



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

**Inspection report on  
The English College in  
Prague  
Czech Republic**

12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Penta International  
is a Department of Education approved inspection provider

*This inspection was conducted against the standards introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) for British schools overseas. These standards are based on those for independent schools in England.*

*To be recognised by the Department for Education, a British School Overseas must have an inspection report which shows that their performance against all the standards is at least satisfactory. This reflects the standards required for continuing registration as a school in England. Schools meeting the standards will have their inspection reports published on the Department's website and will be registered on Edubase.*

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## Key contextual factors

The English College in Prague is a co-educational school, providing a British-style education for Czech and international students from the age of 12 to 19 years. The school was founded in September 1994 after the Velvet Revolution, with HRH Prince Charles and Václav Havel as Patrons. It builds on the success of the Prague English Grammar School which was founded in 1927 and ran intermittently until 1954.

The College is licensed under the jurisdiction of the Czech Ministry of Education, as well as being a member of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) which is based in the UK.

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

There are 363 students, representing 26 nationalities. There are slightly more girls than boys, the gender split being 53:47. More than 62% of the students are Czech. The other larger groupings by nationality are Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese and British. More than 90% of students have a native language other than English.

The youngest students at the College are 12 years old and are placed in Year 1 - the equivalent of Year 8 in the UK. All entrants from Year 1 and above sit an entrance test to establish their ability to access the curriculum. For the Czech Curricular programme, students are assessed in English, mathematics and Czech, and sit a non-verbal reasoning test; for the International Curricular programme, students sit papers in English and mathematics, as well as a non-verbal reasoning test.

In Year 1, there is a strong focus on the English language, through a curriculum of English, Czech, mathematics, science, history, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), French/German, music, art, drama, physical education (PE) and Personal, Social and Moral Education (PSME). Students with a Czech background but limited Czech language ability are offered additional Czech lessons.

Students on the international programme can join the College in either Year 1 or Year 2 depending on their level of English in the entrance examination.

All students are required to study the following subjects, which are taught together and lead to four or five IGCSEs: English, mathematics, French/German/Spanish, art/drama/ICT/music, PE, and/or PSME. Students on Programme A also study Czech, combined science (biology, physics and chemistry), geography, history, arts and ICT, although they do not take IGCSEs in these subjects. This satisfies the requirements of the Czech Ministry so students on this programme receive a state subsidy towards the cost of their education.

Students on Programme B study four or five more IGCSE courses (a total of nine or ten IGCSEs in all) and have a choice from biology, chemistry, Czech (not an IGCSE), geography, German (for beginners), global perspectives, history, physics and Russian (for beginners.) They must choose at least one science and at least one humanity.

Students on both the International and Czech Programmes follow a course of study which leads to the IB Diploma qualification. They can opt for a *Maturita* route which requires the study of Czech Language and Literature at IB Higher level (and from 2013 a modern language other than Czech, English and PE) and leads to qualification in both the IB and Czech *Maturita*. Alternatively, they may opt for a non-*Maturita* route which does not require the study of the Czech language, but leads to qualification only in the IB Diploma.

The agreement that allows for both *Maturita* and IB holds until at least 2014. The College is currently negotiating its extension with the Czech Ministry of Education.

For students whose native language is neither Czech nor English, the College offers teaching in any native languages for which a teacher can be found. This has included in the past Chinese, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Urdu and Vietnamese.

Period 1 starts at 08:15 and the last lesson finishes at 15:55. There is a wide range of extracurricular activities offered, during the day and after school.

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

The Headmaster has been in post for 3 years. He is supported by a leadership team which includes the Deputy Head (Academic), Deputy Head (Pastoral) and the Business and Operations Manager.

## British nature of the school

The College aims to provide the best aspects of an English medium education in a suitable Czech context. As a member of HMC, it is part of a group which represents the Heads of over 250 of the leading independent schools in the United Kingdom. The language of the classroom is English; much of the educational terminology used derives from the UK.

Over 56% of the students in 2010 went on the study in the UK.

Over 82% of teaching staff (excluding those who teach in Czech) are British nationals or native English speakers with British qualifications who have taught in the UK, or have equivalent qualifications.

The English National Curriculum forms part of the basis for the school's curriculum, along with the Czech national requirements, leading to IGCSE. After Year 4, students study within the IB Programme.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of curriculum and extra-curricular activities including drama, music, sports and art. A house system and a student council provide further enrichment opportunities. Field trips to support learning are undertaken each year and are an important part of the curriculum.

