



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection Report

Researchers Schoolhouse

**Cluj-Napoca
Romania**

Date 14th – 16th December 2021
Inspection number 20211214

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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, all teachers were observed in action. School documentation and policies were analysed, and data reviewed. Students' workbooks were scrutinised. Discussions were held with the staff, the management team, a range of teachers, parents and groups of students. Two and a half school days were monitored. Covid-19 precautions were observed.

The inspector at the Researchers Schoolhouse was Dr Mark Evans, Chief Inspector for Penta International.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The Researchers Schoolhouse (RS) meets all standards for British Schools Overseas.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its 75 students. Set up by two experienced teachers, RS is a young organisation that has high aspirations. The students are well known to staff and each is supported in an appropriate and very individualised manner. Students' behaviour is good and they enjoy being at school. Parents and students alike are very supportive of the school.

3.1 What the school does well

RS has many strengths including:

- a supportive, based on the meeting the needs of all students
- passionate and committed owners/principals
- competent and creative teachers
- happy students
- good personal development of the students
- strong relationships between the teachers, students and parents
- positive relationships between teachers and students

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Plan and implement ways to improve further the quality of learning and teaching, including peer observations and sharing behaviour management techniques.
- Review the amount of time that is spent on directed learning, as compared to play-based learning
- Consider a more overt approach to the teaching of phonics

4. The context of the school

Full name of school	Researchers Schoolhouse		
Address	School: Trifoiului Street, Nr.12 Kindergarten: Antonio Gaudi Street, Nr. 49 Cluj Napoca, Cluj County Romania		
Main telephone #	+40-743 671 673 +40-742 528 261		
Website	www.researchersschoolhouse.com		
Email	contact@researchersschoolhouse.com		
Principals	Andra Ciorba Cristina Bajdechi		
Owners	Andra Ciorba Cristina Bajdechi		
Age range	2 – 7 years		
Number of students	Total = 71	Boys = 46	Girls = 25
Student numbers by age on date of entry	(0-2 years) 19	(3-5 years) 40	(6-11 years) 12
	(12-16 years) 0	(17-18 years) 0	(18+ years) 0
Total number of part-time students	0		

RS is a primary school with the following classes:

- Bumble bees, 2 years old, 12 students
- Foxes, 3 years old, 9 students
- Cats, 4 years old, 12 students
- Elephants, rising 5 years, 10 students
- Year 1, 13 students
- Year 2, 15 students

The school is split into two sites: the youngest XX classes are in a separate building 10 minutes away from the main site.

4.1 British nature of the school

RS has been implementing the National British Curriculum for Key Stage (KS) 1 since 2018; this year, the school has started implementing it for the Early Years and Foundation Stage too. Styles of teaching and learning are informed by UK best practice: staff professional development is used to develop and encourage a consistent approach .

The structure of the school year for KS1 is specifically based on practice of British schools. The year is divided into 3 terms and each term into two half terms, making a total of 180 school days.

2021 brought some changes regarding policies and procedures, to align them more closely with UK norms. The school's child protection policy, complaints procedure, and the promoting of positive behaviour procedure, are all based on best British practice.

The main language of communication at RS is English, both during lessons and free play.

5. *Standard 1*

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided at RS is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the BSO standards framework.

5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum at RS is good: there is a strong emphasis on learning through play, especially in the Early Years. The school has developed its own approach to planning, which interlinks English curriculum standards, Romanian requirements, the Waldorf philosophy and the UNICEF second target of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The school uses the National Curriculum of England suitable for all ages (Key Stage 1 and the Early Years and Foundation Stage). This is used to underpin the school's innovative schemes of work, which are modules called 'ages of study'. This is a concept suggested by Rudolf Steiner in his Waldorf pedagogy. Teachers at RS believe that working in this manner, students are given the opportunity to focus on specific subjects for long periods of time, and to and better assimilate new concepts.

