



British Schools Overseas

School inspection report

The British School of Cordoba
17-18 February 2014

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

Two inspectors from Cambridge Education's British Schools Overseas Inspectorate carried out this inspection, and Ofsted accredited inspectors.

The inspectors visited 40 lessons and held meetings with staff and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at data on pupils' attainment over the past three years, at schemes of work, policies, the school improvement plan and the school's self-review.

The inspection team:

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Roger Fry	Team inspector, Cambridge Education
Adrian Massam	Team inspector, NABSS
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Inspectors used the Department for Education standards for the inspection of British schools overseas aligned with the NABSS accreditation criteria. The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's owners on the overall effectiveness of the school and the standard of education. Cambridge Education reports to the Department for Education (DfE) on the extent to which schools meet the relevant standards for British schools overseas as follows:

- the quality of education provided by the school (curriculum, teaching and assessment)
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- the welfare, health and safety of the pupils
- the suitability of the proprietor and staff
- the premises and accommodation
- the provision of information for parents, carers and others
- the school's procedures for handling complaints
- leadership and management of the school.

Information about the school

The British School of Cordoba was founded in 1998 and now has 520 pupils on two sites, 500 metres apart, close to the city centre. The school is a fully authorised British school with an educational programme based on the National Curriculum for England and Wales. Most students are Spanish nationals but there are others from the UK and other parts of Europe. The school is authorised by the Spanish Ministry of Education to offer a British education to children of all nationalities and is a member of the National Association of British Schools in Spain.

Overall effectiveness

This is a good school that gives its students an effective education that is aligned well to the National Curriculum for England and Wales. As a result, students gain a good understanding of how British society works, enabling them to move back to the UK for further study if they so wish. The school also provides effective opportunities for students to enter Spanish universities.

Students learn well and make good progress by the time they leave school. Progress is good in Early Years and Key Stage 1 but in Key Stage 2 it slows a little because the most able students are not always challenged enough. The school has rightly identified improving writing as a priority because of the impact it has on all subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form, is brisk and students make good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. IGCSE, AS and A Level examinations results are consistently above the average in England and compare favourably with other British schools in Spain.

Performance at IGCSE has been constant over the past few years with 80% to 90% of students gaining A* - C grades. The data show that the proportion of students who gain A*/A grades in English, mathematics and science at IGCSE is consistently higher than the proportion gaining Level 5 in the same subjects at the end of Year 6. This shows that students make good progress in their learning. Achievement in the sixth form is similarly good.

Students' welfare, health and safety are promoted very effectively and in some respects the work the school does in this area is outstanding. There is good supervision of students around the site and lessons are managed well. As a result, students' behaviour is good. The high quality of display throughout the school helps to engender students' pride in their school: they look after the building and treat the equipment and facilities with respect.

Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers give students a range of activities that keeps them motivated and engaged in their work. Good behaviour is promoted very effectively and students have positive attitudes and respond well to the tasks they are given. When asked, students said they enjoy school a great deal. These positive attitudes contribute significantly to students' ability and willingness to learn: they take their school work seriously and want to do well.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of students effectively because of the wide range of subjects offered. Extra-curricular activities extend the opportunities available for students and trips abroad, especially to the UK give them a broader perspective about British society.

The school is very successful in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, they develop outstanding personal qualities including respect for others, very positive attitudes to school and self-confidence.

Leadership and management are good. The cooperative governance model means that parents are involved fully in the school. The principal and senior leaders have a clear mission based on respect, academic achievement and responsibility, which are translated effectively throughout the school. Middle leaders are becoming increasingly effective and have a clear understanding of teaching quality in their areas. The school development plans have clear objectives and identified success criteria but tend to focus on compliance rather than outcomes making it difficult to evaluate the impact.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The British School of Cordoba meets the requirements for British schools overseas, as laid down by the UK Department for Education, in full. The school promotes a British education for its pupils well through its teaching, climate, curriculum and the focus on IGCSE and AS/A Level examinations. It meets the requirements of the Spanish Ministry of Education.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Improve teaching further by:
 - sharpening the way tasks are differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils especially the most able
 - providing tasks that are interesting and capture students' imagination
 - sharing good practice more widely across the school.

- Improve the school development plans by:
 - strengthening the focus of the plans on the impact of actions rather than completeness
 - reducing the number of priorities to those which are going to have the most impact on improving teaching and learning, and raising achievement.

