



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection Report

Paradis College

Iasi, Romania

Date	23 rd – 25 th November 2021
Inspection number	20211123

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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 the students; 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 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, the British phase of the school was inspected. 70 lessons were observed by inspectors. School documentation and policies were analysed, and data reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised. Discussions were held with the senior staff, the management teams, a range of teachers, parents, and groups of students. Two and a half school days were monitored.

The lead inspector was Dr Mark Evans. The team member was Ms Andrea Coyle.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

Paradis College, Iasi, Romania (PC) meets all standards for British Schools Overseas.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The school offers a British-style education that meets the needs of its' students. It has a particular ethos that the parents and students relish. The curriculum is rich and varied. Teaching is effective and students make at least satisfactory progress across the school: some students make good or excellent progress.

Students' behaviour is excellent, and they really enjoy school. As a result, students are caring, articulate and confident learners.

3.1 What the school does well

PIC has many strengths which include the:

- very strong ethos, values and culture of the school;
- strength of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within the school;
- inspiring leadership provided by the college director, ably supported by her senior leadership team, who share a united vision for the school;
- breadth of the educational provision beyond the formal curriculum and its contribution to the personal development of students;
- devoted and creative talented teachers, who often challenge and excite the students;
- positive and caring relationships between staff and pupils;
- strong focus on continuing professional development of teachers' skills;
- good use of the school's premises, which is suited to the needs of the students;
- palpable and committed sense of community.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

1. Further improve the quality of learning and teaching, so that all lessons are as good as the best, for example by:
 - identifying and sharing best practice in effective active learning, group and pair work;
 - ensuring challenge and creativity are features within all lessons.
2. In light of the continuing expansion of the school, especially at secondary school level, consider the development of suitable appropriate senior and middle management roles, without compromising the strong open culture of the school.
3. Seek to develop a means for longer term strategic planning, in line with the school's ethos, vision and mission.

4. The context of the school

Full name of school/college	Paradis International College				
Address	Iasi 2m Iancu Flondor street				
Main telephone number	+40 722 133 091				
Website	www.paradis-college.ro				
Email address	contact@paradis-college.ro				
Head	Albu Oana Mihaela				
Owner/founder	Albu Oana Mihaela				
Age range	3-18 years				
Total number of pupils	351	Boys	157	Girls	194
Numbers of students by age	0-2 years	19	12-16 years	79	
	3-5 years	72	17-18 years	9	
	6-11 years	167	18+ years	5	
Total number of part-time children	0				

Iasi is a historic but growing city with strong history, cultural institutions, universities, innovative/information technology industries and increasing investment. There are growing international links with some international companies. It has its own international airport.

PIC was founded in 2005, initially as a kindergarten. It has since evolved with its students and parents, through primary, lower secondary to high school, to become this year, a full K-12 school, offering the Cambridge curriculum (English, science and mathematics) in primary and lower secondary years (to age 14) is taught alongside the Romanian national curriculum. PIC is the first school in Iasi to offer a Cambridge International curriculum.

4.1 British nature of the school

Like UK independent schools and most international schools, Paradis International College has a vision, mission and ethos that seeks to educate the whole child. The approach is holistic, seeking not only to develop the academic and intellectual potential of its students but also to develop in them the values, dispositions, skills and knowledge to enable them to become the best they can be, to be active and fulfilled 'global' citizens, wanting and able to make a positive contribution to society.

Character education and development are key aspects running through the curriculum and co-curriculum; music and art flourish; the needs of the individual students are recognised and met. The values and ethos of the school are those easily recognisable as 'British', based on tolerance and respect, intercultural understanding, concern for others, and respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Whilst the school does need to conform to the requirements of Romanian education regulations, from Kindergarten onwards, the influence of UK education is present. Kindergarten takes account of the principles of the Early Years and Foundation Stage guidance (EYFS), and all students are taught English. The commitment to learning English language (and about UK culture) is carried through the subsequent stages, with increasing focus on the development of English language skills. By the age of 14, the aim is that students are fluent enough in English to cope with the demands of a high school curriculum (IGCSEs and A-levels) that is studied and taught in English. The Cambridge curriculum is used from the primary years onwards.

The Britishness of the school is further reflected in the use of:

- school uniform
- the Duke of Edinburgh Award
- the institution of a Student Council
- and importance of student voice
- the employment of an English director of learning
- membership of Round Square providing links with many UK schools
- direct links to a number of UK schools, such as St John's College in Portsmouth, Mayville High School in Portsmouth, Felsted School, St Mary's in Colchester and Latymer Upper School in London.