The school provides 7 ages in kindergarten and 9 ages in school:

1. personal, social and emotional development
2. geography, dance and music
3. mathematics, painting and drawing
4. English, literacy and drama
5. science
6. Romanian language
7. history and handmade arts
8. financial education (only in school)
9. computing (only in school)

In the kindergarten, at the end of every block, the students have one week of free play where the focus is solely on connecting with the teachers and their peers. RS encourages creative teaching and part of this is the use of cross-curricular activities; this supports the vision of joined-up learning. Planning documents outline the learning outcomes which are important in the implementation of teaching. At the same time it allows the teachers to have the freedom of choosing the support materials and contents.

Students receive full-time supervised education which gives them experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. All are provided with extensive opportunities to acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. Personal, social, health and economic education, at an age-appropriate level, are implemented every week. These lessons encourage respect for other people, pay attention to people's different characteristics and promote tolerance and understanding.

The school appropriately believes that it is important for its students to have a proper knowledge of their native language. Thus elements from the Romanian National Curriculum are additionally included, specifically regarding the development of speech, reading and writing. Both the main school and the kindergarten addressing this throughout special ages of study dedicated only to mother tongue.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching across the school is good: assessment is satisfactory and good practice evident in many classrooms.

The students enrolled in the Early Years programme benefit from many practical activities organised well by the teachers. The approach taken is a blend of traditional elements, with Montessori and Waldorf ideas, resources and materials. Many teachers use this blended approach very well.

All teachers worked together to create the annual planning for this school year. Once it was outlined, each teacher planned the content for each week having in mind the age particularities for their group age.

Every teacher plans ahead, completing a weekly plan which is presented to parents on Sunday afternoons through the RS Facebook group. The teaching day in Kindergarten starts with circle time. Each new activity starts with an element of surprise: this keeps the students engaged and entertained, and maximises the opportunities for learning. For example, the Elephants class in kindergarten were presented with an exciting design and painting activity, using a glass jar, and creating a Christmas scene. The teacher handled this very well.

The teachers believe and demonstrate that they are aware that whole group activities are important even from a young age, as they teach students about patience, taking turns and public speaking. Each main activity is divided into two parts, one that is frontal, thus involving the whole group and one that is individual, thus encouraging each student to work independently and master new skills. Many teachers use innovative ideas to support this: for example, the Year 2 students' literacy lesson included a session in the library, during which they read aloud to their favourite soft toy. The teacher and two learning assistants provided strong support for the students in the group with special education needs.

At the end of each week, teachers fill in the progress tracking sheet for that particular class and age. The school uses its own feedback form, a progress summary which includes British curriculum concepts. The elements that these feedback forms include refer to stage bands (*beginning, within, secure*) and 'next steps to be taken'

to support learning and development. Parents are kept aware of their child's progress through descriptive feedback forms three times each school year.

At school, the timetable is different each week, according to the age of study being used. There are weekly meetings between the headteacher and the main teachers to discuss the following age, the activities, the objectives and to evaluate children for the previous age. The teachers plan ahead their weekly activities according to the lesson objectives division. Each teacher has one or two objectives to follow. This way all objectives (which are in the schemes of work) are covered and the activities are focussed.

The week always starts with an assembly where the theme of the new study age is presented and where four children from each year group are chosen to be The Leader, The Checker, The Helper and The Mediator. These four roles are the school's way of teaching responsibility and to encourage them to pay attention to details, get involved and work as a team. They wear a special badge for the entire week.

Mondays continue with an activity dedicated to the students' emotional development, on theme chosen bearing in mind the challenges that they might face. There has been focus on social abilities, on how to face a refusal from a peer, bullying and how much harm it can do, how to be a flexible thinker and what strategies to use when one is troubled.

Both year groups in the main school have regular library classes where students are encouraged to read a book of their choice. Meanwhile, the main teacher practises reading aloud, taking children one by one, to read given words or lines, depending on the age group.

5.3 *Standards achieved by students*

RS students make at least satisfactory progress. As there are so few in the school, it is not possible to make specific judgements in terms of progress, but the school monitors each student carefully.

Students are energetic, excited and capable in their learning. They respond well to new opportunities and the older students take responsibility for their learning.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the learners at RS is satisfactory and meets the BSO standard.

Students develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence, building their understanding of right and wrong, and learning to respect rules. The students understand that they must accept responsibility for their own behaviour and develop understanding of how they can contribute positively to the class and school communities.

