



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

British School of Plovdiv

**Plovdiv
Bulgaria**

Date **15th – 17th April 2024**
Inspection number **20240415**

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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 pupils; 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 pupils and pupils' 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, 15 lesson observations took place and 4 extracurricular activities were observed. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were seen in lessons, and discussions were held with the owner, staff, parents and informally with students. The inspection took place over three days.

The lead inspector was Mr Simon Sharron.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school has shown that it meets the standards for British Schools Overseas. This judgement is endorsed by the British Government and is valid for three years. The inspection process is quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

The school provides good quality education because the small number of students progress and attain well in a school where effective teaching and assessment, exemplary relationships and behaviour for learning, as well as the students' well-being, are the basis for this success.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including the:

- British style of education which generates strong academic and behavioural standards
- strong leadership and management skilled in growing a new school under challenging circumstances
- the generous teacher/pupil ratio of 1:3
- a committed and cohesive staff group
- innovative curriculum and assessment practice - presentations
- personal development built on combined multicultural elements of British and Bulgarian traditions, which engender strong values and care standards
- increasing opportunities for professional development
- atmosphere at this very happy school, confirmed by students, parents and staff
- safeguarding procedures
- effective and creative use of available space
- appropriate accommodation for the youngest children
- cleanliness and hygiene
- the availability of online tools and open-door policy to develop strong home/school partnerships

3.2 Points for improvement

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

1. Provide more opportunities for the most able students in terms of academic challenge and student leadership;
2. Continually review health and safety risk assessments as student and staff numbers grow;
3. Be ready to adapt the leadership and management structure to meet the school's emergent needs.

4. The context of the school

Full name of School	British School of Plovdiv				
Address	45 Tsar Ivan Asen II, 4108 Markovo, Plovdiv				
Telephone Number/s	+359 899 910 910				
Website Address	www.bsplodiv.bg				
Key Email Address	office@bsplodiv.bg				
Headteacher	Mr Matthew Osborn				
Principal / Proprietor	Mrs Teodora Nenova				
Age Range	2-16 years				
Total number of pupils	37	Boys	18	Girls	19
Numbers by age	0-2 years	1	12-16 years	6	
	3-5 years	4	17-18 years	0	
	6-11 years	26	18+ years	0	
Total number of part-time children	0				

4.1 British nature of the school

- The language of tuition and the classroom is English;
- A British style curriculum through international programmes of study that are closely aligned to the UK EYFS Framework and the English National Curriculum;
- Many UK curricular resources such as the Cambridge Curriculum to shape and deliver content for English, maths, and science;
- PSHE, SRE, a strong house-based pastoral system and a wide range of extracurricular activities and school trips supporting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students;
- Students' progress and achievement are tracked using assessment tools widely used in the UK;
- The kindergarten and grades 1-9 mirror the year group and Key Stage structure of the English National Curriculum;
- The academic year has three terms with half-terms in each;
- BPS is a member of the Council of British International Schools;
- BPS students wear school uniforms that bear the school's insignia;
- The school celebrating events from the UK;
- The celebration of its multicultural student population;
- Vibrant class displays, particularly in the Kindergarten and primary school, have a distinct British character;
- Class and school rules;
- Virtue based assemblies as well as special internationally themed and cultural days;
- The strong pastoral house system fostering community cohesion and support;
- Supply of teacher professional development courses by UK organisations.

5. Standard 1

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided by the school is of a high standard because it ensures that it creates the conditions in which relationships and behaviour for learning are excellent so that students progress and attain exceptionally good outcomes. The school succeeds in delivering an all round British style of education in an overall safe and secure learning environment which is bright, clean, multi-purpose and inviting.

5.1 Curriculum

The school meets the BSO standard and has many very commendable features given that, at the time of inspection, it caters for fewer than 40 students from early years to secondary school Grade or Year 9.

The curriculum is balanced and meets the needs of all learners with scope to boost high level learning through the metacognitive 'Thinking-Based Learning Programme'. It ensures that students acquire experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education. The education is full-time and supervised. There are no students with special educational needs who need adapted programmes of study. Parents have access to a written curriculum policy and documentation about the specific curriculum that students follow.

The overarching curricula, the International Early Years Curriculum (IEYC), the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and the International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC) are translated into well-planned, written schemes of work. These clearly promote the fundamental British and European Union values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. The school's Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme integrates Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is further supported by an effective pastoral system, assemblies, curriculum transdisciplinary project work and extracurricular activities. Respect for others is encouraged. which is tangible in the observed warm friendships and interactions between children and students from variety of cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds. Adherence to the UK Equality Act 2010 is promoted and maintained within this curriculum framework.

