



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

**The English School
of Mongolia**

**Ulaanbaatar
Mongolia**

Date **10th – 12th May 2023**
Inspection number **20230510**

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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 students; their welfare, health and safety; the suitability of the proprietor and staff; the school's premises and accommodation (including boarding, if appropriate); 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 students and students' 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, all years groups and a wide range of subjects were observed. A series of lesson observations and learning walks took place. School documentation, data and policies were analysed and reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, and a range of teachers, parents, and groups of students. The inspection team was in school for three days.

The lead inspector was Dr Mark Evans. The team members (online) were Phil Neild and Sue Croft.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school has shown that it meets the standards for British Schools Overseas, except for those that cannot be achieved legally in the host country. These pertain to aspects of the UK Equality Act 2010. The school actively promotes tolerance and a respect for all human differences, within the confines of the law. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school. This judgement is endorsed by the British Government and is valid for three years. The inspection process is quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The English School of Mongolia (ESM) has made significant progress since the last inspection, and provides a strong all-round education for its students. It has many good and some excellent features. The principal and senior leaders drive school improvement with energy, determination, and enthusiasm.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including the following:

- The school has managed to improve even more, despite the difficulties of the past few years, and has significantly increased in size, the number of students on roll almost doubling;
- There has been very effective progress made on the recommendations of the last BSO report;
- The students are very proud of their school and enjoy their learning;
- Teaching English as an additional language (EAL) is effective: provision is a central part of learning and teaching for all;
- The recognition and celebration of the Mongolian language is also a key part of the curriculum;
- Teaching staff are committed to ESM and enjoy working at the school;
- The principal is strong, focussed and purposeful – he is well supported by his senior team;
- There is an obvious open-door policy, which encourages parental input and makes them feel confident in the school;
- The introduction of the International Baccalaureate (IB) into years 12 and 13 has been successful;
- The administration team continue to provide strong and effective support to the senior team, teachers, students and parents at ESM.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- i. Further improve the quality of learning, teaching, and assessment, so that all matches that of the best;
- ii. Develop further the focus on progress towards successful IB examination results, for example by:
 - o making even better use of the formative data available in the school (including primary)
 - o considering a school-wide assessment schedule
 - o seeking to support students with learning difficulties with specialist teaching
- iii. Continue to develop programmes of outreach into the local community and schools, to further develop students' understanding of Mongolia and to share expertise widely.

4. The context of the school

Full name of school	The English School of Mongolia				
Address	Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar city, Bayanzurkh District, 1 st khoroo, Tokyo Street 89				
Telephone Number/s	+976 70154015				
Website Address	https://esm.edu.mn/				
Key Email Address/s	info@esm.edu.mn				
Executive Principal	Graham Hill				
Chair of Board of Governors/ Proprietor	Jargalan Erdenebat				
Age Range	3-18 years				
Total number of students	1,081	Boys	503	Girls	578
Numbers by age	<i>0-2 years</i>	0	<i>12-16 years</i>	397	
	<i>3-5 years</i>	96	<i>17-18 years</i>	98	
	<i>6-11 years</i>	490	<i>18+ years</i>	0	
Total number of part-time children	0				

The English School of Mongolia (ESM) school is located in the downtown area of Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. It has grown fast, now with over 1,000 pupils – almost double the number at the time of the last BSO inspection. Most of the pupils are Mongolian citizens (approximately 80%) with slightly more girls than boys.

New pupils join the school at different points in the academic year, and in all different academic years. They come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds, including international schools in Ulaanbaatar, local state schools, and schools overseas. Disruption to pupils' education is common in Mongolia due to volatile economic conditions and to the Mongolian citizens working on short contracts overseas. It is not always possible to obtain reports and/or academic data from pupils' previous school. ESM is not selective, accepting pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and/or special educational needs (SEN).

Ulaanbaatar has an extreme continental climate, with a long and cold winter season: temperatures of -20° to -30°C are typical. It is therefore not possible to organise outdoor activities or trips during the November – March period.

Due to the remote location of the city within East Asia, it can be challenging to obtain a full range of teaching resources, to host visiting speakers and to organise events with other British international schools in Asia. The remote location, along with high levels of air pollution in winter and the fluctuating Mongolian economic situation, creates a challenging context for recruiting teachers from overseas.

The last BSO inspection of the school was in 2017. The school is an accredited as an IB World School and authorised to offer the IB Diploma Programme.

4.1 British nature of the school

ESM is proud to be a British school, and this is reflected in many aspects of the school's operations. The ethos and culture of the school are clearly British in nature and fully meet the standard.

