

The International School of Penang (Uplands)

British School Overseas Inspection Report

Inspection dates Tuesday 14th – Friday 18th November 2011

Lead Inspector Mike Hewlett

Age group: 5-18
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection report follows the English Department for Education (DfE) Schedule for the inspection of British schools overseas. The inspection was carried out by five inspectors from CfBT Education Trust who spent four days at the school. CfBT is a body approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools in England and overseas and quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

It is one of the world's leading not-for-profit education companies, providing a range of education services in the UK and internationally. CfBT employs over 2,500 staff worldwide, all working on projects relating to educational quality.

Inspectors report on the extent to which schools meet the relevant Standards for British Schools Overseas. The inspection follows closely the framework for the inspection of Independent schools in England but, where appropriate, also takes account of compliance with local regulations. The Standards are as follows:-

1. The quality of education provided by the school (Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment).
2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils.
4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff.
5. The premises and accommodation.
6. The provision of information for parents, carers and others.
7. The school's procedures for handling complaints.
8. The quality of provision for boarding.
9. Leadership and management of the school.

The purposes of the inspections are to:-

- help schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of pupils' education and of the care for their welfare;
- provide rigorous and reliable inspection reports which help schools to recognise and celebrate their strengths and to identify and remedy any weaknesses;
- inform parents and the wider public of the quality of British schools overseas by placing reports in the public domain;

Information about the school

The International School of Penang (Uplands) was founded in 1955 as a British Preparatory school for the children of expatriate families in Malaya. It moved in 2006 into purpose-built facilities in Batu Ferringi, a popular seaside resort. Uplands is a not-for-profit, multi-national school community with pupils from up to 35 different nations. Its stated aim is to be 'A cooperative international community, encouraged by the principles of mutual respect, within a framework of secular education and an open exchange of rational ideas'. There are currently 523 pupils on roll, 242 girls and 281 boys, including 97 in the sixth form. 40 pupils are Boarders and these are aged 9 to 18. The majority of pupils speak English as a second language and the school makes special provision for 20 pupils who are identified as having special educational needs. In the primary school, pupils follow the Primary Years Programme (PYP) while in secondary, the school offers its pupils the Cambridge IGCSE and A level as well as the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme (IB). Students have won places at numerous universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College, Wharton and University of British Columbia. Over 80 per cent of the teaching staff are ex-patriate with wide range of international experiences. The majority are UK educated and trained and staff turnover is relatively low with 7 per cent of teachers changing during the last academic year.

Summary of the evidence base used by the inspection team

This inspection was carried out by five CfBT Education Trust inspectors. The inspectors visited 54 lessons. They held 39 meetings in total including those with members of the governing body, staff and parents and carers and talked with groups of pupils. An evening visit was made to Boarding houses where inspectors met with pupils and joined them for their evening meal. Inspectors also observed the school's work and looked at self-evaluation, improvement plans, policies, assessment and tracking systems, safeguarding procedures and pupils' work. Inspectors examined 50 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and followed up on issues that were raised.

In addition to evaluating the school's performance against the BSO standards, inspectors were also asked to review the quality of the school's provision for Modern Foreign Languages and for IB. These two reports are not contained within this document but are reported directly to the Board of the school.

Evaluation of the school

The International School of Penang (Uplands) is a good school. It provides its pupils with a good quality of education and has some significant strengths.

The overall picture of attainment and progress of pupils is good.

2011 results in English at IB Higher Level were above the worldwide average. Many pupils gained outstanding results at IGCSE and have performed well above the worldwide average in both English Language and Literature. In 2011, Uplands pupils performed exceptionally well in English Literature and all candidates gained a grade A* to B.

Progress in lessons and over time is good in the primary and secondary sections of the school. In the sixth form it is generally satisfactory from pupils' starting points. The majority of pupils are articulate in lessons and demonstrate good listening skills. They acquire an extensive vocabulary and are able to read and interpret English texts and poetry with increasing empathy and confidence. Many demonstrate a keen enjoyment of literature.

In mathematics, the attainment of students taking the IB is generally above world averages. Secondary pupils typically make good progress, with the result that many are successful when they take the IGCSE a year early in Year 10. Results in this examination have been well above average in recent years, with around three quarters of pupils achieving A* or A..