Parents are supportive of the British nature of the College. A survey suggested that over 97% who responded, believe that there are good links with the UK and the students are well prepared for studying in the UK, if relevant.

## 1. The quality of education provided by the school

### The curriculum

The quality of curricular provision is excellent. It makes a significant contribution to the students' learning and achievements, in line with the College's aims to provide a broad and stimulating curriculum that challenges every student.

The English College in Prague provides a broad and balanced curriculum supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. There is a clearly stated vision: "Education is not about filling empty vessels, it is about lighting fires".

The College aims to deliver a British style of Education to mainly Czech, but also other foreign students. This gives the College a unique position within the Czech Republic and ensures the key features of both the UK and Czech curricular expectations are well met. The College has special permission from the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Training to organise and deliver a curriculum that meets national requirements, and also reflects the strengths of the UK educational system.

The College follows the national curriculum for England, adapted to reflect the abilities of the students and to complement key features of the Czech curriculum. Teachers evaluate the curriculum and adjust it as required, so teaching is lively, vibrant and often practical. For example, a strength of the science teaching is the high level of practical activities in chemistry and biology lessons. In many lessons, students are supported and encouraged to express and develop their own ideas and to take a responsibility for their learning.

The curriculum focus in the first three or four years is the IGCSE. In the first year, students are introduced to the curriculum and in the third and fourth years, IGCSE examinations are taken. Previously students in the fourth year took a preparation course to study for the IB diploma, but 2011/12 is the last year that this will happen. Along with finishing IB in year 6, students qualify for the Czech *Maturita*. This is a legal document that recognises completion of secondary education and provides the opportunity to enter those Czech universities that do not recognise the IB alone.

The consistency of curriculum planning is evident in all subject areas. The department handbooks give clear educational guidance. Members of staff identify and exploit opportunities for students to be involved in peer group- and self-assessment, to evaluate and identify their

own targets for improved attainment. Teachers encourage a high level of discussion activities that encourage students to be reflective learners who value and respect the ideas of others. The focus on discussion in planned activities also plays a significant role in enhancing the high levels of spoken English displayed by many students. This encourages intellectual curiosity and independence, and prepares the students to be lifelong learners.

The curriculum is flexibly adapted to support the needs of students of all ages and aptitudes. Teachers are aware of individual students' education needs and ensure planning clearly provides a range of differentiated learning objectives. Learning support is effective within the school and aims to enable teachers to address the range of learning needs of all students. Students value the support they are given, and recognise the important contribution all members of staff make in their development.

The curriculum is extended by a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities and visits both within the school day and as 'extras'. There is a school band and choir, and opportunities for students to take part in musical events. Sporting provision is good, including team sports such as football, hockey, basketball, cross country skiing and ice skating. Teachers provide a good range of extra-curricular activities and the quality of creative work is a strength of the College. The wider community support and celebrate the outstanding quality of drama achieved by the College's students: outsiders commented that the College is "leading the way" for English language theatre in Prague.

## The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good: it is often excellent. Students acquire new knowledge with enthusiasm, and make progress in line with their ability. In the best lessons, teachers inspire through outstanding technical knowledge and a real passion for their subject.

Lessons are very well planned. There is a notable emphasis on promoting a sense of independence and responsibility in students. For example, in drama, students lead production meetings, make difficult personnel decisions, and have often emotional creative discussions within a context that is led, supported and facilitated by the teacher. The planning and implementation that allows this high degree of mature learning are outstanding. Teachers are often very effective in encouraging students to apply intellectual, physical or creative efforts, for example in art, Czech, PE and science. Similarly, in mathematics and ICT, students frequently demonstrated a genuine interest in their work and a real desire to think and learn for themselves. For example, this was encouraged very effectively by the teachers when working on golden rectangles, trigonometric identities and the VLOOKUP function.

In the best lessons, there is a wide variety of teaching methods utilised, which lead to brisk pace and good learning. There are many opportunities to learn collaboratively, in Czech, French and science for instance. Styles of teaching used equip students well with the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to enter, or re-enter the UK educational system at an appropriate level, if that is needed. More than 95% of parents were positive about this; 95% also suggested that student engagement and attitude to learning was strong.