There are now students in grade 12 and some of these hope to gain places, via UCAS, at UK universities. Policies and approach within the school are linked to UK standards

and best practice, as can be seen, for example, in approaches to safer recruitment, safeguarding and child protection, student welfare, PSHE and the many school trips and visits.

Whilst the vast majority of parents are Romanian, they recognise and appreciate the Britishness of the school, not least because of the strong ties between Romania and the UK. They support the school in its ambition to become recognised as a British School Overseas and appreciate the nature of the Cambridge curriculum, and the IGCSE and A-level programmes. They like the fact that the development of English language is central and that the pursuit of IGCSE and A-level qualifications will enable students to apply to UK universities and other international universities.

5. Standard 1

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided at PIC is good and meets the requirements of the BSO Framework.

5.1 Curriculum

The curriculum meets the standards for BSO.

There is a clear curriculum policy. It is built around the strong vision, mission and values of the school that drive a holistic approach to the development of each student as an individual. Thus every teacher contributes to enriching the curriculum, starting from kindergarten, all the way up to the high school.

The curriculum for Paradis Kindergarten is based on the Romanian National Curriculum for Kindergartens, but is heavily influenced by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) guidance from the UK. Together, they focus on holistic and multi-sensory approaches, equally addressing the mind, emotions and senses. It also includes the study of the English language every day.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative, especially in the Romanian context. In primary and lower secondary, both Romanian and English national curriculum (based on Cambridge) types of curriculum are offered to students, each complementing the other. Students are offered all subjects they have to study according to the Romanian curriculum, but also have classes following the Cambridge curriculum of mathematics, English and science. This blended curriculum is carefully structured and directed towards understanding the world as a whole, with its many interdependencies. The study of English and other languages is a key feature of the Paradis curriculum. The aim is to raise bilingual students - global citizens fluent in Romanian and English with the option to gain competence (up to A-level standard) in more languages (German, Spanish and French) as well.

PIC follows the Cambridge International Curriculum in high school, offering IGCSE courses for grades 9 and 10, and AS and A-level courses for grades 11 and 12. The broad curricular offer (20 subjects offered for currently less than 40 students) allows each student to identify with the help of their teachers exactly the perfect areas they are interested in and will succeed with. The fact that they are involved in their curriculum helps to make them responsible and committed, as they identify their path towards their future careers, themselves.

In the wider, non-academic curriculum, the school excels, offering a very wide range of clubs and activities where the students can have fun and develop values and skills at the same time. There are many artistic clubs, cross and co-curricular activities, trips, visits and camps. The range of clubs offered goes from kindergarten to high school and multiple areas from sports and outdoor educational activities (football, handball, yoga) to arts and music (guitar, drums, piano, band, canto-choir) and science related clubs (robotics, programming and astronomy) and media. There are opportunities for public speaking, debating, and participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Model United Nations and Round Square.

5.2 *Teaching and assessment*

The quality of teaching and assessment across the school is at least satisfactory with much good teaching seen.

Teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, cultural background, needs (including the needs of learners who do not speak English as a mother tongue) and prior attainments of the students. These are taken into account in the planning of lessons.

As the school staff suggest, teaching is a serious and fun process at PC, but ‘we have fun implementing it’. The educational process is inclusive, so that it does not undermine any of the British values of democracy, rule of law, respect for those having different beliefs and races. Every person’s opinion is listened to and respected and everybody has the right to vote for something to be implemented or changed, regardless of age and status. All people in school have to respect the law and comply with the regulations and rules, both local and international.

Teachers demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. In a kindergarten lesson, a range of good quality resources were used to develop the student’s fine motor skills. The students worked collaboratively, with the teacher moving from group to group, providing effective modelling and praise. Most students were well motivated and engaged throughout the practical activities. The teacher showed a good understanding of students’ individual capabilities. The positive student–teacher relationships supported and encouraged a safe and productive learning environment.

Teachers demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. In a Year 2 science lesson, this led to students making good use of key vocabulary, related to food groups. Prior knowledge was obtained through a lively group sorting activity which engaged students in the topic. Some skilled use of teacher questioning elicited a deeper understanding of the effect different foods have on the human body. Students were given positive feedback to their responses. Most students were motivated and generally engaged in the lesson.