Many UK teaching resources are used to deliver important elements of the curriculum such as *Monster* phonics and a range of British textbooks and literature. In primary and secondary classes the curriculum is calibrated through the Cambridge Checkpoints scheme. All lessons are delivered in English except for Bulgarian which is taught as a national and modern language; Spanish and German are also available

to older students.

The one EYFS class follows the IEYC which is closely linked to the UK Early Years Foundation Statutory Framework. The provision ensures that all the framework's 7 areas of learning can be addressed and observations confirm that the provision follows the EYFS guidance on minimum facilities, methodology and assessment.

The primary curriculum is thematic in accordance with the IPC. Within this, teachers create opportunities for rich literacy and numeracy development as well as opportunities to extend skills and knowledge across the foundation subjects. A multipurpose room serves as a gym and this, together with outside space and a generously sized swimming pool, offer good opportunities for physical education.

Currently, the secondary school consists of 3 students assigned organisationally to Y7 and Y9 classes. Again, the core subjects of English and Science are complemented by language and numeracy rich thematic learning through the IMYC.

While the present size of the school and limited access to specialist rooming may slightly restrict the students' curriculum experience in science and design technology, creative and adaptive solutions are implemented by the school to compensate for this. Specialist music and art rooms are available.

Extracurricular activities broaden the curriculum further, particularly in the realm of the performing arts. Students participate enthusiastically in extended lunchtime activities such as drama club, piano, guitar and mental maths. The school calendar and the students themselves evidence an impressive array of school trips to support the wider curriculum. These include, for example, the fascinating Bulgarian and Roman history of Plovdiv old town and the natural beauty of the Bachkovo Waterfalls. EYFS children visit the zoo in Pazardzhik as a part of their IEYFS theme "The World Around Us". Every year the school organises a ski week as an extension of the PE programme for primary and secondary students. A popular eight-week summer school is available to boost EAL learning. .

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment in classes that never exceed 8 students is excellent. The standard for BSO is fully met.

The vast majority of lessons observed were good or better. The small class sizes and the highly favourable teacher:pupil ratio assures that the teaching is closely tailored to the needs and aptitudes of the students. Information technology frequently supports interactive as well as independent, research based learning. Activities are nearly always timed so that these lessons have pace and urgency. Collaborative, discursive group or peer learning was often observed, which freed the teacher to give some pupils individual attention.

The quality of teaching and assessment is regularly assured by the UK trained leadership team who succeed in promoting a positive culture of professional development. This has a significant impact on the high academic and personal development standards achieved by the students.

Planning to implement the curriculum and bring about successful learning is of a high quality. In vertically aged classes, the necessary differentiation is effective so that despite their age differences students progress well and enjoy their personalised learning.

There is a consistent template for lesson plans which puts emphasis on learning objectives, success criteria and assessment. In the best lessons, activities were clearly planned to help students achieve the learning objectives, and progress was rigorously checked through a variety of formative assessment methods including higher level questioning to ensure challenge. In a well-pitched Grade 6 English poetry lesson on Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', a student replied, "It makes sense but it doesn't." when the class was asked why the poem is known as nonsense verse. In the plenary, the students responded accurately to a series of questions skilfully designed to elicit the salient features of a poem.

Student self-assessment and peer assessment, such as the use of mini whiteboards in a Grade or Year 3 English lesson on homophones, is a strength of the learning experience that the school creates for its students. While high quality written feedback and student responses to it are visible in some exercise books and tests, this practice is variable. Older students were able to explain the school's assessment systems, understanding and appreciating the measure of challenge afforded to them.

Base-line testing is carried out every year to assess and re-evaluate students' academic targets. This ensures that high standards are achieved and extended learning is considered for students who will thrive on it. Extended learning for the brightest pupils is a priority for the school.

Teachers maintain their grasp on students' progress over time through regular summative assessment. Children in the school's foundation and reception class have their progress measured against the seventeen learning goals contained within the seven areas of learning of the EYFS framework. Regular Cambridge Progress Tests and the Cambridge Checkpoint tests map student achievement throughout the school year and at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3.

The innovative presentation of student work at the end of the year 'On Presentation Day' is an exciting way for students to demonstrate their learning in front of their peers, parents and the school staff. On the strength of this, the school is considering the practice of student-led parent/teacher consultation meetings, to discuss progress and attainment.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

The academic standards achieved by the British School of Plovdiv (BSP)'s small cohort of students are excellent. The standards for BSO are fully met.