On some occasions, in some classrooms, opportunities to develop students' interests further are missed: some displays are prosaic and uninspiring, for example. In other classrooms, there are exciting visual stimuli provided, as in English, art and economics, in which the work displayed is a real part of the learning experience. In chemistry for example, it is clear that students are shown that the classroom is a laboratory where written work occasionally happens, rather than the other way around. The emphasis is on the science, and encouraging students to feel the excitement of the subject.

Teachers show a respect for their students that is effective in promoting a strong sense of self-worth in the learners. High – sometimes very high – expectations lead to excitement and trust. All combines to create a community of learning that is safe enough to make mistakes, but tough enough to encourage high attainment.

Standards of attainment are high. IB results are above world averages in nearly all subjects; classroom observation and scrutiny of students' workbooks in lessons concur in suggesting strong academic outcomes.

All teachers demonstrated a sound understanding of the aptitudes, cultural background, learning needs and prior attainments of the students. The least effective lessons however, were not successful in igniting enthusiasm in students, so that the teaching, whilst functional, was dull. This fails to take advantage of the positive attitude to learning exhibited by most of the students. However in all appropriate lessons, there was a very effective emphasis on the use of the English language. In some subjects, this was a real strength, for example in English, where expectations were high in both the planned lesson and in the displays of literature and text around the classroom.

Classroom resources are satisfactory, with a sound quality, quantity and range. In the best lessons, resources including ICT are used very effectively to drive learning. In both psychology and history, good use was made of video clips. In a history lesson in Year 3, the clips prompted a high level discussion of some of the characteristics of the United States of America in the 1920s, and comparisons with the Czech Republic both recently and currently.

Assessment systems are good, and recent modifications to the reporting process are excellent. Students are graded separately for attainment and for effort. These grades are discussed with the relevant house tutor, and comparisons made. This gives the tracking of students' progress a strong basis in fact.

## **2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They demonstrate good social skills through their participation in group and paired activities in lessons. Indeed, a key feature of the College is the very strong relationships students demonstrate towards each other. Their excellent cultural development is a strength that is shown throughout the curriculum. Students have the opportunity to develop well culturally and in particular develop a strong appreciation of their own culture. There are many opportunities to develop cultural awareness, including visits within Prague, and to other locations nationally and internationally.

The strength of the relationships and the positive atmosphere at the College enhance the students' confidence. Thus they have a well-developed awareness of their own identity. The close ties between the Czech home culture and the international experience delivered through the curriculum, ensures each student has a strong recognition of their individual worth. Students are well aware of right and wrong: they often demonstrate a strong set of beliefs centred on fairness and justice. The College encourages and expects students to behave responsibly, and to show initiative. There are many examples where students have instigated projects as a contribution to school and community life, including charitable activities. Students have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship, in the Czech Republic, in the UK and internationally

Students have a good awareness of how to keep healthy. They participate in sporting activities and many display a high level of independence and responsibility. Students feel very safe and are aware of safety rules. They clearly enjoy their education and they talk enthusiastically about their college. They enjoy a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including performing and creative arts, academic and sporting activities.

Teachers at the College promote and model positive attitudes towards tolerance, democracy, respect for freedom of expression and human rights: the students show strong knowledge and understanding of this, including the differences between the UK and the Czech Republic.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The care, guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Pastoral care is a key focus and a major reason why attendance is so high. The standard of behaviour within the school is outstanding.

Through a clear system of delegation, teachers, form tutors and senior tutors (housemasters and housemistresses) ensure a high level of support and guidance that is appropriately managed. The management of these systems is closely monitored and supported to ensure highly effective outcomes. There is good, focused assistance for individuals who are in danger of underachieving or who are having difficulties adapting to school life or face personal challenges.

The College ensures that students are well inducted for the start of Year 1, and this is implemented by both staff and students. Students are also well supported prior to leaving at the end of Year 6. Throughout their time in College, students receive good guidance for choosing their optional subjects and the career implications of making these choices.

The College's effective analysis of attendance, behaviour and achievement identifies vulnerable groups and ensures that all learners make good progress. Procedures are in place to ensure the safeguarding and health and safety of students. New staff are inducted into the College well. They are made fully aware of all policies relating to health and safety through a detailed staff handbook. The College ensures all issues regarding first aid and fire safety meet fully the local regulatory requirements.

Academic guidance is good and staff give sound advice on how students can improve. Students are supported well throughout their time at the College, and suitable records are maintained to support each student's needs.