Classroom resources are of good quality, quantity and range, and are generally used effectively. In kindergarten and primary, the classrooms have a reading corner, an English corner and a science corner. In some of the best lessons, teachers use excellent resources, even dressing up themselves (for example like a ladybird) to motivate and enthuse the students.

In lower secondary and high school, the classrooms are organised as labs and normally students change classrooms depending on the class they have - e.g. chemistry lessons in the science lab. IT equipment is important, and all classrooms have video projectors, plasma displays, access to laptops and internet access and wi-fi printers. Limited use was made of these resources, during the inspection.

In the less successful lessons, fewer practical activities and extended periods of teacher input were seen. Student engagement was more limited. Planning and delivery showed a less detailed understanding of how to create engaging learning experiences. There was minimal use of resources and lack of classroom management: students were less attentive.

The assessment policy in place specifies how often students are assessed and then how the information obtained through assessment is used to make an individual plan for each student. This leads to some level of certainty about progress made every year. The framework involves an initial assessment made at the beginning of the school year, after a period of settling back of two weeks; initial tests are analysed *with* the students and their parents, identifying the strengths and also any areas that need improvement.

Every two months, parents are sent feedback or given the chance to meet directly in individual meetings; initial assessment and also regular ongoing assessment is discussed within the teaching committees and the weekly meetings in departments. The outcomes of these meetings are further used for planning efficient teaching.

5.3 *Standards achieved by pupils*

Across the school students enjoy learning.

PIC sets high standards for academic and non-academic activities. Thus the students going to local and national contests and competitions often bring home prizes and they focus on preparing well for those contests. Academically, students are also well prepared when sitting the examinations - national and international. For example, the average grade for students in the National Examinations taken at the end of lower secondary is 9.29/10, significantly higher than the national averages, placing the school in the top 10 in the county.

The results for international exams are equally good, the average grade in Checkpoint being 5.4 out of 6 in mathematics and 5 out of 6 in science. Progression tests that are given at the end of each year for the Cambridge subjects allow the school to compare results with all Cambridge school results: they are consistently above average in all subjects and in all year groups.

There were very good results in IGCSE and AS exams in 2021. 73% of the grades for IGCSE were A* and A, while in AS exams in 2021, 95% of the grades were A: 88% of students got A in all subjects they sat.

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

The quality of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development at PIC meets the standard for BSO. It is excellent across the school.

Students develop their understanding and awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects through school assemblies, national celebrations, extra-curricular activities and formal and informal curriculum as they move through the school.

The school fosters a real feeling of togetherness and family amongst its staff and students. The students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and are given the opportunity to reflect on their actions through the school's '7 habits', which are displayed in all classrooms. Students are kind and considerate both around the school and in lessons. PIC enables students to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and self-knowledge through theatre productions and public speaking events.

Teachers at PIC aim to play a specific role in creating positive and trusting relationships, creating supportive classroom, free of blame where mistakes and apologies are accepted and relationships can be repaired, if needed. The restorative practice approach is used, and emphasizes taking responsibility for one's own actions by understanding how what one person does affects others. Students are able to discuss their behaviour in a non-threatening, no-blame context. The aim is for a wrong-doer to understand that what they did was wrong and not to repeat the mistake. Sanctions are applied only as a last resort.

Students are encouraged to contribute to the local and wider community. There is a strong focus on community service and social responsibility, through which students undertake voluntary projects to support the local area such as the *Tansa – Loc De Poveste* project. Students learn the importance of looking after animals from their school hedgehog and guinea pig. They take part in the *Leader in Me* program once a week which supports a strong educational and student leadership culture. A student council comprises of one leader elected from and by each class.

Cultural awareness in the school is excellent. Students show an appreciation, awareness and understanding for each other and wider cultures. Students are given the opportunity to celebrate diversity in a range of local and international festivals throughout the academic year. Students recognise and celebrate the connection between the British and Romanian royal families. They embark on learning journeys to discover the history of their city, Iasi and explore Romanian culture through traditional dances and pottery crafts. The school promotes an understanding of modern British life including UK attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect and democracy. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school.

7. Standard 3

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school meets the standard. The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students in PIC is good.

Provision and procedure for fire emergencies and evacuation at the school are in line with Romanian legislation. The fire emergency policy is available on the school's website. All classrooms display a map identifying the nearest emergency exit. Evacuation drills for fire and earthquakes take place once a semester with the most recent being on 22nd September 2021.