- The staff aim to offer a broad educational experience which recreates the UK independent school experience.
- There is active promotion of the arts, the humanities and physical education in addition to core subjects.
- Several pupils have made a successful transition to schools and universities in the UK.
- The National Curriculum for England is implemented in most of the school, carefully adapted to suit the local context;
- Secondary pupils continue their studies through GCSE examinations and the IB Diploma programme;
- There is a uniform at ESM, similar that that which would be found in UK independent schools;
- The language of instruction (and of most all conversations amongst the pupils) is English;
- Pupils are supported by an effective pastoral care structure, which is very similar to that found in many UK private schools;
- Professional development is delivered through a combination of internal expertise, and through external agencies such as the Federation of British Schools in Asia (FOBISIA);
- The school runs a house system with three houses: Chaplin, Darwin and Austin;
- The school supports British initiatives including celebrating the coronation of Charles III.

5. Standard 1 The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided is good. The school fully meets the standards for BSO.

5.1 Curriculum

The curriculum at ESM is good and developing well.

The school operates a non-selective admissions policy except where an individual student's learning difficulties make it impossible for that student to access the curriculum effectively.

ESM delivers the Primary Years Programme (PYP) programme in the primary school, which is supplemented by a home-grown curriculum loosely based on the English National Curriculum in Key Stage 3, the Cambridge IGCSE programmes in Key Stage 4 and the IB Diploma in Key Stage 5. This curriculum has been developed by ESM staff for ESM students. Within the frameworks of the IB PYP, the Cambridge IGCSE programme, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, the English National Curriculum serves as the backbone for the content taught and the progression.

Teachers come from a range of backgrounds, but the robust induction to ESM's way of teaching aims to standardise the learning experience for all learners. This is generally successful, although relatively high teacher turnover, particularly with international staff, has posed challenges.

The introduction of PYP has been beneficial and has particularly increased students' attainment in primary, as the exhibition phase enables the showcasing their imagination: it is very popular with parents. IB is now compulsory in Key Stage 5. This has been a successful replacement for the old ESM Diploma which although valuable, had no formal international recognition.

Planning in the PYP curriculum is satisfactory, but more focus is needed and planned in order to better support standards required in the core subjects. This has been fully recognised by the school and is scheduled to begin after the completion of the inspection. The school underwent both PYP accreditation and IB Diploma evaluation last year. Both of which have led to changes in the manner of delivery of lessons and further developed professionalism of the faculty body.

Support from the curriculum for students who speak English as an additional language and at a low level, is good. Streamed English classes take place for part of the week in middle school. There is after-school provision for all students at a sister organisation, and a timetabled after-school EAL club for primary students.

There is some inconsistency in the quality of curriculum planning documents. The best include support for detailed plans including lesson objectives, starters, resources used and assessment schedules and methods. This mitigates the impact of the relatively high staff turnover that exists. The shift towards offering staff two year as opposed to one year contracts has helped to improve staff retention in allowing the school to develop curriculum plans and expectations within departments.

Provision for supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is limited, but the recent employment of a staff member as psychologist and mentor is a good start, with involvement mainly involved in counselling those with behavioural or emotional issues. Otherwise, there is little support from formally trained SEND staff at ESM.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is good; assessment is developing well.

Teaching, learning and external assessment were impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic for multiple academic years, as in many schools. But at its best, teaching enables students to acquire new knowledge and make fast progress, according to their ability. The students increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught. Where lessons promote independent learning, they foster in students self-motivation, physical and creative effort and the ability to think and learn for themselves.

In the best lessons, there is clear and purposeful planning and effective teaching methods. Activities and class time is managed well. The teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the students, and they ensure that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons. For example, students who enter the school into the secondary year groups, are supported well.

In a very strong lesson, the Year 6 students were totally engaged by the short video about 'The Tempest', and the teacher asked probing questions, which the students really enjoyed. Teachers demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. From EYFS to IB diploma, classroom resources are of a good quality, quantity and range; teachers generally they use them effectively. Many lessons have a good deal of fun involved too, such as the Year 5 lesson about the way that the Earth tilts.

Although the behaviour of the students is excellent, when necessary, teachers are adept at utilising strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging students to act responsibly. At no point does teaching undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, within the context of Mongolia. Teachers never discriminate because of students' individual characteristics. Indeed, in many lessons, the atmosphere is one of fun and inclusion: for example in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on solving straight line equations, the class worked hard in their groups and really enjoyed themselves. The teacher's strong subject knowledge allowed him to ask challenging questions, which made the students think deeply.

