

O Castro British International School

Camiño San Cosme, San Pedro De Cela, Mos, Vigo, 36419
Pontevedra

School's regional authorisation: DOG 60 2018/3/26

Date of Inspection: 29th November 2023

Inspection Team:

Andrew Beavon (Lead Inspector)
Stefan Rumistrewicz (Team Inspector)

Reason for the Inspection:

To evaluate the school for authorisation as British from Nursery to Year 13.

Overall Recommendation:

The school is recommended for authorisation from Nursery to Year 13 for a period of 4 years for 1,112 students.

The next inspection is due in November 2027.

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History and Context of the School

O Castro British International School was founded in 2008. It follows the English National Curriculum. The school is in a rural area close to Vigo, in the province of Pontevedra. In 2017, the school was acquired by the Globeducate group.

There are 707 pupils on roll from nursery to year 13, the majority of whom are of Spanish nationality.

The last inspection took place in November 2019, and authorisation was given for 1,112 students from Nursery to Year 13 for four years.

Accommodation and Resources

The school accommodation and resources meet all the requirements for the delivery of the curriculum. The main building is modern, purpose-built and houses classrooms on three floors. All rooms are adequate in size and furnished appropriately for the age of the children. They are all equipped with projectors and whiteboards which are used effectively to support teaching and learning.

There are well-resourced facilities for art, music and computing. In the last year, the school has introduced drama as a subject for secondary students and added a dedicated drama studio. There are two well-equipped science laboratories, with good facilities for the preparation and secure storage of chemicals.

The range of printed and practical resources in both primary and secondary classes, including personal laptops and tablets, effectively supports the delivery of the curriculum. The two school libraries and the reading areas located in classrooms are well stocked.

The school grounds are extensive and include play areas, sports pitches, a garden and an outdoor learning area. A large sports hall is used for large meetings, assemblies and indoor physical education activities. An outbuilding has recently been repurposed as a wellbeing centre for use by the school community as a meeting space and for activities such as yoga.

The dining room is of a suitable size and lunchtimes are well organised. Food is cooked onsite, and the students are positive about the quality of the meals provided.

Staff facilities are appropriate for the number of teachers in the school. Toilet facilities for students are suitable for a school of this size.

Health, Safety and Welfare

The school provides a safe environment for the pupils and has a health and safety policy that effectively guides practice. Entrances and exits to and from the school are secure and well-supervised at the start and end of the school

day.

Other key policies are in place for teaching and learning, child protection and safeguarding, including anti-bullying. In practice, students comment that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. They know they can speak to any member of staff if they have a problem and are also aware of the dedicated safeguarding team members who can offer specific help.

When students have had a concern in the past, it has been dealt with appropriately. They find staff approachable and supportive, and this is one of the strengths of the school. Students speak positively about the new designated safeguarding leader and school counsellor, who offers pastoral support for students experiencing social and emotional problems.

Fire and evacuation procedures are displayed around the school but not in all rooms. Evacuation drills take place during the first term. There is a school nurse, and several staff are first aid trained. Appropriate procedures are in place for recording accidents or illnesses.

Appropriate checks are carried out to ensure the safe recruitment of all adults who work in the school. All staff are required to undertake regular safeguarding training.

The Curriculum

The curriculum is broad and balanced and clearly based on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and the English National Curriculum up to Year 13. Appropriate time is allocated to the teaching of subjects enabling students to learn appropriately and make good progress.

Suitable weight is given to both English subjects and Spanish and Galician. The principal language of instruction is English and staff encourage the use of English in most classes. In some classes, teachers could do more to monitor and promote English as the language of learning in school.

Planning is detailed and consistent across the school. It is supported by clear schemes of work. Differentiated tasks are included in planning, and students are confident in selecting the level of challenge most appropriate for them during lessons.

Students with a special educational need (SEN) are identified and supported. The SEN team works together with teachers to assist targeted students inside and outside the classroom. Detailed information in the form of an individual educational plan is provided to help teachers support students where required. The SEN team also liaises with external providers to better meet students' specific needs.

At Key Stage 4, students choose two optional subjects in addition to the compulsory subjects of English language and literature, mathematics, science, French and Spanish.

An extensive range of subjects is offered in Year 12 and Year 13, with students studying four A levels. Additional Spanish subjects are timetabled so students can gain the qualifications they require to access the Spanish university system.

Career and university guidance are well-catered for. The school participates in regular university fairs and organises a programme of university and career talks for students. Older students speak positively about the taster sessions they enjoyed in the previous year which helped them choose their options.

Educational visits are organised throughout the year and these are often linked to the curriculum. All students from Year 4 up have the opportunity to attend an annual ski trip, with residential trips for upper primary and secondary students at the end of the school year.

Staffing

Most staff are UK qualified and all are suitably experienced to deliver the EYFS programmes of study and the National Curriculum. Teachers are effectively deployed in their areas of specialism.

Staff recruitment and retention are well managed. There is a core of staff who have worked at the school for several years. This has ensured continuity and stability. Recent investment in training and development has supported this and has been well-received by staff.

