Inspection report on

British School of Sofia
Bulgaria

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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 DFE on the extent to which schools meet the standards for British Schools Overseas.

During the inspection visit, 50 full or part lessons were observed by inspectors. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, a range of teachers, parents and groups of pupils. Three school days were monitored.

The lead inspector was John Cranfield. The other team members were Geraldine Cranfield and Wayne Howson.

2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

British School Sofia (BSS) meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas accreditation.

3. Overall effectiveness of the school

BSS is an improving school. Overall teaching is satisfactory. Pupils are well supported through effective pastoral care and the implementation of sound welfare, health and safety policies and procedures. The senior leadership team has an understanding of the strengths of the school and areas requiring improvement. Pupils, parents and staff value the British nature of the curriculum. Nearly all pupils make progress at least in line with their ability, some better. The curriculum is broad and balanced; enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths, including:

- a strong commitment, both governance and financial, by the proprietor to ensure the school continues to develop and improve;
- the Director of Studies who makes a highly significant contribution to school improvement;
- school management on a day-to-day basis; routines and procedures are understood and followed by all;
- the work of the school counsellor;
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities which enrich pupils' learning experiences;
- the pupils who are safe, happy and well cared for, in a harmonious and nurturing environment;
- the progress made by pupils from Early Years as they move through the school;
- the head of the HR department;
- articulate and self-confident pupils, who develop positive relationships with their peers and adults in the school;
- provision of outdoor play areas in EYFS.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- Ensure the implementation and rigorous monitoring of a comprehensive marking, assessment and tracking process which provides pupils, teachers and parents with information that clearly indicates attainment, progress and future targets.

- Review, expand and strengthen the senior and middle leadership across the school to reflect increasing pupil numbers and prepare for future growth.

- Ensure that all teachers are monitored and held accountable for high standards of teaching and learning, and raising individual pupil's level of attainment.

4. The context of the school

BSS was established in 2009 as the vision of the proprietor seeking to offer a 'British type' education to local and expat pupils. She offers both governance and financial stability. Sharing the ideals and open-mindedness of the school's British identity in its early stages, her personal commitment is seen as significant in strengthening and securing the school's future life in Sofia.

The school has experienced rapid growth, particularly over the last year. There are now over 200 students from 25 different countries; 45% are Bulgarian. Over 90% of students are studying English as a second or third language. The majority of pupils are in the primary sector. Secondary school pupils are just completing their first year IGCSE at the end of year 9. The school has plans to offer AS and A levels as it continues to expand.

The school was approved in 2010 as a Primary Centre by Cambridge International Examinations. In 2013 the school was approved as a Secondary Centre with facilities to offer IGCSE and A levels.

The school has identified the following as potential barriers to learning:

- recruiting UK trained staff
- the Bulgarian Ministry of education not recognising non-governmental schools.

4.1 British nature of the school

The ethos, nature and appearance of the school are recognisably British, and mirror what would be found in the independent sector in the UK. All students wear school uniform. The school is organized according to the structures used in English schools. Classroom management, displays of work and appropriate celebrations throughout the year, contribute to a British feel of the school. British School Sofia (BSS) delivers the International Primary Curriculum from Nursery to Grade 4 and Cambridge Primary Programmes in English, mathematics and science to meet the outcomes of the English National Curriculum. British School Sofia uses a range of UK assessments, for example SATs and IGCSEs.

All communications from the school to families and pupils are provided in English, with a Bulgarian translation where appropriate. Some consent forms, emails and documentation are also in Bulgarian. All school publications, reports, letters and the web site are in English, the latter with a Bulgarian translation. The importance of extra-curricular provision including clubs and school trips are in line with British practice.

The school is in the process of implementing a house system and extending 'class presidents' into a formal pupil council. Interviews with parents, suggested they appreciated the British style of education on offer. The school has been an active member of COBIS since 2010.

5. *Standard 1* The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided at the British School Sofia is satisfactory. It meets fully the requirements of the BSO Framework.

5.1 Curriculum

The curriculum meets the standard for accreditation.