The quality of work displayed around the school is high: from the 'Deadly sins of Maths', the beautiful 'tree' in EYFS, the colourful cups for holding house points in many classrooms and the Year 3 presentation on the explorers Earnest Shackleton and Marco Polo.

ESM has a framework in place to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly, although this follows different patterns in different subjects. The use of information

from assessments to plan teaching so that students can make maximum progress, is developing well.

Assessment is both internal and external. Internal assessment takes place continuously, both formatively and summatively, at every age group and across every subject. External assessment is via various examination bodies: the Mongolian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Cambridge IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

No overall record of a schedule of assessments is kept and monitored. The frequency and methods of assessment are left to individual subjects and year groups: in keeping with the calm nature of the school, are mainly formative in nature.

Mongolian law decrees that two summative assessments are conducted each year: these form the basis of student grades which are communicated to parents. According to government stipulations, the school is required to keep paper records of these outcomes. Several online systems have been trialled over recent years to help SLT members track student progress and measure value-added but none of these has proved suitable for the purpose. The school now recognises that this is now become a priority.

There is no overall homework policy for the school which means that the volume and frequency of work set varies between classes, subjects and key stage. Class teachers in the primary school respond to parental requests for additional work to be completed at home, as and when they are made. This can result in an inequitable educational load amongst students and workload for staff.

Informal training is given via weekly staff meetings and ad hoc conversations between managers and staff, via the open-door policy. Formal training is made available online and in person where possible) for all staff teaching internationally recognised programmes in KS4 and 5. Primary staff have access to the Making the PYP Happen online training programme. The pandemic increased the provision of online training which has been a benefit to a school, being so remotely geographically located

5.3 Standards achieved by students

The academic standards and progress achieved by students are good, especially in the English language. These standards are evident in class and around the school.

ESM's external results have been steadily improving, despite several factors that could have impacted negatively on the overall trend. In particular, the move towards all students taking examinations in the external curricula (IB) whereas previously it was optional. IGCSE grades have improved significantly since 2019 and rose even further during the Covid-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the average grade achieved per student fell last year, but inconsistent results are to be expected from a non-selective admissions policy.

The school's rapid growth also makes it difficult to compare cohorts year-on-year. There is only limited progress tracking data as yet, so relevant deductions are limited.

A similarly variable pattern can be seen in the results of students taking the diploma of the IB. However, the recent replacement of the school's own diploma with the obligatory sitting of either the full diploma or the IB certificates programme will have undoubtedly affected overall results. The average grades gained by those students who sat the full diploma is in line or slightly above the world average.

6. *Standard 2* Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development of students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good: it is a strength of the school.

Developing students holistically is a central part of the ESM mission statement. As an IB World School, a big part of this is the IB Learner Profile, which is implemented and developed within classrooms and through school events. There is a strong focus on reflection as a part of this: this extends to disciplinary situations, where students write a written reflection on their actions, as part of any behaviour management process.

Spiritual development is good. Students develop self-awareness and a greater understanding of others. They are almost always tolerant and supportive of one another, and enjoy the regular celebration of individuals' success. Older students help younger ones through their roles of responsibility. The importance of good behaviour is well understood. Personal development is advanced very effectively through drama productions and concerts, educational visits and visiting speakers.

The school actively promotes tolerance and a respect for human differences. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school. Wellbeing is built through feelings of identity and ownership over learning, and the safeguarding team monitor and deal with any related issues.

Moral development is good and from an early age, students show a clear understanding of right and wrong. They are almost always polite, courteous and respectful. Students' attitude to learning is positive: they recognise and appreciate the opportunities that are available to them at ESM.

Student voice is encouraged and listened to – elections were taking place during the BSO visit, and there was much excitement. House captains in the primary school, class representatives in the middle school and prefects in the senior school all provide vehicles for students to learn about leadership and serving the school.

Social development is good. Relationships between students and staff, and within the student body itself are evident positive aspect of the schools. There is a mutual respect in all areas of the school community. The prefect body are an impressive group, as they were at the time of the previous inspection.

Behaviour in the school was almost all of a good standard. Students take responsibility for their own behaviour. The school enhances this by the use of a merit system, which may (for example) lead to an end of year trip as a reward.

Cultural development is good. Students celebrate diversity in a range of local and international festivals throughout the academic year, including an international day. Students are aware of issues of need in the local community and have been involved in outreach programmes.

7. *Standard 3* The welfare, health and safety of the students

The welfare, health and safety of students is good, with many excellent aspects. It is clear that the school views pastoral care as a priority and staff care unreservedly for the students in their care.