This judgement is based on observations of students' progress in lessons and the successful progression of learning over time as seen in students' work, annual presentations and celebration of their subject learning and, of course, in the EYFS portfolio of early learning goals, phonics screening at the end of Year or Grade 1, as well as the moderated summative assessment results of the Cambridge Progress and Checkpoints tests at the end of Key Stage 2. It was clear during the inspection that all the students from KS1 upwards were working at or above age-expected levels in their learning and were engaging very successfully with the primary and secondary curriculum delivered in English.

While statistical comparisons for such a small cohort of pupils with international academic standards must be treated with caution, the school presents data showing that BSP students attain Year or Grade 6 Cambridge Checkpoint results above international averages in English and Science but just below in Maths. On close examination, progression in maths lessons from EYFS to Grade or Year 6 is demonstrably well planned and sequenced, learning objectives are age-appropriate and often challenging, the teaching is nearly always differentiated and the learning is strong.

The level of English oracy and written expression is high by the time students reach the end of the primary cycle. The school demonstrates by its student outcomes that it is able to build on the English language skills and fluency that most children have when they are admitted to the school. The EAL summer school and literacy booster strategies using the 'Fast Forward' programme are clearly successful in accelerating English language outcomes in the primary school when, initially, children are not achieving at age expected levels.

The behaviour for learning is exemplary as indeed is the student conduct around the school. Student attendance is below the 96% expected in the UK but it is steadily improving and now stands at above 90%.

Traffic conditions impact on punctuality and further consultations with parents may be necessary to improve this.

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

The standard for BSO is fully met and is a notable strength of the school.

Respect and tolerance of multicultural otherness are fundamental to the BSP's 'Golden Rules' that underpin the school's behaviour policy and management. To celebrate World Art Day, the school assembly focused on very different but equally valid personal and cultural concepts of beauty. The importance of the British, Bulgarian and European values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and global citizenship is promoted and reinforced through the curriculum and also through classroom methodologies that instigate discussion and an exchange of different views on social or historical topics. This is a priority in BSP's international school community where many of the twelve nationalities comprising the student population have been at the heart of recent and residual European conflict. During morning break, a group of friends from Bulgaria, Turkey, China and Russia, chatting in English, were able to articulate to the BSO inspector how important and meaningful their international school community was for them.

Developing student understanding of civic responsibility could be enhanced further by creating more opportunities for student leadership in terms of representation or student mentoring of younger or new members of the school community.

Recently, Grade or Year 2 children won second place in a Bulgarian national competition for student journalism. Democracy and the basis of producing and applying law are topics that arise and are discussed in the IPC and IMYC. Student visits to the regional court of Plovdiv are part of this process. Virtue based assemblies, circle time in EYFS and KS1 and tutor time in general reinforce expectations enshrined in the students code of conduct. Positive behaviour is rewarded with the public awarding of certificates, while aberrations are subject to a system of restorative justice or referral to the school counsellor or academic coordinator for further support.

Personal, Social, Health and Social Education (PSHE) which includes sex and relationship education is taught across the age-groups to support students' self-knowledge and self-esteem as well as their development as active participants in society. Students know the difference between right and wrong. Behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was excellent. A strong pastoral house system, based on UK schools, enhances this moral education. Students and parents report that bullying is a very rare occurrence. 'World Anti-bullying Week' is always on the school calendar. The school's participation in many charitable endeavours serves to keep the students moral compass pointing in the correct direction. Such charitable engagement includes supporting the survivors of the devastating 2023 Turkish earthquake; supporting children with severe physical and mental health issues in the small rural community of Davidkova and children in a neonatal clinic in the predominantly Bulgarian Turk community of Kardzhali. Involving students in this wider community work is emblematic of the importance the school attributes to social and cultural cohesion; it is also a force for good and regeneration which BSP feels contributes to the students' spiritual development.

BSP's extracurricular activities further enrich the students' cultural and spiritual experience. Music and drama clubs, small concerts, the celebration of Bulgarian festivals and UK cultural events, as well as the recognition of different religious calendars, are important uplifting experiences provided by the school. School visits to the 1st Century AD Roman amphitheatre of Philippopolis or to the Bachovo Waterfalls, or the Palaeontology Museum in Asenovgrad or indeed to the planetarium at the Plovdiv Natural History Museum are designed to inspire and create a sense of awe for the students.