The core values of the school are modelled effectively by the staff. Staff actively promote an environment built on positive education. The school does not use specific rewards or punishments: instead, adults reinforce the idea of consequences specific to each group age. There is a strong focus on the personal development of the students, in keeping with the school aim of wholesome education of the individual. Both in school and kindergarten, the staff include special ages which specifically cover personal and social growth. In addition, every school week begins with an assembly-like activity that addresses this topic.

Ever since we began building our community, we included children with Down Syndrome in every group. This teaches children and parents about the importance of inclusion, acceptance and friendship.

Before the pandemic, the school organises summer brunches for the whole community, to celebrate the end of the school year. This kind of social event supports social and cultural development. In Spring 2021, RS commenced on a new programme called *Community Bonding* with the help of teachers from an adventure education company. The programme consists of spending a weekend in different locations and getting to know one another better. In addition the school has teacher initiated organised day trips for children, to places such as the Faget Forest. Students learned how to use a compass, how to make fire, how to react in case of minor injuries, the importance of first aid, as well as developing personally. Other half day trips to different locations near the city like the Village Museum, Dinosaur Expo, Horse Farm, the Zoologic Museum etc.

The school has strong links to local charities, and facilitates the collection of non-perishable food for different organisations, for example the Paediatric Oncology department at *Petrina Rose*, and the *Misionarii Padre Pios*, teaching students the importance of helping the less fortunate ones.

7. Standard 3

The welfare, health and safety of the students

RS meets the standard required for BSO. A number of minor health and safety hazards were discussed with the principals.

The senior team work hard to ensure the safety of all students and staff on both sites. The school is compliant with written policies and procedures, which are regularly reviewed and updated. RS meets local fire and other safety regulations. A ration of 1 adult to 5 children is maintained at all times.

The school makes good use of the nurse, who visits twice a week. Suitable precautions have been introduced since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Every morning upon entering the premises the temperature of the students is taken and logged. If there are signs of illness throughout the day, the parents are immediately informed: depending on the symptoms they are asked to pick the child up before the end of school day. The school has a strict policy regarding high temperature/fever. Once the child has a high temperature, s/he can return to school only after 24 hours have elapsed without any medicine or high temperature.

The school has a very transparent policy about informing parents of any cases of Covid-19 or other health issues. Fortunately there have been only a few parents that tested positive for Covid-19. They followed the national protocol, staying in quarantine for two weeks. In this situation, the class teacher prepared materials and activities for the children to do at home. Teachers are tested every Monday morning before meeting the children. Parents are asked to test their children at the beginning of every week.

There are first-aid designated teachers in both centres, as well as appropriate first-aid kits for minor injuries.

All staff contribute to the day-to-day safety of the students through an effective collaborative approach. Embedded structures are in place to ensure that all security and safety procedures are adhered to. Attendance registers are completed electronically each day, using *kinderpedia*, and there is a suitable admission register.

RS has an engaging and exciting learning atmosphere. It is clear that all enjoy working and learning in this school community, even if sometimes a very small number of the youngest students take a little time to settle. There is a happy and supportive feel across all ages of the school.

8. Standard 4

The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school was set up and is owned by two experienced teachers. Their activity started with workshops for toddlers: they were then encouraged by the parents that attended these with their children, and so decided to broaden the programme. Thus the kindergarten was started. The school site followed along a similar pattern.

There are rigorous safe recruitment policies and processes in place that meet BSO standards. All employees have employment records. These are either in physical or digital format: the details are recorded in a single centrally held record. Staff have a criminal check that is issued by the police in the area where each person lives.

The school focuses on frequent professional development; therefore all teachers have at least 3 professional development courses each year and are encouraged them to take online courses that the school pays for. The assistant teachers are encouraged to read psychology and parenting books. These are then discussed in regular meetings and during professional development days (called Baker Days). We also have a Facebook Group for staff where all can post activity ideas and helpful articles.

The safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures follow British legislation, as well that of the host country and the school group. No temporary or supply staff are used at RS.

9. Standard 5

The premises and accommodation

All aspects of the BSO standards are met. The school premises at both sites and related facilities provide satisfactory physical learning environments which meet the needs of students, including those with special educational needs. There are appropriate security arrangements. The environment is safe for its students and staff.