There is full time supervised teaching for pupils from Nursery age (3+) to Grade 9, with plans to offer the full secondary phase as the school grows and develops. The school has a written curriculum policy accompanied by schemes of work. All teachers produce individual lesson plans.

The EYFS curriculum utilises elements of Early Years provision from the English National Curriculum, supplemented by aspects of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). As pupils move through the key stages, curriculum provision is extended through the delivery of the Cambridge Curriculum. The school is presently preparing older pupils for a range of Cambridge International GCSE exams. The principal language of instruction is English.

Throughout the EYFS, pupils have many opportunities to develop early reading and phonic skills, an understanding of numbers, and speaking and listening. The IPC component encourages pupils to explore the world around them. There is good provision for outdoor play although opportunities for continuous provision are limited. Some aspects of the curriculum offered in EYFS are not as current as others; some key aspects of learning have yet to be fully implemented.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, there are specialist lessons for ICT, PE, modern foreign languages, music, art and modified design and technology based on *Lego*.

Pupils follow a shortened two year Key Stage 3, beginning IGCSEs at the start of Grade 9. As a consequence of low numbers, the school combined Grade 8 with Grade 7 pupils. Having completed Cambridge Curriculum Checkpoints, Grade 8 are now working with Grade 9 pupils. In addition to English, mathematics and science, subjects covered in IPC are taught as individual subjects. ICT, design technology, PSHE, modern foreign languages, Bulgarian, PE and music are planned and taught by specialist teachers.

Pupils with learning difficulties are effectively supported through a combination of individual education plans, extra support and access to a school counsellor. Parents are fully involved in the process. The broad and balanced curriculum gives pupils experience in a wide range of areas of learning, including linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative education. It enables pupils to develop the skills and attributes to support their future lives as global citizens. Thinking skills have been a major school focus during the present academic year.

Across all key stages the curriculum is enhanced by a planned PSHE or citizenship programme and the opportunity to participate in a wide range of after school activities, including sporting, digital and aesthetic.

Pupils care and concern extends beyond the school. They are involved in fund raising for charities through activities such as a Halloween bake sale, Christmas Bazaar and shoebox collection. Every June, pupils' art work is auctioned to raise further funds for charity. Talented pianists take part in a public recital.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

Teaching and assessment meet the standard required for accreditation.

The vast majority of lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Across the key stages, most pupils are acquiring new knowledge, making progress, increasing their understanding and developing their skills, according to their ability. In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils to apply intellectual, physical and creative effort, to show interest in their work, and to think and learn for themselves. Classroom management is generally effective, enabling nearly all pupils to behave well and show a readiness for, and enjoyment in learning. Whilst the school has assessment procedures in place, the use of assessment data to inform lesson planning and reliably evidence value added for an individual and groups is less well established. The identification of underachievement and implementation of intervention strategies is generally effective.

In the best lessons, pupils are set imaginative tasks, well matched to their learning needs, enabling them to learn independently and to make good progress. In one lesson puppets were used to tell a story. The pupils then took part in a range of activities to develop their creative thinking, speaking and listening skills. In the unsatisfactory lessons, there is too much teacher talk and pupils lose interest. Tasks such as colouring in a photocopied sheet do not allow the children to make progress in their learning. Samples of work indicate that overall, progress is broadly in line with ability. A formal test at the end of the EYFS gives evidence of attainment but in the absence of reliable entry baseline data, it is difficult to measure progress across the key stage.

Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 the quality of teaching is also variable. In the best lessons, the tasks are well matched to the learning objectives and pupils have plenty of time to apply new skills. In a Key Stage 1 lesson on capacity, after a clear explanation from the teacher, pupils were able to work collaboratively, investigating the capacity of various containers. Evidence of teachers using ICT to enhance the pupils' learning experience is evident. In a thought-provoking Key Stage 2 science lesson, pupils used ipads to research and report on the contribution of their chosen scientist to scientific knowledge. Interactive whiteboards are used in many lessons and some teachers encourage pupils to email their homework.