The quality of education provided by the school

The curriculum

The curriculum is good. It is suitably broad and provides students with a balance of subjects that meets their needs. It follows the National Curriculum, for England and Wales and includes subjects required by the Spanish Ministry of Education.

In the Foundation Stage (three and four year olds) the curriculum provides good early years experiences and opportunities for children to develop their skills in the six areas of learning including literacy, numeracy and social, personal and emotional skills. This is because planning is thorough and follows closely the English guidance for the Foundation Stage. As a result children move into Year 1 with a good range of skills and understanding and make brisk progress with their learning as they move through to the end of Year 2. Students start Year 3 at above average levels and by the end of Year 6 reach above average standards. The opportunity for students to start learning French in Year 6 helps to extend their skills and understanding well. On the whole, progress is good but the pace of learning is not quite as brisk as it could be because the most able students are not always challenged enough.

The secondary curriculum is good. The range of subjects offered enables students to have a broad experience and prepares them well for their IGCSE examinations and the requirements of the Spanish curriculum. The “core” programme in Years 10 and 11 is well balanced so that students experience different ways of learning, from academic, through to practical, creative and physical activities. Sixth form opportunities are good and the range of subjects provided ensures that students’ needs are met.

Cultural activities for adults and children are organised periodically by a group of parents with the full cooperation of the school. In addition, the school runs after school sports clubs and employs peripatetic music teachers who give music tuition during the school day. These clubs and activities are generally well attended and add significantly to students’ experiences. Students said that they “have lots of clubs like Chinese, horse riding and gym”. They also talked excitedly about trips and excursions for example the theatre and the cinema.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is typically good with some outstanding features. As a result students learn well and make good progress to achieve above average standards. The majority of teaching seen during the inspection was good; it was occasionally outstanding and sometimes satisfactory. None of the teaching seen was inadequate. The characteristics of the good teaching included the following significant factors:

- Students behave very well in lessons because of the way teachers manage them
- Students have very good attitudes to their learning and respond very well to the activities they are given
- Classrooms are well resourced, including teaching assistants (TAs)
- Teachers use a range of imaginative activities that keep children and students excited about learning, and focused and attentive
- Teachers use their expertise effectively to impart to students the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed
- English language is a key part of lessons
- The pace of learning is good because teachers make the lesson interesting
- Lessons are well structured and students are given time to consolidate their learning as well as develop new skills and understanding.

Satisfactory teaching was characterised by:

- A “one size fits all” approach where the same work was set to all students. This meant that the work lacked challenge and did not stretch students sufficiently
- TAs not supporting teaching effectively enough
- Less creative use of resources than in the good lessons
- In Key Stage 2, the most able students were not always challenged sufficiently and there is a need to target the higher levels especially Levels 5 and 6
- In some cases, teachers do not take advantage of students’ good attitudes to learning to really push them.

Occasionally, teaching was outstanding. The factors that made it so were the way teachers made sure that all students were challenged by setting tasks that were sufficiently open to meet the needs of all. This happened, for example, in a Year 7 lesson. Lower down the school a Year 1 lesson was outstanding because the teacher insisted on everyone speaking English at all times and gave students thinking time. This enabled them to develop their communication and literacy skills very effectively.

Assessment for learning has been a focus of the school’s professional development provision. Generally, this work is having a successful impact on practice and there are examples of marking being used effectively to give good feedback to students and help them improve their work.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students have excellent attitudes to school and to their learning. This has a very effective impact on their learning because they behave very well, are respectful towards their teachers and their peers, and are keen to do well in their studies.

Trips and after extra-curricular activities contribute well to students' personal development. For example, one student noted, "I was really proud of myself when we went abseiling. You can overcome your fears".

The school's very positive climate also adds significantly to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have a clear understanding of right and wrong and understand how to behave with, and respond to, others. Students feel that the school council is very useful because it allows them to make their views known to teachers. They said it is "important".

Students have a good understanding of the issues related to bullying. Anti bullying is covered extensively in PSHE lessons and students know what to do and who to go to on the rare occasions where there are issues.

Cultural development is promoted effectively through the curriculum and the range of after and extra-curricular activities. As a result, students gain a secure understanding of both the British and Spanish cultures. Studying French in school and the opportunity to learn Chinese also contribute to students' understanding of the wider world.

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The quality of welfare, health and safety provided by the school is good. This has a strong impact it has on students' academic and personal development because they are well supported. The PSHE curriculum covers aspects of healthy living such as eating well and causes of common diseases. Staff have high expectations of behaviour, good relationships with their students and provide good support. Students say they are happy at school and make friends quickly. They have a sense of pride in themselves and in the school.