By Year 6 pupils have secure numeracy skills and calculate confidently using the four rules. For example, they are adept at long multiplication and division. They gain a good understanding of the relationships between fractions, decimals and percentages, and use this knowledge when solving mathematical problems. Most primary pupils achieve well from their starting points in Year 1.

In science the A level cohort in 2011 was small but all students studying science achieved grades of B and above. The results in chemistry were particularly impressive with all students achieving A* grades. The results in IB present a more varied picture. Biology results over the past few years, including 2011, have been consistently high and above the world average. In chemistry, the past three years' results have fluctuated but, in most years, have remained above the world average. Physics results are lower and are less consistent with results over time being near the world average.

Good progress is made in the secondary phase so that by the time pupils reach Year 11 they achieve well in examinations.

By Year 6 pupils know about natural and man-made light, how light travels and can investigate shadows. They know the basic parts and functions of the human body. Pupils follow instructions well and carry out a fair test but they have limited skills in designing and carrying out scientific experiments and investigations.

A similarly positive picture is found in most of the subjects offered. For example, in both the Arts and Humanities IGCSE results in 2011 were above world average scores.

Pupils achieve well because they are provided with an interesting, engaging curriculum. It prepares them well to easily enter or re-enter the UK educational system. Individual student needs are generally met and those with additional needs are identified and supported.

The curriculum offers pupils good opportunities to take on personal responsibilities and there is a wealth of extra-curricular activities on offer. It would be improved by strengthening links between the primary and secondary departments so that pupils experience a greater continuity between the two. Teaching is good overall. Pupils work hard in most lessons and respond enthusiastically to any tasks set. Most teachers have excellent subject knowledge and, because they know their pupils well, set most of the work at a suitable level. Nevertheless, some inconsistencies still remain in marking and assessment.

Pupils' personal development is good overall and their behaviour is outstanding. The quality of welfare, care and support they receive is excellent. The school places a great emphasis on this aspect of its provision.

The Principal has brought stability and a sense of direction to the school after a period of disruption at leadership level. Working successfully with the Board and senior leaders, he has ensured that areas of strength within the school continue to flourish and that the gaps that have been identified are being addressed. Results remain consistently good but school leaders recognise that a few pupils could be doing even better given their starting points when they arrive at Uplands. Currently, progress of pupils as they move through the school is not tracked closely enough. Rigorous processes to monitor and evaluate the work of the school and then set its strategic direction are being introduced. They are all relatively new and it is too soon to measure their impact on pupils' and teachers' performance. Consequently, leadership and management of the school are judged to be satisfactory overall. However, there is strong evidence to demonstrate that the systems introduced are the right ones, staff are beginning to gather the necessary information and that within the school's leadership there is a good capacity to improve.

As a result of this inspection, undertaken during November 2011, the school has demonstrated that it meets the Standards for British Schools Overseas. This judgement is endorsed by the British Government, quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and is valid for a period of three years.

Standard1. The quality of education provided by the school

The good **curriculum** offers a wide range of memorable experiences which successfully promote pupils' academic progress and personal development. The local environment is used extensively in subjects such as geography and science to bring learning to life, and provide opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding in real contexts. Visits further afield, such as those to China and Japan provide valuable insights into cultural diversity, in addition to enlivening pupils' learning in history and the Japanese language.

Much of the work in the primary school is based on units of study which successfully engage pupils because they relate to their everyday experiences and allow an element of choice in which aspects of a topic to explore. Pupils in the secondary department have a good range of options from which to choose for IGCSE and IB which are recognised by employers and relevant to the courses offered by universities. However, there is a lack of curriculum coherence and continuity across the primary and secondary phases, which results in some unnecessary repetition. Throughout the school, there are individual education plans (IEPs) for pupils who have special educational needs.

An extensive programme in personal, health and social education contributes much to these aspects of pupils' development. Issues such as keeping safe, sustaining friendships and resolving minor conflicts are addressed in the primary years. As pupils move through the school they are helped to form their own views on topics such as alcohol and staying healthy.