The school has a formal written behaviour policy and an anti-bullying policy which promote good behaviour and manners. These are available on the school website. The general behaviour of students observed during the inspection was very good.

A comprehensive safeguarding policy is published on the school website. The designated safeguarding lead and deputy designated safeguarding lead's photographs and contact details are clearly displayed around the school corridors and in classrooms. Students are appropriately supervised during the school day and duty rosters ensure this.

First aid is administered in a timely and competent manner. The school has effectively implemented a written first aid policy, available on the school website. There are over forty first aid trained staff members and a school doctor and nurse who split their time between both sites.

The site manager and cleaning staff ensure that the school site is kept clean throughout the day and that the outdoor areas are safe and well cared for. All visitors must sign in at reception and are issued with badges.

Admission and attendance registers conform to local regulatory requirements. They are appropriately maintained through the *Adversio* software platform.

8. Standard 4

The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The suitability of the proprietor and staff meets the standards required for BSO.

The origin of the school was the foundation of the Children's Paradis Association in 2005 by four individuals. Two remain active and as such have been verified regarding their identity, and qualifications; they have documents that certify that they are safe persons to work with children.

Information regarding identity / qualifications and references are presented when interviews take place. These documents remain in the personal file for those who are or will be employed in the school. The owner of the school carries out checks that they meet all local requirements, confirms their identity, right to work in the host country and suitability to work with children, including where applicable certificates of good conduct are provided whenever practicable, from the relevant embassies or police forces of all countries in which they have resided.

To make sure that the employees are suitable to work with children, the school checks all new employees on the Romanian criminal record and for behavioural integrity. In addition to the criminal record check, a certificate of behavioural integrity is required from the Romanian police. These two documents together certify that the potential employees are safe to work with children. Although in Romania, the taking up of references is not mandatory, the school started requiring references, almost two years ago.

The records can be checked in the personnel file and a Single Central Record details all adults in school, as well as in the register of minutes for the board administration meetings.

9. Standard 5

The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are good and meet BSO standards.

The classes are spread over two sites in Iasi, called Capou and Pacurari. The Capou building accommodates kindergarten classes; the Pacurari building accommodates primary, secondary and high school classes with one additional kindergarten classroom.

The school's accommodation supports students' learning effectively. All classrooms have a laptop and projector. Furniture is age-appropriate and ample space is provided for subject specific resources. There are specialist facilities for art, including ceramics, music technology and science. There are outdoor and indoor areas for physical education including an indoor gymnasium, an outdoor basketball court and playground equipment.

The school meets local building regulations. The school's maintenance team is effective in ensuring that the infrastructure remains in good condition. Water supply is tested regularly and meets local regulatory requirements. Sound insulation and acoustics allow effective teaching and communication. Lighting, heating and ventilation are appropriate for learning. Flooring throughout the site is well maintained and is in good condition.

The school hall is used for assemblies and dramatic productions. Washroom facilities are plentiful, hygienic and easily accessible. Medical facilities on both sites are good. Medicines and student records are secure. Two clinics are staffed by one doctor and one nurse. The food serving areas and the dining halls are hygienic and meet or exceed local regulations.

PIC is a stimulating and well-maintained place for students to learn and play. The classrooms are decorated with age-specific materials and resources; the hallways show the evolution of various projects and stimulate the involvement and curiosity of students. The school classrooms are of a good size and well resourced.

The school resources support learning very well. Each classroom has a wide range of teaching resources - IT facilities, visual materials, books and other practical resources. There are specialist rooms for art, science, computer science and music rooms. There are adequate outdoor facilities for playtime and ball games.

The school is attentive to external security and to health and safety, including cleaning and hygiene. One of the strong points is the fact that the restaurant is in the school building; The school is a well-ordered and stimulating environment, which contributes significantly to the students' enjoyment of their education and their intellectual curiosity. The school has suitable toilets and washing facilities on each floor.

10. Standard 6 Provision of information for parents, carers and others

PIC values its strong relationships with parents and the wider community – it is a strength of the school.

The school's details and name of the college director are appropriately posted on the website. In addition, key policies including behaviour, admission, safeguarding, health and safety, and anti-bullying are readily available to parents. Details of the complaints policy and procedures are also on the website.