7. *Standard 3*

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the children and students is good overall and exemplary in many respects. The school fully meets the BSO standard and is in compliance with health and safety laws of the host country, Bulgaria. Its licence to operate is dependent on this .

The school is a safe and secure environment. Perimeter security and access control through the school's single pedestrian entry/exit point is constantly monitored. Handovers of the youngest pupils are rigorously supervised by staff at the school gate. Students using school bus transport are escorted from/to the garage. Adults are not allowed to enter school premises unless on school business. Teachers have access to attendance registers via their iPads; parents can see the attendance data for their children live via an online platform.

Supervision of children around the school, particularly in potentially hazardous areas such as the outdoor swimming pool, is excellent in this small school. Health and safety measures as well as fire prevention and evacuation procedures meet local requirements. Evacuation plans, emergency lighting, emergency exit signs and fire-fighting equipment is in place with staff trained to use it. Effective evacuation drills are held regularly and the school plans to improve these by using the designated fire assembly stations outside the school premises. Lockdown drills are planned for the near future. Hazardous substances are securely locked away.

School policies concerning the welfare, health and safety of students along with their concomitant risk assessments are in place and updated every year. These include discreet policies for child protection and safeguarding, fire safety, first aid, anti-bullying, student behaviour and staff conduct. The implementation of these policies is overseen by the admissions officer/premises manager and the on-site academic coordinator. All school trips must be risk-assessed.

The headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), supported by the academic coordinator who has the responsibility of the deputy designated safeguarding Lead (DDSL). Staff refresh their safeguarding training in accordance with the UK's 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. The PSHE and RSE schemes of work provide students with education and guidance on how to avoid risky behaviours. The school's IT system is protected by a firewall and students have to adhere to a strict code concerning the acceptable use of mobile technology.

A trained nurse is available to administer first aid during school hours. In Bulgaria, all vehicle drivers have been trained in first aid which means that many staff have some knowledge of this . The school has a small, but well equipped medical room with a toilet near-by.

As the school grows, it is constantly reviewing and evaluating how it can further improve health and safety in premises which were not purpose built for a school.

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

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

The owner of the BSP is an experienced school proprietor having successfully founded the British School of Sofia (BSS) in 2010 and which has been BSO accredited for many years. She also operates a school in the Bulgarian national system. In Plovdiv, she is supported by an executive headteacher whose leadership responsibilities for the sister school in Sofia as well as by an in-situ academic coordinator and a very effective administrative and premises team.

A single central register (SCR) is in place and confirms the appropriateness of staff to work with children in respect of police clearance, health checks and professional qualifications. Behind this document is a robust system of 'safer recruitment' whereby all staff are interviewed by the proprietor and their documents and qualifications, including proof of identity, proof of medical fitness and right to work in Bulgaria are checked by the administrative team. The proprietor, who is a Bulgarian national, presents her own proof of good conduct to the administration team as part of her own staff file. If further checks are needed, these are requested by the proprietor. The SCR is reviewed and updated regularly. BSP does not employ supply staff.

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

Premises and accommodation of the school meet the standards for BSO.

The school is situated in a quiet residential area and housed in a former large private dwelling that has been converted into a small school on three floors. It is an attractive and welcoming learning environment. The premises now offer several well equipped classrooms and multipurpose spaces which provide good accommodation for the current number of students enrolled at the school. The classrooms are well illuminated and have acoustics that support good teaching and learning. Air-conditioning and air-filtration units are installed in each room.

The facilities for the EYFS or kindergarten are age-appropriate with easy access to an outside play/activity area, separate toilet and, adjacent to this, a discreet room for dining and sleeping if required.

For the whole school, the outside space consists of a sizable, treed, shaded garden equipped with play equipment and an impressive outdoor swimming pool which is secured by railings. There is also a covered area next to the kitchen where older students can eat their meals. Drinking water is readily available throughout the school. There is good accessibility afforded into, out of and around the school. School minibuses arrive to and depart from an integral garage on the ground floor.

A suitable number of toilet and wash facilities are provided for the students, including some showers. Students can change for PE in the privacy of their classroom or in the toilets. There are separate toilets and wash facilities for adults. A small but adequately equipped medical room with easy access to an adjacent toilet with washing facilities is available for students in case they require it. A small staff room with a sizable balcony is available for teacher use.