The school has safe recruitment policies and actively follows them using accredited external recruitment partners who are able to pre-screen applicants. The Mongolian Department of Education requires that each applicant submits copies of their relevant degrees, police checks and/or a DBS Certificate/ICPC before issuing a work visa.

The school premises are completely surrounded by fencing with the only two entrance gates supervised by school security. Visitors are required to sign in and proceed to the school reception upon arrival.

There is an ESM doctor on-site to be able to deal with any medical issues for both staff and students. Details of all appointments and incidents are recorded and kept securely in her room.

All staff, including administrative and operations members, have been trained in safeguarding and are able and encouraged to report any concerns to the designated safeguarding lead who actions them appropriately. The new safeguarding lead taking over in August 2023 has formal qualifications from the UK.

Students are polite, feel respected at school and a healthy rapport exists between staff and students. Most behavioural issues which occur are minor in nature. The school does not use detentions but prefers to rely on a system of student reflection and a discussion with a member of the teaching faculty to guide and improve self control. For more serious issues, the school has a clear behavioural policy in place which it follows. The counsellor is available to students, in addition to government support services.

The reports of behavioural incidents were previously written and stored on paper, although this is now be moved to a digital system. This has made storage and retrieval easier, but has created some access problems. The introduction of a new school-wide management information system might assist in the ability of the school to offer the best possible pastoral care for its students.

The large increase in student numbers has meant that the school has found adapting its systems and procedures a challenge. The ability to monitor effectively individual student information and attendance for example, is much more challenging now, than it was five years ago.

Senior leaders are aware of current issues and challenges facing young people and are proactive in attempting to help students and parents make good choices including online safety and vaping. Lessons on these and other subjects are included in the timetable in addition to email communications and workshops for parents.

The school views staff wellbeing as a priority and acts accordingly. The open-door policy from the senior leadership team enables staff to discuss any concerns freely with managers. A full staff meeting is dedicated to wellbeing once a month, and staff are encouraged to contribute ways in which the wellbeing policy can be improved. For example, staff are able to see the counsellor should they wish to and the senior leadership team have recognised the positive impact that employing a full-time supply teacher will have on workload.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff meets the standard for BSO.

Responsibilities with regard to the safeguarding and welfare of pupils are clearly understood and discharged effectively. Clear procedures are in place to ensure staff appointed meet best practice regarding safe recruitment procedures. Board members can demonstrate that they meet local requirements and in addition have the right to work in Mongolia. Where appropriate, certificates of good conduct are obtained from the relevant embassies or police forces of all countries in which board members have resided.

Staff recruitment policies and practices are embedded and meet all safeguarding requirements. The policies for safeguarding and for health and safety are available for all to see, on the school's website.

Teachers are hired from a variety of backgrounds. This approach has allowed ESM to build a varied but internationally experienced team. The school partners with one recruitment agency in the main. This has led to recruitment a number of higher calibre and longer-serving teaching staff, who have had a positive impact on the school.

Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks, including police checks in the country of origin, are carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in Mongolia and their previous employment activity.

The relevant background checks are carried out on all staff at the school (including full-time and part-time teachers, visiting teachers, non-teaching staff). Records of all staff and volunteers are kept by the HR manager.

Locally hired Mongolian staff make up around half of the teachers; all have strong knowledge of English language, as well as international-mindedness. All staff receive training, in particular teaching assistants, through international, external training (both online and in-person), to empower them in their work.

There is a secure list maintained of all staff and volunteers who currently work in the school. This shows when they started and stopped working in the school. Background checks are carried out on all staff (including part-time and peripatetic teachers) and volunteers at the school. Health checks are completed in accordance with Mongolian law; in addition, staff complete a health declaration form. At least two appropriate references are taken for all staff before giving a job offer. The relevant checks and supporting documents are kept by the HR manager.

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation of ESM are good, and have been improved significantly since the last inspection.

The school is housed in a large four storey building with a well utilised basement level. The building is functional, with reasonable sized classrooms and corridors. Furniture and fittings are appropriate. Rapid growth in recent years has led the school to be creative about how to best use the space available. Following a successful addition of a fourth floor over half of the site in 2019, this year, a further extension is planned to provide additional classrooms and learning spaces.

Classrooms and facilities are well-used by teachers and teaching assistants to support learning, through displays, classroom equipment and technology. Although technology provision is limited to one dedicated ICT room and the several computers available in the library, these are booked out and used regularly by teachers to support research and digital literacy development.

Toilet and washing facilities for the sole use of children of boys or girls are available. Changing accommodation is provided for all students, but showers are not available as yet.