There are good staff-to-student ratios in all classes, and the majority of classes currently have less than 20 students. Classes in the EYFS and Year 1 have a dedicated assistant, with other year groups in primary supported by a team of learning support assistants. These are deployed well to support teaching and learning.

The teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and teaching skills, and this is supported by a programme of in-service training in school and online throughout the year. Primary teachers have undertaken training in the past year on marking and feedback and it was clear from books that students know what to do to improve their work.

Staff meetings are held weekly. These provide opportunities for staff to share expertise and good practice which directly impacts teaching and learning. Teachers are positive about the school and enthusiastic about their work.

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. Mostly it is good. Teachers, support assistants and students have excellent relationships and this contributes to a purposeful and inclusive learning environment.

Students are ready to learn, start work immediately, and make good progress. In a Reception phonics lesson, the children started an activity on the carpet as

soon as the school day began. After reviewing sounds they had previously learned, each child chose a favourite sound and gave an example of a word beginning with the sound. The teacher then introduced the focus for the day's lesson with an activity on the whiteboard. This well-paced and interactive lesson ensured all the children were engaged and made good progress throughout the lesson.

Across the school, lessons are thoughtfully planned, well-paced and structured, and have explicit learning objectives. In many lessons, students have the opportunity to work collaboratively and share their ideas in group and class discussions to produce good results. During a Year 13 history lesson, students spent most of the time working together, discussing their ideas about Mussolini and his relationship with the church. Their thoughtful and well-informed conversation, skillfully directed by the teacher, helped the whole class to develop their understanding of the topic.

Teachers give students individual attention throughout lessons to check understanding and challenge them further when needed. Students talk fluently about what they are learning and make good progress. For example, in a Year 13 English literature class comparing two texts, the teacher helped students sustain a discussion through the use of thoughtful, open-ended questioning. This enabled the class to deepen their knowledge of the topic and to check their understanding in a supportive way.

In the EYFS, there is a welcoming atmosphere where children feel happy, safe and secure. There are opportunities for learning and play both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers plan meaningful activities to promote learning, making use of the facilities on offer.

Displays in classrooms and communal areas are plentiful and celebrate the good standard of students' work from across the school.

Assessment

The school's systems for assessment are well organised and effective. Students' progress is tracked against curriculum objectives. Marking and feedback are used well in primary and some secondary classes, but the lack of consistency in marking practice across secondary departments results in not all students knowing how to improve.

In addition to school assessments, external assessments are used to inform teaching and learning and to benchmark progress as a student moves through the school. These focus on academic achievement as well as the social and emotional wellbeing of the students.

School reports are issued on a termly basis. Parent meetings are scheduled twice a year, although parents can make an appointment with members of the teaching staff at any point throughout the year.

The results from external examinations indicate that student achievement is broadly in line with expectations in most subjects.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development

Behaviour in the classrooms is outstanding. The atmosphere both inside and outside the classroom is friendly and welcoming, with students being polite to visitors and to one another. One student commented that there is a little community in every class and that people help each other. This was evident in the majority of classes where group work was seen.

The school provides opportunities for students to take on leadership positions, such as head student and head of house. Students' views are valued within the school. Both the primary and secondary councils meet weekly. Currently, agendas are driven by suggestion boxes around the school. The Eco Committee (also student-led) is well established, and their efforts have led to Eco-Schools Green Flag accreditation.

An initiative across schools in the same group promotes outdoor learning and wellbeing. It aims to develop skills of collaboration, problem solving and creative thinking and has been enthusiastically taken up by the school and its students. From Year 9, students have the chance to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award programme, with the majority of students choosing to take part.

The house team system allows for personal and team success to be rewarded. Regular assemblies reinforce the school programme for personal, social and health education, and celebrate achievement.

Leadership and Management

Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed who has prioritised strengthening the leadership team at all levels. This has been done through the clarification of roles and the appointment of several new middle managers. Collectively, they have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and its future direction.

There is a clear commitment from the school's leaders to continually develop the school. The progress made since the previous inspection demonstrates this. Good leadership and management are evident in the consistency of expectations across the school, notably in the quality of teaching and learning, relationships and behaviour. Staff work together to achieve the school's priorities. Teachers are positive about the school and play an active role in planning for its development.

There are regular leadership meetings to discuss and plan the school's priorities and review progress. Departmental heads also meet regularly with their respective teams. School development planning is thorough and is informed by the school's self-evaluation process which includes input from staff.

The school's appraisal system consists of regular classroom observations and the monitoring of students' books. Subsequent feedback to teachers emphasises improvement. All of these activities influence the training opportunities offered to staff.

Response to previous inspection reports

The school has taken steps to make the recruitment system more robust, with all staff having the necessary criminal record checks in place.

While there has been some improvement in the use of spoken English throughout the school, in some classes teachers could do more to insist on this.

In the EYFS, there is now an appropriate allocation of time to allow children opportunities to follow their interests and to apply and consolidate new learning.

Strategies to improve staff retention have had a positive impact on the school.

The range of resources available for secondary lessons has improved.

Recommendations

The school should:

- develop greater consistency in teachers' marking and written feedback so students, especially secondary students, know how to improve their work; and
- maintain the current high standards of teaching and learning and share good practice across departments to ensure all lessons are good or better.