The school operates an open-door policy. Parents have daily access to the college director and class teachers. Written reports outlining student progress, attainment and wellbeing are provided each semester. There are two parent teacher meetings during the year and the students attend the first half of these meetings to share their learning goals with their parents. Social media and emails keep parents updated on the life of the school and the school holds regular parent information evenings.

The focus group of parents reported that the school is quick to respond with appropriate action when issues are raised. They are very happy with the school and the provision made for their children. They also suggested that they are delighted with the broad range of after-school clubs on offer. Parents are pleased with the way in which their children learn to accepting of others and tolerant of differences.

PIC values parents as key stakeholders in their children's education. Parents are invited to participate in school concerts, plays, grandparents' day and other celebrations throughout the school year. Parents and students stated that there is a real feeling of community within the school. In addition, the Paradis project grew due to the desire of the parents, because they loved the project they wanted continuity for their children in the same educational setting.

PIC does not promote itself through advertising materials or media ads. The number of students roll has increased due to word-of-mouth. The whole Paradis team is very open in communicating with parents, and parents equally involved, back. Even during the pandemic, when face-to-face meetings were not possible, the school communicated a lot on *Whatsapp* groups, Zoom calls and more recently, on the *Adservio* platform.

There is a parent advisory council in the school, which includes representatives of parents from each class, democratically elected. Usually meetings take place once a semester, and these meetings are attended by the director of Paradis College. Meetings can take place even more often, if deemed necessary. There are many

projects with parents such as Father's Day, Thanksgiving, Family Day, Grandparents' Day, Easter Workshops, Christmas Workshops.

11. *Standard 7*

The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling complaints meets BSO standards.

The complaints policy is available to all parents, via the school website and/or via the school administrators. It has not been used for at least 18 months. This is due in great part to the close communication and positive relationships between school and parents.

The policy sets out clear time scales for the management of a complaint and it allows for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis. Where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph, it allows for a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing.

Where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in writing, the PIC policy makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one panel member would be independent of the management and running of the school. At such a panel meeting, the complainant would be expected to attend and could be accompanied if they wished.

A copy of any panel findings and recommendations would be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy would be kept securely on the school premises by the proprietor/the head teacher. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints would be kept confidential except where local legal requirements permit access.

12. *Standard 8* *Leadership and management of the school*

The quality of leadership and management of the school meets the standard: some aspects are good.

The ethos and values of the school are very evident in the day to day life of students and staff. The aims and vision of PIC are clearly set out on the website and in school publications; they are also very evident throughout the school in corridors and displays. The aims and vision are reiterated by school leaders and staff informally and formally in meetings.

There is no formal governance structure, as the owner is also the college director of the school. She provides both careful and effective oversight of the school alongside inspirational leadership. Her thorough knowledge of the school, its staff, parents and students ensures a good understanding of the school's needs. A key strength of the school is her passion and vision. She engenders great loyalty from her staff, the students and the parents. Teachers and administrators are highly supportive of her. There is little depth however, in terms of senior or middle leadership.

There is a rolling school development plan that is focused on realising the aims and raising standards further. The educational experience for students is the prime focus. Decisions on the programme of events, trips and other educational experiences are only made in light of the school aims and vision.

There is also an annual operational plan that sets out priorities for the academic year. This is kept under review to ensure priorities are followed through or any adjustments made.

Professional development of staff is a key priority for PIC. A member of the senior team (who runs a committee with this task) is tasked with researching and promoting professional development for all. There is a system of internal mentoring for each member of the teaching staff, which is effective. Support staff also receive appropriate training and opportunities to develop further. The college director, director of learning and teacher mentors undertake regular individual observations of teaching.

A key feature for teacher professional development is the system of regular 'demonstration lessons' where groups of staff observe a colleague's lesson and then have a professional development discussion about it - this is reported to be a powerful mechanism not only for discussing issues of pedagogical practice but also for developing a sense of common purpose and shared culture. The fact that it is announced and prepared for specially, may limit its usefulness in some respects, however.

As part of the annual review of staff, all teachers fill in a self-evaluation form (following the format laid down by Romanian education practice) that is signed off by relevant key staff, and formally by the leadership. This form identifies areas of strength and for development. Where a professional development need is identified, for example, this will be followed up to ensure appropriate training/experience/mentoring is put in place.

School routines are well-established and regular staff meetings ensure that changes to such routines can be accommodated and implemented. As responsibility for policy areas is usually distributed widely, many staff will have had involvement in policy development as a matter of course. However, in line with the open culture of the school, all staff are consulted on any major revision.