The best lessons throughout Key Stages 2 demonstrated effective use of 'assessment for learning' strategies. In a Grade 6 English lesson, the teacher employed effective plenaries on three occasions in order to assess the pupils' learning and progress against the lesson objectives. In the same lesson, pupils provided peer feedback and analysed their own responses to a task. In less effective lessons, there is too much teacher talk, tasks are not clearly differentiated, learning objectives for the lesson are unclear and there is an over-reliance on completing exercises in a text book or on a worksheet.

In the best lessons across Key Stage 3, pupils are provided with opportunities to work collaboratively and participate in self and peer assessment. In some lessons, although pupils are on task and well behaved, the pace of the lesson is slow and pupils' learning

against lesson objectives is limited. Some teachers encourage creative and critical thinking and provide a range of different activities which stimulate and excite the pupils. This was evident in an English lesson where the teacher used a variety of shoes to stimulate a speaking and listening activity. In some Grade 8 and 9 combined lessons, teachers' planning fails to ensure that both groups of pupils make progress against intended learning outcomes. Effective planned differentiation is evident in a few lessons. In a combined Grade 8 and 9 mathematics lesson, the teacher planned for both year groups and ensured that collaborative work, together with peer assessment, was used effectively to challenge the pupils' thinking and ensure all pupils made progress against the intended learning objectives.

Across the key stages, a significant amount of work in pupils' books remains unmarked. Assessment for learning techniques, for example peer and self-assessment, use of plenaries and targeted high order questioning, have yet to be fully embedded across all subjects. There is limited evidence of effective target setting to raise individual pupil attainment.

Most teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, cultural background and EAL needs of their pupils. Whilst the needs of most pupils are met, planning to specifically meet the needs of the most able is under-developed. In lessons where teaching assistants are effectively used to support learning, pupils make good progress. The contribution to pupils' learning by teaching assistants is inconsistent across the school.

BSS takes into account the types of curriculum and external examinations commonly used in schools in the UK. This enables students to enter, or re-enter the UK educational system without disadvantage.

5.3 Standards achieved by students

Most pupils start school using English as an additional language. Throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage pupils make sound progress in literacy and mathematical understanding so that by the end of the EYFS, most pupils have acquired basic reading, writing and number skills to enable them to make a smooth transition into Key Stage 1.

Pupils continue to make progress throughout Key Stage 1 such that by the end of Grade 2, standards in reading, number, spelling, punctuation and grammar, speaking and listening are at least at an age appropriate level. SAT assessments conducted by the school, indicate that at the end of the key stage, 80% of pupils are working at or above the expected level in English reading and 75% in mathematics. Systems for tracking progress across EYFS are underdeveloped. Formal tracking in Key Stage 1 is at an early stage of development.

By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils are working at or above UK national average expectations, with 36% above in reading and writing and 25% in mathematics. Standards are higher in English than mathematics. The school has begun to systematically track individual pupil progress, using Cambridge Checkpoint Tests to provide an international perspective on standards.

At the end of the two year Key Stage 3 course (in Year 8), lesson observations, SAT assessments and book scrutiny indicate that most pupils are working towards UK expected levels by the time they start IGCSE courses in Grade 9. Small numbers however make statistical inference unreliable. The school's first cohort of pupils to take IGCSE in 2016, are predicted to achieve A* - C grades in English, mathematics and ICT.

The school is successful in helping all pupils to develop their personal skills and qualities. Nearly all pupils are thoughtful and well behaved. They are acquiring the personal and social skills needed to move successfully to the next stage of their lives.

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

The quality of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness meets the standard for accreditation.

All pupils are exposed to aspects of spirituality through the taught curriculum as they move through the school. A planned PSHE and citizenship programme provide additional opportunities for reflection and sharing moments of wonder.

Pupils are expected to listen attentively to the adults and each other. They are mostly polite, cheerful and well mannered. Many teachers plan opportunities for their pupils to work in pairs and or in small groups in order to develop their social skills and gain from collaborative ways of working. Trips, visits and charity fundraising provide opportunities for social interaction.