Students feel safe in College. They report that members of staff deal well with any instances of bullying. Students say that teachers care for them and they receive very good pastoral support. They are particularly pleased with the work the College does when they arrive in Year 1 and the way in which the curriculum is adapted to help the induction of some students who benefit from extra support.

The students are very well prepared for the next phase of their education, and the vast majority move onto the university of their choice, mainly in the UK (including Oxford, Cambridge, London and St Andrews), or in the Czech Republic.

## **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The English College in Prague was co-founded and supported by The English College Foundation. The Foundation is a registered charity that raises funds and enables the College to provide a quality education based on the best British and international practice.

Prior to confirming the appointment of staff to work at the College (including volunteers), appropriate checks are carried out to confirm their identity, their medical fitness, and to establish that they have a right to work in the Czech Republic. References are taken up to confirm previous employment history, character and, where appropriate, qualifications.

Where possible and appropriate, checks on the suitability of potential teaching staff to work with children, including a UK enhanced criminal record check, are made. Where this is not possible before appointment, it is carried out as soon as is practicable afterwards, with satisfactory checks being a condition of employment.

A comprehensive file detailing all staff and volunteers who currently work in the school is maintained. Staff are well qualified, experienced and appropriately deployed.

## 5. The premises and accommodation

The quality of the premises and educational accommodation for securing the health and safety of all students is good

The College confirms that all local regulations are met regarding services i.e. power, water and drainage. The College's security arrangements are good. Students entering and leaving the College do so through the 'big blue doors' seen by students as an iconic feature of the building.

The main building is only used by the College, however the annexe used by years 5 and 6 is in an office building a few minutes' walk away. The health and safety of the students are carefully safeguarded and the annexe is organised in a way that does not interrupt the education of the students.

The College buildings are well maintained with adequate heating and double glazed windows.

Emergency access is well signed with detailed exit routes marked on all floors. The College has rented the building from the local government until 2025 and is responsible for day to day maintenance. The College is fit for purpose. The separate washrooms on each floor for boys and girls have recently been renovated to a high standard.

Students who are ill have access to the pastoral room. Two members of staff have advanced first aid certificates. The College is a minute's walk from the local hospital.

A good variety of food is served in the canteen on the ground floor. The canteen facilities are hygienic and the environment is bright and airy. All classrooms are clean and well maintained with adequate heating and ventilation.

A new art room and chemistry laboratory have recently been built, with plans for two biology labs to follow. The College has plans to develop the library into a learning centre, possibly including a mezzanine floor for computers. Other renovation plans include the modernising of the student cloakroom area on the ground floor to build an atrium and to convert an annex attached to the main building into an extended drama and music area.

The outside space provided is limited, due to the location of the College. Students have access to basketball, space for volleyball/football and a small garden area at the front of the College at break times. The College does not have sports provision on site, and students travel 10 minutes on the tram to the local stadium: these facilities are excellent.

## **6. The provision of information for parents, carers and others**

The College provides parents with correspondence details of the headteacher and governors through the school web site and the parents' annual handbook. The College provides a statement of the ethos and aims for parents. It ensures that all policies concerning parents, i.e. the discipline and admissions policies, are available and easily accessible.

The parents' annual handbook and the website provides concise and detailed information on all relevant areas of college life, including policies and particulars of the curriculum. Parents are able to have access to details of past academic performance, including the results of any public examinations and information on universities attended by College leavers.

Parents have access to the College's complaints procedures and appropriate details on staff numbers and qualifications. Following this inspection, the College will make available a copy of the report to parents either electronically or in paper format.

Written reports are provided to parents twice a year on the progress of students and are detailed and informative. They provide information on current progress, grades and attainment of the student and also targets for improvement and challenge.

College staff and governors have been very helpful and open with requests for information in connection with this British Schools Overseas inspection.

The College has, and has followed, clear procedures when dealing with any disciplinary action involving staff and there has been no suspension of staff because of concerns about their suitability to work with children or young people.

## **7. The school's procedures for handling complaints**

The College's procedures for handling complaints are transparent and effective. They take into account local Czech regulations requirements and circumstances. The complaints procedure is made available to parents and students through the web site and parents' handbook. There are clear timescales for the management of complaints.

The procedure allows for complaints to be made initially on an informal basis, and then in writing if not satisfied with the initial response. Where a parent is unhappy with the written response, the College has provision for the establishment of a hearing before the governors or a panel not directly involved with the complaint. There is provision to appoint an independent member of the hearing panel who is not involved in the management and running of the College. The procedure allows for the parents to attend the panel hearing if they wish.