A large, multipurpose classroom is timetabled for assemblies, PE, practical science lessons and exams. Students can also recreate there during inclement weather. ICT is taught in a specialist room with several computer stations. The school office doubles up as a student library and students were seen frequently using it.

The health, safety and security infrastructure is such that the welfare of the students can be assured with the usual adult supervision in place. CCTV surveillance operates in the school, internally and externally. The perimeter and single access point are secure. There is external lighting, although the school seldom operates during hours of darkness.

The proprietor, who is often on-site, ensures that the school premises are maintained to a very high standard in terms of repair and hygiene. The school's health and safety installations as well as its water and power utilities are subject to regular inspection and checks by the local authorities. The proprietor and headteacher are aware that the school building may need further adaptations as the school community increases in size.

10. Standard 6

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information provided by the school to parents, carers and others fully meets the BSO standard.

The school website publishes a clear statement of its vision, mission and values. Contact details for the school and profiles of the staff are also posted on its web pages along with a host of information on the curriculum and the life of the school. Parents are impressed with the accessibility of the leadership team who respond quickly to their queries and concerns. They have to contact the school office in order to contact teachers outside of parent consultation times.

Policies, including safeguarding/child protection, complaints policy/procedures and policies on admissions, the curriculum, students with SEND and EAL, student behaviour, anti-bullying and first aid, are available through a parent portal. For prospective parents, the policies are made available on request. This will be the school's first BSO inspection report and therefore there is no previous report to be found on the school website.

Reports on student progress and attainment are issued termly via the parent portal. Parent/teacher conferences to discuss progress and forward planning for their children are held twice a year. A small number of parents were keen for the school to communicate concerns about their children's progress as soon as these became apparent.

11. Standard 7

The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling complaints meets the standard for BSO.

A written complaints policy is accessible via the parent's online portal or on request. The procedures for making a complaint and the complainant's expectations in terms of school responses and timescales within which these should be made are clearly set out and explained.

Serious complaints are rare. Parents report that when complaints do occur they are handled effectively. A strong parental view was that ever improving communication with class teachers and school management were the basis of the school's successful conflict resolution systems. The proactive and helpful role of the school office staff was particularly cited in this respect.

12. Standard 8 Leadership and management of the school

The leadership and management of the school are excellent, although there is still room for improvement as the British School of Plovdiv grows.

The proprietor is fully supported by her leadership team in implementing her vision and mission to establish a successful British curriculum school in Plovdiv offering a high quality of education.

The school opened in 2019 and, in four academic years, the students are achieving high academic standards within an English language British curriculum as well as clearly benefiting from the hallmark of UK schooling which is to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition to overcoming the challenges of establishing a new school with a radically different curriculum and ethos, the proprietor and her senior leadership team nurtured the new school successfully through the difficult years of the Covid pandemic during 2020-2022 when severe restrictions on schools were imposed.

The proprietor and leadership team clearly demonstrate that they have the knowledge, skills, experience and, above all, commitment to ensure that all the BSO standards are consistently met.

BSP offers a praiseworthy curriculum that exceeds expectations given the small, embryonic size of the school. It has surprisingly generous breadth and is enhanced by the strong metacognitive component of 'Thinking Based Learning'. The proprietor and the headteacher succeed well in assembling and preparing a team of proficient and enthusiastic teachers to deliver it. Although the options for lunchtime extracurricular activities are understandably limited, great efforts are made to enrich the students' learning experience through a very praiseworthy range of cultural and outdoor learning school trips for all classes. Safeguarding as well as the welfare, health and safety of students, closely overseen by the proprietor and the leadership team, is of a high standard and a constant priority for the school.

The school has created the conditions whereby students feel safe and happy. Exemplary relationships demonstrably underpin students' willingness to learn and be challenged. Parents revealed to the inspection that they were immensely satisfied with the school and thrilled that such a British curriculum school is available to them in Plovdiv.

Teaching and assessment is subject to regular quality assurance and the school organises a variety of professional development events related to the school development plan. Performance management generates further opportunities for personal professional advancement. The school collaborates closely and efficiently with its more established and bigger sister school, relying on the latter for much of its subject leadership. The school is well resourced and its facilities are maintained to a high standard by the maintenance team

Currently, the proprietor/principal and the headteacher play an executive role, dividing their time between BSP and the British School of Sofia to very good effect. The academic coordinator and admissions officer are based full-time on the BSP campus and share operational responsibility with the proprietor and headteacher. However, as both schools grow, a new middle and senior leadership structure for BSP will undoubtedly become necessary.