Pupils quickly learn to distinguish right from wrong through the effective application of the school's 'Golden Rules' which clearly details staff expectations in lessons and around the school. Most pupils respond appropriately and respectfully to the views of others and understand the consequences of their actions. Most pupils are able to take responsibility for their actions and learn from their mistakes.

Tolerance, democracy, respect for freedom of expression and other human rights are developed throughout the school. As pupils progress, planned curriculum experiences ensure they broaden and deepen their understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship not only in Bulgaria, but the UK and internationally. A spirit of internationalism is firmly embedded in the curriculum. During the accreditation visit the school held an International Children's Day. The absence of regular planned assemblies is a missed opportunity to enhance curriculum provision and celebrate the work of the school.

7. *Standard 3*
The welfare, health and safety of the students

The care given to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils meets the standard for accreditation.

The school has a health and safety policy which outlines systems and procedures as well as roles and responsibilities. The school has implemented an effective anti-bullying policy.

Pupils at the school are well cared for. The school is a happy and harmonious environment. Pupils are articulate, confident and kind to each other. Incidents of bullying are rare. Relationships between staff and children are positive.

The site is secure. Visitors enter the school through a security gate and all visitors are required to wear appropriate ID. Within the limitations of space, the school site is mostly well maintained with a small number of minor issues that need addressing. All areas of the school are kept clean during the school day. The school meets Bulgarian regulations in all aspects of health and safety.

The school employs a full time nurse. Detailed medical records are kept and appropriate care given to pupils who have accidents or are unwell. The nurse liaises closely with families about medical issues. Medicines are stored securely.

The school encourages pupils to develop healthy lifestyles. In addition to the PE curriculum there is an extensive range of sporting extra-curricular activities. Pupils are taught about the importance of a healthy diet and this is reflected in the food prepared for the children in the two on-site school kitchens.

The school employs a full time counsellor as well as a separate teacher for PSHE. The PSHE curriculum and the role of the counsellor support children in learning to deal with a range of issues including developing self-confidence, being a good friend, staying safe on-line, making the right choices and age appropriate sex and relationships education.

Pupils are well supervised during break and lunch times and the start and end of the school day. During the accreditation visit a drill was observed and all pupils evacuated the school in a reasonable timeframe. The school identified the need to refine some aspects of the evacuation process to ensure the safe evacuation of all members of the school community.

Daily attendance registers are taken. Overall, attendance is about 90%. The school has identified the need to continue working with parents to ensure improving attendance and inform them on the day if their child is absent. Transport safety is given a high priority. Buses are well maintained and pupils well supervised. Bus registers are well maintained and wearing of seat-belts compulsory.

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

The suitability of the proprietor is highly appropriate. All local requirements are met, including the right to work in the host country; suitability to work with children and appropriate certificates of suitability. The proprietor ensures the school fulfils the safety, care and guidance requirements for all pupils. In addition she takes responsibility for the checking of staff credentials.

Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks, including police checks in the country of origin, are carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in Bulgaria and their previous employment activity. All staff involved with Early Years students are required to undertake a full medical examination. In addition, all members of staff are required to sit an *APTIS* test to demonstrate their English proficiency.

There is a list of all staff who currently work in the school. This is regularly updated and shows when they started and stopped working in the school. The school does not employ supply teachers.

Staffing levels are more than adequate for the successful delivery of the curriculum. All teaching staff have qualifications appropriate to their role; some staff have further academic or teaching qualifications that enhance school development.

9. *Standard 5*
The premises and accommodation

The accommodation, staffing levels and resources meet the requirements for accreditation.

The school is situated on a small site with four separate buildings. Security of the school is good. During the day one main gate is used, locked and staffed by security personnel who verify the identity of all visitors. Although far from ideal the school makes effective use of limited space for example in the creation of specialist rooms for art, technology, a library, science lab, gym and ICT suite. There are adequate rooms for school administration, dining and a suitable school clinic. The small outdoor area is very well used including two small pitches and excellent outdoor play equipment for younger children.

