitions within the College. They feel well supported in their university and college applications. Academic advice and guidance are excellent, and members of staff know their charges very well.

8. *Standard 4* The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor and staff are highly suitable.

The College was originally established with monies raised by a charitable trust in the UK, the English College Foundation. It is now a separate foundation based in the Czech Republic.

The College is well staffed with both qualified teachers and support staff. More than 70% of the teaching staff come from the UK. Many of the teachers are experienced and all are well qualified to teach their specialist subject/s.

There are appropriate procedures in place to ensure the suitability of staff appointments. The Board and Headmaster are fully mindful of the requirements for safer recruitment. Prior to appointment, appropriate checks are made to confirm identity, qualifications, medical fitness and to establish that they have the right to work in the Czech Republic. Checks on the suitability of potential teaching staff to work with young people, including the UK enhanced criminal check are made. The school maintains a comprehensive file of all staff and volunteers and their records.

Although Czech regulations do not require that all governors undergo criminal record checking, it has become standard practice at the College, in order to meet UK standards of best practice.

9. Standard 5 The premises and accommodation

The accommodation and resources meet the requirements for BSO.

The College occupies a 19th Century building and has an annex in a nearby office block. The buildings are physically sound although the annex suffers from some sound leakage between rooms. The College leaders have worked hard to minimise the effect this might have on learning by careful planning and timetabling.

There is a duty rota for the main building that ensures a teacher is on duty between 8:00 and 16:30 every school day. The annex operates a separate duty rota, agreed with the staff who are based there, so the supervision is continuous and not interrupted by teaching in the main building.

The classrooms are clean and well maintained. Resources are more than adequate and rooms are equipped with whiteboards, projectors and with ability to use IT for learning. Specialist rooms are appropriate to need and where possible, have been blocked together such as in science and mathematics.

The library is well stocked and equipped and there are specialist rooms for music, art and drama. PE uses local facilities off site. There is a 'quiet room' available to students who feel unwell.

Cold food, soups and panini are served in a small cafeteria. Students are able to leave the school site at lunch time and arrangements have been made for students to eat at a local school should they wish.

There are tentative plans to relocate the school to another site in the near future: Governors are searching for a long-term solution as the premises are currently rented from Prague 9. Options include purchasing the freehold for its existing building or pursuing options elsewhere in the metropolitan area of Prague.

Water is supplied by *Pražské vodovody a kanalizace*, the main provider of water in Prague and the buildings are connected to town drainage system run by the same company. There is no reason to believe that the water supply does not meet local regulatory requirements. Drainage is appropriate for hygienic purposes and for the disposal of waste water.

Load bearing structures are built with due regard to local regulatory requirements. The buildings provide resistance to penetration by wind and dust. The school is adequately

decorated and maintained. The furniture and fittings are appropriately designed for the age and needs of students registered at the school

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is excellent.

The College's communication with its parents and community is comprehensive. The school's booklet for prospective parents and its parental handbook, published and updated annually, provide detailed information for parents on curriculum, staff and policies. The names of governors and key staff are made available, and contact details are provided for the Headmaster.

The parental handbook also contains a statement of the school's aims, curriculum outlines, staff responsibilities, and key policies including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, health, safety and bullying. Provision for learning support, EAL and procedures for dealing with behaviour issues, are clearly outlined. These and most other general communications are available bilingually in English and Czech.

All key information is also available on the website.

The school celebrates its founders and patrons in its publications and through photographs displayed in its halls.

Newsletters are published regularly and contain detailed reports of significant school events, successes and community links. An excellent history of the school was published to mark the twentieth anniversary of its foundation.

Reporting, which is comprehensive and clear, is through quarterly progress checks that report academic grades as well as 'Attitude to Learning' grades. Full reports, which include teacher comments, are issued twice a year. In line with local reporting systems, ECP also issues a Czech report twice annually using the accepted Ministry of Education criteria.

The recently adopted management information system provides a parental portal which permits parents to access attendance and assessment information, as well as information relating to particular year groups. Parent teacher meetings are held twice a year for Year 1 and once for other groups; these are well attended. The Headmaster, senior tutors and deputy heads are available at these meetings, and parents who cannot make the meetings are able to make alternative appointments. Options evenings are held at the key transition to IB. Parents attend drama and music events in the College, as well as graduation events.

ECP has made previous inspection reports available to parents. Parents can also readily access details of the complaints procedures. Examination results for IGCSE and IB are published, with comparisons of the school's performance to international norms.

The school receptionist communicates with home in the event of student absence.

11. *Standard 7*

The school's procedure for handling complaints

Complaints are very rare, but the College has a clear policy and procedures in place which reflect good practice from the UK. As a result, the school easily meets the standard.

Parents can review the publicly displayed complaint policy to confirm how formal complaints are to be submitted and the subsequent process. They appreciate the access they have to the teachers and senior staff.

12. *Standard 8*

The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

13. *Standard 9* Leadership and management of the school

Leadership and management are good: some aspects are outstanding. The school has made very good progress since the last inspection and the Headmaster has ensured this has continued since he was appointed. He is an effective and sensitive leader, and has inspired further success at the school. He provides clear educational direction, and been instrumental in further defining the school's purpose and status in Prague. He works closely and effectively with the local Ministry.

The Board of Governors oversee school life effectively. They are strong and effective stewards of the financial, student welfare and facility-related components. Their impact on the quality of learning and teaching is less secure. Much of the information they receive about the school is through the Headmaster and the Senior Leadership Team, through the twice-yearly Education Committee meeting. Other members of staff are invited to give presentations, as appropriate.

The results of visits that are made to the school by some governors are recorded but are not always followed up and discussed as fully as they could be; thus their impact is lessened, long-term. There have been steps taken to involve governors in observing lessons and taking a more detailed interest in the day-to-day running of the school: these are emerging and could be profitably developed further by the School and Board. They are however, successful in securing, supporting and developing sound quality staff and ensuring their suitability to work with children.

There are no parent representatives on the Board, but there are two parents on the School Council, which is the official body which supervises the school. The school is working to integrate further the already effective work of the two groups.

The school has appropriate policies and procedures, and the Board review them for effectiveness and appropriateness. They are informed by the Headmaster about priorities for improvement, but most of the planning to meet these is delegated to the school. Although the Board is excellent at not getting involved in day-to-day management issues, monitoring of education standards by governors is underdeveloped.

Improvements in the quality of learning and teaching have been sensitively effected by the Headmaster and his senior leaders. The leadership of the College provides very good opportunities for staff appraisal and professional development. There is very good and appropriate focus on using expertise that exists within the College.