Pupils have good opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the school and wider community. Older pupils, for example, organise break-time sports, act as schools councillors and run groups such as the Uplands Environmental Society. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 help younger ones as their 'reading buddies'. They play roles in the house system as captains and class representatives, although there is no primary school council to provide a formal conduit for their views.

Overall **teaching** is good. Most teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they know their pupils well. Positive teacher student relationships and a strong work ethic in the classroom contribute to pupils' learning. Lessons follow relevant courses and there were many good examples of teachers using variety of teaching methods to enhance pupils' learning. For example, in Spanish where pupils in Year 7 were learning vocabulary for the family from an interactive whiteboard and in Year 12 in a Japanese lesson students practised verbs for direction using a map and picture cards. Lesson time is well managed and used productively so that, in the best lessons, the pace of learning remains brisk.

Good levels of support are provided for pupils who require English as a Second Language support (ESL), especially in Year 7 where large numbers arrive at the school to begin the secondary phase of their education. When given the time to evaluate their own work and that of their classmates pupils are quick to grasp the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the subject they are studying. A good example of this was observed during an outstanding IGCSE PE lesson where pupils analysed their personal performance and that of their partner while they were working their way through a training circuit. They were able to explain the criteria that they were applying to the tasks and plan their work so that their performance improved in the skills needed for their particular sport. In the small number of lessons that were less effective, too much time was spent listening to teachers talk and work set did not meet pupils' individual needs.

Relationships within the school are very positive and there is a mutual respect between pupils and their teachers. This contributes positively to their learning. They settle very quickly to work in lessons and work well. In almost all lessons observed pupils rose to the challenges that were set for them and gave of their best.

Many teachers use **assessment** well to plan lessons and set tasks for pupils at just the right level. In addition, there are some good examples of detailed marking with specific targets for improvement explained to pupils. Where this happens, pupils are clear about how they can improve. The school acknowledges that there are gaps in this process with evidence of some inconsistencies in marking and assessment throughout the school.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding across the school during lessons, when pupils are moving around the school and at break times. Almost all pupils show good levels of self-discipline even when they are less tightly supervised. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong that is strongly promoted by the school. They demonstrate positive attitudes to school through their good attendance and punctuality. In addition, almost all pupils arrive to lessons with the necessary equipment, complete their homework and enthusiastically participate in all aspects of school life.

Pupils come from a very diverse range of cultural backgrounds and in formal and informal ways have good opportunities to learn about cultures other than their own. Annual events such as the World Music concert and International Food Festival are inspired and enhanced by the multi-ethnic school population. Furthermore, the school has a strong commitment to encouraging good relationships and tolerance among people of all backgrounds and cultures. This is embedded in the school motto “Respect for Self; Respect for Others’ and as a consequence of this pupils respect other people’s beliefs and values and pupils of all nationalities work play and work well together. Pupils are self-confident and have good self-esteem and along with the clear policies set out by the school this ensures that incidents of bullying are rare. The social development of pupils is strong and they say it is amongst the highlights of their schooling at Uplands and is well balanced with their academic development. Pupils make good overall progress in developing personal qualities that will enable them to contribute effectively to the community and eventually to transfer to working roles and adult life. These qualities include being good communicators, open-minded, risk takers, reflective, principled and caring.

Opportunities and experiences provided by the school do allow pupils opportunities for spiritual development but this is not yet as deliberately planned and promoted as other aspects of pupils’ personal development. Pupils are developing a good basic knowledge of public institutions and services in Malaysia and in the UK.

Standard 3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The high priority given to pupils’ health, welfare and safety is evident in all aspects of the school’s work. Pastoral support is excellent and is greatly appreciated by the pupils, not least by those new to the school who benefit from high quality support by the school counsellor. Every attention is given to ensuring the premises are secure and that potential hazards are addressed. For example, power tools and chemical are stored safely. The premises are guarded around the clock by a highly efficient security team. Procedures for evacuating the building are well known to pupils and staff. They are practised regularly and modified if necessary.

A caring ethos pervades across the school. Relationships between pupils and staff at every level are excellent. Pupils feel extremely safe and valued as individuals. They are mutually supportive and look out for one another within the harmonious school community. This is exemplified by students studying for the IB who have a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to their fellow pupils. Pupils across the school gain an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy life style. This is evident, for example in primary pupils’ awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. Pupils in Year 3 were keen to explain how the heart needs to be strong to pump blood around the body and that eating too much fat can clog the arteries. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the wide range of physical activities on offer. Boarders form a happy and thriving community and develop strong friendships.