Classrooms are small which limits future potential for growth and has implications for the delivery of the curriculum. There are interactive whiteboards in all classrooms. The furniture and fittings are fit for purpose and are of a particularly high quality in EYFS. Sound insulation and acoustics allow effective teaching and communication. Lighting, heating and ventilation are effective. Flooring throughout the site is well maintained and is generally in good condition. Washroom facilities are plentiful, hygienic and easily accessible. Water and drainage systems meet local requirements and are tested regularly. Emergency evacuations are carried out and monitored for effectiveness. Site security is good. The main access point is well manned and the school is surrounded by secure boundary walls. Security staff monitor the main entrance, ensure all visitors are checked and security badges issued. The school site is clean and well maintained throughout the day to maintain these high standards. Cleaning and maintenance staff are present throughout the day. Regular checks are carried out to ensure that equipment and the environment are safe.

Overall, resources are adequate for the curriculum. Investment to enhance support for mathematics such as 3D shapes, clocks and counting equipment, and small world equipment in EYFS, such as sand, water and role play areas, would help improve provision further and provide more opportunities for independent learning. Recent investment in ICT has increased the use of technology to support teaching and learning. All classrooms are equipped with interactive white boards. A bank of i-pods is available for classroom use. The library is housed in a small room with sufficient space for storage but not for sitting/browsing. Nevertheless pupils are actively encouraged to read and take books home. The electronic recording system provides a log of individual library use.

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

The provision of information for parents, carers and others meets the standard required for accreditation.

Contact details of the school and the proprietor are readily available. British School Sofia's mission, vision and ethos are featured in relevant documents and publications. It is a driving force for school improvement.

Prospective parents are given the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions. Clear expectations are given to parents and commitment to them is one criterion for admission. Key school policies and the curriculum on offer are available on a parent portal, part of the school's web site. Passport size photographs, qualifications and a short biopic of each member of staff are displayed in the entrance area. The complaints procedure is available on request.

Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress. They receive two full reports, including all subjects, and two short report cards at the end of the first and third term, which contain the main subjects only. There are two parents' meetings a year. The school is in the process of changing its reporting nomenclature to match that of the UK: working towards, working at and working above UK national averages.

There are monthly meetings with an elected Parent-Teacher-Organisation-Committee (PTOC). Parents have the opportunity to put forward suggestions for improvement. Lead class parents have recently been introduced to work as a link between parents and teachers in organising events and fund-raising.

Reports accompanying formal inspections or accreditations are posted on the school's web site.

11. *Standard 7*
The school's procedure for handling complaints

Serious complaints are very rare. The school nevertheless has a clear policy and procedures in place which reflect good practice from the UK. Parents are informed of the process. The formal complaints procedure is transparent, open and effective, taking into account local laws and regulations. The procedures for handling complaints mirror the management structure of the school. The class or subject teacher is the first port of call. Should an issue not be resolved, progression through the management structure follows. Provision is made for an independent appeals panel and for the complainant to be accompanied. Written records clearly detail the process regarding individual complaints and a high level of confidentiality is observed.

12. *Standard 8*
The quality of provision for boarding

Not applicable.

13. Standard 9
Leadership and management of the school

Leadership and management of the school meet the standard for accreditation.

The school runs well on a day-to-day basis. The principal is well supported by her senior leadership team. Collectively they have a clear vision for the development of the school. Through its recent self-evaluation, which takes into account the views of all major stakeholders, the senior leadership team have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The senior leadership team gives a high priority to staff professional development. The use of technology in the classroom and the application of thinking skills are the present priorities. The rapid growth in student numbers is providing increasing opportunities for teachers to undertake leadership responsibilities. The school has recognised the need to ensure that newly appointed senior leaders and middle managers have the skill set to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

Teaching is improving as a result of monitoring but this needs to be more rigorous and sustained. The school's curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn and make progress. The school has identified the need for a more rigorous approach to monitoring, tracking and assessment. Overall, the quality of lesson planning is good. Behaviour in class and around the school is good. Whilst all teachers undergo formal lesson observations, the absence of pupil attainment targets is a missed opportunity to continue to raise standards.

The school actively seeks to recruit quality staff and ensures safeguarding procedures are in place. The school is increasingly successful in developing strategies for engaging with parents and carers.