The complaints procedure is rigorous and robust. It requires the panel to describe both findings and recommendations. A copy of these findings is given to the complainant and where relevant, the person complained about. There is provision in place for written records of complaints to be kept whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing. All correspondence, statements and records of complaints are kept confidential and in compliance with local legal requirements.

## 8. The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

## 9. Leadership and management of the school

The English College in Prague is a 'not for profit' organisation supported by The English College Foundation. The Foundation raises small additional funds for the College to help provide a quality education based on the best British and international practice. The Foundation's principal objectives are:

- To provide support and advice to The English College in Prague as needed;
- To raise funds to assist the College;
- To increase awareness of and support for the College in the UK;
- To help form a network of alumni studying or working in the UK, to assist them and foster their long-term commitment to the College.

There are eight directors, with a secretary, an honorary treasurer and a charity co-ordinator. The College is governed through a Board of Governors, some of whom are also members of the Foundation. This Board is very effective. Governors comprise an eclectic mix of professionals, both Czech- and British-based. Their experience of business, politics, civil service, journalism, finance, diplomacy and education combine to offer powerful and appropriate leadership to the College, without overstepping into management issues. Above all else, they take a genuine interest in the College and the students for which it provides. The aims of the foundation are followed rigorously and effectively.

Leadership and management at school level are delegated to the headmaster. He is experienced, focussed and single-minded in the pursuit of high standards and the aims of the College. He is very effective. Ably supported by two deputies, a business manager and an assistant head, he is clear about the direction of the College, and about what needs to be done to get there. Excellent support is provided by Czech staff as far as managing the College within the context of the Republic. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, and they are reviewed on a regular cycle. Financial management is robust.

The College appoints high quality staff, and works hard to retain them. Formal appraisal takes place every two years for all staff. This involves self-appraisal, lesson observation by both the line manager and the Headmaster, and also review meetings with both. There is a developing culture of peer observation. New staff are observed by the Headmaster and the line manager in their first term. Most staff attend subject-specific training for IB. The College is making increasing use of HMC courses for professional development. The Deputy (Pastoral) and all four senior tutors have had recent UK child protection training. Recent whole staff training has focussed on teaching and learning.

## 10. Overall effectiveness of the school

### How successful is the school?

The English College in Prague is a highly effective school. It has a special history, a special ethos and a special sense of both its significance and its responsibilities within the Czech, the UK and the international contexts.

### What the school does well

- The ethos and purpose of the College are clear, and pursued with great focus;
- The Board of Governors is a powerful and effective influence on the success of the College;
- Leadership is strong – the headmaster has high expectations and sets a brisk pace – he is ably supported by senior managers;
- There are high standards of attainment and achievement throughout the College;
- The quality of spoken English is excellent, especially as the students settle in;
- The quality of teaching is good and much is excellent: the best teaching is inspiring and passionate;
- The curriculum provided is appropriate and complies with local requirements, whilst also being broad, interesting, and providing many opportunities for students to develop their interests and skills;
- Students demonstrate an outstanding attitude to learning: they are engaged, behave well and are keen to learn;
- They show great independence of thought and deed, and display notable maturity;
- Parents are intensely supportive of the College;
- The house system is a key factor in the success of the College.

## What should the school do to improve further?

In order to improve the provision at The English College in Prague further, the following areas should be considered:

- Reviewing the policies, procedures and job descriptions that support the success of the new pastoral system, to ensure they are still relevant, effective and supportive of best practice;
- Including in the review of the benefits and disadvantages of staying within the Czech State System, the impact that either option has on the quality of learning and teaching;
- Ensuring that the appearance of all areas of the school reflects, supports and celebrates the high quality of learning at the College.

## Does the school meet the DfE standards?

All aspects of The English College in Prague are at least good, and many are excellent: the quality of education provided exceeds all the standards set by the DfE.

### **Evidence source/s**

During the inspection, more than 40 full or part- lessons were observed across the whole College, on both sites. School documentation and policies were analysed, students' work was scrutinised, and discussions were held with senior staff, middle managers and a range of teachers and groups of students. Governors met with the lead inspector in the UK and in Prague. The lead inspector visited the College before the inspection. Parents were asked for their views on the school and over 150 responded. Three days were spent at the College, including the monitoring of two full days.