There is a medical room, staffed by a qualified nurse. There is a bed for use of short term sick children, screened from the rest of the facility. Drinking water facilities are available for the use of children. They are located strategically and met all the BSO standards required.

There are indoor and outdoor areas for PE and co-curricular activities. There were good outdoor play areas for students which were well supervised during break and lunch times.

All facilities meet the local requirements of health and safety.

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

Provision of information for parents and others is good.

Parents and carers are essential elements in the ESM's approach to education. The school is active on social media and on its website, sharing and celebrating successes with the entire community, whether on an individual student level or involving larger groups. For more official communication (such as announcements), school email is used as the appropriate channel.

The effectiveness is has improved in recent years, primarily in terms of parents and guardians keeping their contact details up-to-date and being responsive. It is probably a positive effect of the extended periods of online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The system for academic reporting has also been updated since the last BSO inspection. It is now separated into three strands, with the purpose of being clearer for learners, teachers and parents. Reporting is honest and thus welcomed by the parents. Brochures, leaflets and school magazines are published throughout the year, and a monthly newsletter from the director is shared in both English and Mongolian. This helps the school to share its messages in a standardised way.

Not all parents speak English confidently, which can pose a challenge. There are cultural expectations also regarding the role of parents in their child's education, but the school works hard to develop a more British approach and understanding. Nevertheless, Mongolian, Chinese and Korean translation services are readily available if needed.

In recent years, a higher proportion of parents are attending parents evenings and information sessions than at the time of the last inspection. There are firm plans to develop more provision in terms of parental information sessions and coffee mornings, in the hope to will continue this growth.

11. Standard 7

The school's procedure for handling complaints

ESM fully meets the BSO standard for the complaints procedure.

The school provides clear and precise information about what should happen in the event of a complaint. These procedures are in line with local Ministry requirements.

Complaints are very rare, but the school does have a detailed policy and procedure in place. These good practice from the UK, outlining both the spirit and details of the process. Parents are informed of the process through the website. Most issues are requests for further information or understanding.

Form tutors, teaching assistants and school leaders are able to meet with parents or guardians who feel they have something to complain about. Face-to-face meetings accompany email and telephone contact to follow up in such instances. The school's registration office and receptionist are usually the first port of call for parents, either by telephone or in person.

The aim of the procedure is to ensure a fair, effective and as rapid as possible resolution of all parent complaints. It is clear about time limits, record keeping correspondence and matters of professional judgement. The policy also states clearly the role of the board of directors.

Stage 1 of the process is informal resolution. It is hoped most complaints and concerns will be made, considered and resolved quickly and informally. Stage 2 is used if formal resolution is required. The complaint is put in writing to the school's director and replied to within 10 school days. Records of all meetings and interviews are kept for three years.

If parents are not satisfied with the school director's response, the parents can write within 10 working days to the chair of the board of directors. S/he would investigate the matter and aim to respond to parents within 15 school days of receiving the complaint. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they can proceed to Stage 3, which is a board of directors' panel hearing.

In fact, use of stages 2 and 3 is extremely rare.

12. Standard 8 Leadership and management of the school

The leadership and management of the school are good.

The vision, hard work and patient approach of the school's director is outstanding: he focusses strongly on the quality of education and the care of the pupils. The current senior leadership team has been in place for several years, which has allowed norms and expectations to develop over time, in line with policy, and has led to strong personal relationships between the team and the staff. Communication of news and events is primarily through the Monday morning briefings, department and grade level meetings, and email updates.

Many staff and visitors to the school praise the open-door approach that the school's director and leadership team have towards leadership.

The support and strategic planning shown by the board is excellent. They focus on strategy and support the director and the leadership team well in the running of the school. They are effective in their emphasis on financial and business development.

The senior leadership team provides clear educational direction, reflected in the sound quality of education, the emphasis on the care of students, and the fulfilment of the school's vision, mission and core values. There is a very positive relationship between the school's director, senior staff and the school's board.

The leadership team has been increasingly successful in securing and motivating high quality staff. Both teaching and non-teaching staff are recognised as valued members of the school team. This has created a sense of community amongst the professionals who support, encourage and work together. A professional development week takes place each spring, where external providers are invited to deliver specific workshops and training programmes for staff.

This is combined with overnight stays away from school, internal training delivered by members of the senior leadership team with team-building activities help to build a strong ethos of togetherness among staff. In addition, this allows a greater flow of information between management and staff regarding potential school improvements. The content of the week is determined by the outcomes of lesson observations and individual staff reflections and target setting.