Students with additional educational needs (ALN) are supported well by the learning support department. This is a strength of the school. There are secure procedures for identifying students' needs and the ALN coordinator supports those whose progress is "stuck" as well as with those judged to be gifted and talented. As a result, support for students who are falling behind is targeted effectively. The school employs its own psychologist who works closely with the department.

Transition arrangements from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 are good. One of the school's priorities has been ensuring curriculum progression from one key stage to another and teachers from secondary support Year 5 and 6 subject lessons, for example science. This is helping to raise standards.

The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietors ensure that all the appropriate checks required by the local authorities are made on staff to confirm their suitability to work with children. Details are recorded appropriately. Where appropriate, the UK's DBS enhanced disclosure is used to check the suitability of British teaching staff. Procedures meet the requirements for British schools overseas.

The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are good and contribute very well to students' well being and to the positive climate for learning. High quality displays throughout the school contribute significantly to this positive climate. The accommodation meets the needs of both the students and the curriculum. It is safe, welcoming and well cared for, and provides good access for disabled students. There are sufficient toilet facilities for students and staff; there is a nurse's room and washing facilities in the Foundation Stage. The recent addition of an outdoor play area for Key Stage 1 means that there is adequate space for students. The outdoor space in the Foundation Stage is generous and supports children's learning well. The premises and accommodation meets all the BSO requirements.

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides clear information for parents including a complaints procedure and policies for admissions and attendance. Parents receive regular information about their children's achievements through straightforward report cards each term. Parents say that they are very satisfied with the school and that they receive all the necessary information. Many are involved in the school as shareholders and in running workshops and after school clubs. They say they feel very welcome at the school. The information provided by the school for parents meets the requirements for British schools overseas.

The school's procedures for handling complaints

The school meets the BSO requirements for handling complaints but few parents raise any concerns. One parent noted, "We never have any concerns".

Leadership and management of the school

The school is well led and managed. The principal provides clear strategic leadership which ensures that all share his vision and high expectations. Senior leaders are effective and work together well as a team to push forward developments and improve teaching and learning. Middle leaders also make a strong contribution to the school and take up their leadership roles effectively. For example, they are becoming increasingly involved in

observing lessons. Some heads of department said it was left to individual subject areas how often these take place but there is a published evaluation cycle suggesting that is driven by senior leaders.

The school uses data reasonably well to understand overall trends, identify students who need additional support and to set targets for students to achieve. In the secondary school tracking students achievement is based on internal criteria but is not externally benchmarked. This means that while teachers have a good understanding of individual students who are experiencing difficulties, it is difficult to analyse performance against international benchmarks. Doing so would help the school identify if there is scope for further improvement and help to raise achievement even further.

The school has clear systems for reviewing its work, identifying priorities for development and using these to implement improvements. The school development plans have clear objectives and identified success criteria, which are derived from what the school calls an “internal inspection report.” This is, in effect, a record of its self-evaluation processes and is well structured. The development plans are clearly working documents and used to help drive improvements. The success criteria are more about compliance than outcomes making it difficult to evaluate impact. Middle leaders are clear about the school’s priorities, especially the work to improve assessment for learning.

Overall school leaders have a strong impact on students’ learning. The positive ethos and climate for learning, the effective teaching and the good progress made by students are evidence that leaders are doing the right things. For example, in Key Stage 2 reading has been a focus and standards have improved. The introduction of phonics in the Foundation Stage has also raised literacy standards effectively. The school recognises that it also needs to focus on mathematics in primary and have introduced a number of initiatives such as the “imaths programme” and parent workshops. These are having a positive impact and more students are now making better progress.

Glossary of terms

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		<input type="checkbox"/>		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		<input type="checkbox"/>		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		<input type="checkbox"/>		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		<input type="checkbox"/>		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<input type="checkbox"/>			
The behaviour of pupils		<input type="checkbox"/>		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		<input type="checkbox"/>		
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Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management		<input type="checkbox"/>		
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School details

School status	Independent, day		
Type of school	All through, 3 – 18 years		
Date school opened	1998		
Age range of pupils	3 - 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
Annual fees (day pupils)	265	278	543
Address of school	Calle México 14012 Córdoba C.I.F.: A14498026		
Telephone number	957 767 048		
Fax number	957 270 610		
Email address	secdir@colegiobritanicodecordoba.com		
Headteacher	Howard Thomas		