Standard 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The Board, through the Principal and administrative staff, ensures that all the required checks are in place to confirm that staff are suitable to work with children and that they have the right to work in Malaysia. It delivers its responsibilities competently and has a well established structure of committees that meet regularly to discuss and support the work of the school.

Standard 5. The premises and accommodation

In most respects, the school is well resourced, both in terms of learning and staffing. Staff use the facilities very effectively to support pupils' learning. Built in 2006, the facilities are very clean and well maintained. The recently constructed play area, for use by primary pupils, complements the attractive school environment. It incorporates natural resources, surrounded by trees and bushes, and pupils are proud of how 'green' their school campus has become. In most departments, there are sufficient teachers, suitable specialist areas and teaching rooms to meet the needs of the pupils. The school acknowledges that some improvements are needed. These include increasing the size of the secondary library, music and drama rooms as well as providing better study areas for IB students. Security arrangements are highly effective with all gates constantly supervised and all visitors met as they arrive on site.

All pupils, including boarders have regular access to sports facilities, including a swimming pool and sports fields.

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

The school provides parents with good levels of information through the website, documents when they join the school and regular newsletters. All school policies are made available on request. The school profile is a comprehensive document which contains valuable information about the mission statement, trends in academic results and the performance of individual pupils.

Responses to the parental survey, sent out by the inspection team prior to the visit, confirmed that the overwhelming majority of parents were happy with the school and with the education their children received. Almost all agreed that their children enjoyed school and that they found the work interesting and challenging. Similarly, those that responded to the statement felt that the school prepared pupils well to enter, or re-enter, the UK system without disruption to their education.

A small minority felt that the school reports did not give them enough helpful information about their children's progress. Inspection findings confirm that this is the case and that reporting processes would benefit from improvement. The school had already undertaken a review of its reporting procedures aimed at ensuring that parents and carers are kept fully informed.

The Primary department regularly surveys parents, seeking their views on various matters related to pupils' education and welfare. This provides leaders with a good

range of information which they can then act upon. In Secondary, this information is gathered informally but there is a need to formalise the arrangements to ensure that all parents and carers have a regular opportunity to provide feedback on the education their children are receiving.

Standard 7. The school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has satisfactory procedures for handling complaints and they meet requirements of the standards.

Standard 8. The quality of provision for boarding

The quality of the boarding experience at Uplands is good and supports boarders' education and development. Improvements in boarding provision have resulted in numbers rising from 17 to 40 pupils. Boarders and their parents, in their responses to the questionnaires and in discussion, endorsed the strength of the boarding life of the school. They confirmed that the boarding life met the school's aim of 'Providing an environment within which all pupils could live their lives to the full, in as many spheres as possible, and where individuality can flourish'. Relationships between boarders across the age groups are strong. The atmosphere in the houses is relaxed, warm, lively and supportive. For example, as well as having access to well organised study areas, pupils are able to socialise with their friends in comfortably furnished 'lounge areas' and kitchens. New boarders are welcomed by older members of the house and are given help whenever they need it. Boarders are particularly supportive of each other's achievements.

Relations between staff and boarders are excellent. Based on mutual respect and trust, boarding staff offer a high quality of pastoral care to the members of their houses. The aim for houses to be family communities is well met. Boarders appreciate that such communities need sensible ground rules and work with the boarding staff to achieve the special atmosphere in the houses where boarders are given the support they need without feeling crowded. Boarders say that they enjoy talking with boarding staff and also value discussing issues with the school counsellor. As one boarder commented, 'My only criticism would be that, on occasions, my houseparent seems a bit strict about where we go.....but I don't think my parents would agree with me, they prefer it that way and don't have to worry about me while I'm away'. There have been fewer 'house meetings' than usual this term, where all pupils gather to discuss boarding issues. The school recognises that these should take place more regularly. Parents praise the work of the staff and comment on the way their children have developed positively in behaviour and attitudes and have 'blossomed as individuals'.