The building complies with local regulations and is well-maintained. Resources, fixtures, fittings and furniture match students' educational needs, are of sound quality and are in satisfactory condition. Gender specific toilet and washing facilities are provided and are cleaned on a regular basis. Staff and visitors have separate designated washroom facilities. The wash basins in all toilets have cold and hot running water. The temperature of water in these facilities does not pose a risk of scalding to users. Drainage systems for the dispersal of waste and surface water are suitable.

There is good lighting in most rooms. The school is well ventilated and the temperature is controlled by air-conditioning throughout the building. Adequate sources of drinking water are available and in compliance with local regulations. Effective staff timetabling ensures that the use of available outdoor spaces is maximised for learning and play. Suitable indoor and outdoor space ensures space for physical education and games which are key parts of the curriculum. The students enjoy the areas even when they are muddy and full of leaves!

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is satisfactory, and meets the BSO standard. A recent written survey of parents confirmed strong support for the school.

The school site and the kindergarten communicate with the parents over any and all health issues, as well as academic progress. Even a change in a student's mood or behaviour will be reported and discussed. There is a specific Facebook messenger group for each individual child. The members of these messenger groups consist of both parents, group teacher, assistant teacher and head of school or kindergarten. The app *Kinderpedia* is used to inform parents about the amount of food eaten during the day and (for those appropriate) amount of time slept.

There is transparent, honest and open communication with parents regarding all aspects of school life. There is a closed Facebook group, only for our parents, which the staff use as the main tool of communication along with the Facebook Messenger app and the *Kinderpedia* App. Teachers post photos and videos from daily activities, each day. Every Sunday afternoon, the main teachers of both centres post their weekly planning on a shared drive, which allows parents to keep track of children's learning process.

All policies, procedures, the school vision and mission statement are easily accessed by the parents using the given drive links. The RS website is work in progress and the school plans to include all relevant information.

Any concerns regarding individual students are addressed immediately through the messenger individual groups. In case of a health emergency, the parents are informed by phone. Whenever necessary, both teachers and/or parents can ask for a private meeting to discuss a particular child.

Information regarding the academic progress is also provided regularly. There are 3 progress summary feedbacks every school year.

Each Spring, the school organises meetings with kindergarten parents in which the 'main school' offer is outlined. Parents are also informed about the structure of the following school year as well as any changes in fees and taxes.

11. Standard 7

The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school now has a clear complaints and concerns policy that includes the BSO requirements. The policy is sent to parents on admission. There is also an option for parents to request a call or a meeting, highlighting the open door ethos the school actively encourages.

The RS community is based on open and transparent relationships with the parents. The school believes, and parents confirm that without an active involvement on both sides, it is less likely that development of the child will be as successful as it might.

Parents are encouraged to inform senior staff regarding any concerns they might have regarding school life. They can use the group message system implemented in school and KG. The system facilitates the communication between teachers and parents.

However, if parents prefer to address the issues directly, they can ask for a meeting with the class teacher / assistant teacher / head of school/kindergarten.

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

Leadership and management of the school are good.

The principals/owners have a strong vision and they are passionate about their endeavour, both setting up the school and in developing it further. They are well supported by teachers and other staff: the school is still small and thus there is as yet, very limited middle management to help to secure the vision.

The owners ensure that staff demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles, so that the BSO standards are met consistently. Professional development is regular and seen as important.

Although one owner covers the school site and the other covers the kindergarten site, they are jointly involved and informed of any issues concerning both. They are successful in seeing their main focus as being awareness of everything that happens throughout a school day, as well as having a deep knowledge of every child enrolled in the community. If a parents for a meeting with a teacher, one or other of the leaders is always present.

Both leaders are class teachers too, and rightly pride themselves being strong practitioners. They lead by example, setting teaching standards for the other teachers. However, this limits opportunities for lesson observations, or the chance to facilities peer observations.

For teachers, staff turnover is low, though there is more change at the assistant teacher level. The RS leaders were successful in recruiting and retaining staff right from the beginning of the organisation: these staff are proud to be part of the organisation.