Boarders report that they have a good range of activities and that the school's structure encourages participation whilst, in the older years, it achieves the right balance between activity and academic study. Outdoor, cultural, arts and shopping trips are offered each weekend. The breadth of choice of activities is a strength of the school. Boarders also like the different pace of the house at the end of a working week, allowing them to relax and unwind just as they would at home.

Boarding accommodation is of a good standard. The boarding houses are off campus in a quiet suburban street and pupils enjoy a good quality of personal accommodation in study bedrooms. The social areas of the houses are spacious and well resourced with good communication facilities and lack any institutional feel.

Staff and pupils enjoy strong leadership from a caring and effective Head of Boarding.

Standard 9. Leadership and management of the school

The Principal, who was appointed in 2009, has brought a sense of order and direction to the school following a period when there were several changes in leadership. He has been well supported by the senior leadership team as he has instigated major changes to the way in which the school operates. For example, there is now a regular programme of staff appraisal aimed at ensuring that there is a greater consistency in teaching learning across the school. However, this initiative, along with many others, is relatively new and it is too soon to demonstrate the impact of many of the changes that have been made. Consequently, the effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory overall despite having some clear strengths. These include the smooth running of the school on a day-to-day basis and the recruitment of knowledgeable and effective teachers and support staff. School policies are updated, readily available and there are clear lines of responsibility. There are appropriate resources for staff and pupils and they are well deployed to maximize their impact on pupils' learning. School leaders take their responsibilities for ensuring pupils' safety very seriously and the school has invested heavily in projects such as retiling the floors and providing better machine guards in the Design and Technology department.

Underpinning the school's work has been its commitment to the motto which is encapsulated in the phrase, 'Respect for self; respect for others'. This shared vision is known to all staff and pupils and reflected in relationships both in classrooms and around the school. Improvements in monitoring pupils' progress and comparing classes and year groups are still very new and not sufficiently embedded. Similarly, data analysis can show the overall trends in the school's overall performance at the end of Year 11 and Year 13 but do not always demonstrate whether all pupils have made sufficient progress.

Both the Principal and the Board are able to articulate a strategic direction for the school, are mutually supportive and understand their roles and responsibilities. However, their views on the school's direction are yet to be formalized into a strategic plan which will cover the next three to five years. As a result, there is some lack of clarity among staff about the school's priorities and their role in achieving them.

The school is aware that its procedures for self evaluation need to be more rigorous. For example, monitoring of pupils' work is undertaken by school leaders as well as departmental heads. This provides them with a useful overview of curriculum coverage but is not used consistently enough to check on marking or to discover whether there is sufficient challenge in some of the pupils' work.

Safeguarding arrangements are secure and new staff are thoroughly checked to ensure their suitability. Decisions on staff attending Continuing Professional Development (CPD) are taken at senior leadership level. Consequently, there is a good, whole school overview of training undertaken and its effectiveness.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The International School of Penang (Uplands) meets the requirements for British schools overseas.

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 the effectiveness of leadership and management by:

- ensuring all leaders and managers are involved in rigorous and accurate assessment of the school's performance through data analysis and through monitoring the performance of students and teachers across the school
- completing the strategic plan and implementing development priorities against a timescale that is known and understood by all stakeholders
- sharing best practice across the school and enhance transition arrangements so that there is better continuity and progression for students as they move between year groups and departments

Raise the quality of teaching and assessment by:

- ensuring all teaching is good or better and that the pace of students' learning is brisk
- improving the use of assessment so that work is suitably differentiated to meet the needs of students
- providing a better balance between teacher and student contributions in lessons so that more students are able to practise their speaking skills

Summary of inspection judgements

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	√			
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The quality of provision for boarding

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Leadership and management

Overall effectiveness of leadership and management			√	
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School details

Name of school	The International School of Penang (Uplands)
Type of school	International School
Date school opened	1955
Age range of pupils	5-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	522
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3189 - £13,950
Annual fees (boarders)	Average £8,000 in addition to tuition
Address of school	Jalan Sungai Satu Batu Feringgi 11100 Penang Malaysia
Telephone number	604 8819777
Fax number	604 8819789
Email address	principal@uplands.org
Head teacher or Principal	Dr John Horsfall
Proprietor	The ISP Schools Association