



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Tier 4 Educational Oversight  
Inspection

International House Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
October 2012

# CONTENTS

Section	Page
<b>PART ONE - SUMMARY</b>	
1. CONTEXT	1
2. PROVISION	1
3. THE INSPECTION	2
4. MAIN FINDINGS	2
<b>PART TWO - OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION</b>	
5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	4
6. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	5

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

All the statistics in this report have been supplied and verified by International House Belfast

### **Grading System**

The Education and Training Inspectorate use the following performance levels for (Tier 4) Educational Oversight inspections:

<b>Performance Level</b>
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## **PART ONE - SUMMARY**

### **1. CONTEXT**

1.1 International House Belfast is a member of the International House World Organisation (IHWO) and, although independently managed and operated, forms part of a group of International House schools based in Barcelona. It was registered as a company in 2006 and has been operating as an English language school and teacher training centre in Belfast city centre since 2007. International House Belfast is accredited by the British Council, and is a member of English UK, the representative body of English language schools across the United Kingdom. In 2012, International House Belfast worked in partnership with local universities, a teacher training college, a number of further education colleges and other private language schools to set up a local branch of English UK in Northern Ireland.

### **2. PROVISION**

2.1 International House offers a range of English language courses to students at various levels which are certified in-house by the IHWO and are aligned to the Common European Framework (CEF) for languages; they include a General English course on which students can enrol continuously, tailored courses for organisations or groups of students, and executive immersion courses. It also offers Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses for teachers and preparation courses for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examinations.

2.2 As an open testing centre for University of Cambridge examination courses for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), International House Belfast offers examination courses at first, advanced and proficiency certificate levels for its own students, and end-test facilities for students from other institutions. It also offers the teacher training Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA).

2.3 During the summer months International House Belfast offers three residential programmes for young people aged from 12 to 17 to study and develop their English language skills at Queen's University Belfast, Rockport School Belfast, and the SHARE Adventure Centre in Fermanagh. It also offers high school term-time programmes to young people aged from 11 to 16 at Rockport School, which are designed for students who want to follow a typical post-primary school programme in English.

2.4 International House Belfast is also expanding its English language provision through the development of a number of international educational projects; to date staff have worked on projects in China, Kazakhstan, Oman and Turkey.

2.5 All of the students in International House Belfast are private fee paying students who attend courses for various reasons; they include, for example, exchange students or students participating in a European Union funded Leonardo da Vinci project. With the exception of the summer programmes, all students are adults from a range of international countries, and ethnic backgrounds.

2.6 During the period from January 2008 to August 2012, 2239 students completed in-house certified courses; of these, almost all (97%) completed a General English course at various levels. Over the same period, 236 students completed IELTS preparation courses and 184 students completed University of Cambridge (ESOL) examinations; 78 at first certificate, 81 at advanced certificate and 25 at proficiency certificate levels.

2.7 At the time of the inspection, 59 students were undertaking a General English course at various levels, 8 students were undertaking the IELTS preparation course, and 1 student was enrolled on a University of Cambridge (ESOL) advanced certificate course. In addition, 10 students were undertaking the CELTA course. Only one student was registered under the Tier 4 points based system as a general visa student. None of the students were under 18, and there was a balanced gender mix of male and female students.

### **3. THE INSPECTION**

3.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) is the approved Educational Oversight body in Northern Ireland authorised by the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) to inspect privately funded further education providers and private language schools, which offer provision up to and including level 3 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

3.2 The Inspectorate carried out a two-phase inspection of the provision for English language courses in International House Belfast in September and October 2012. Phase one involved a small team of inspectors looking at the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation, carrying out a focus group meeting with staff, and observing a small sample of teaching sessions. Phase two involved a team of inspectors who observed teaching sessions at a variety of levels, carried out a focus group meeting with students, held discussions with management and key staff in the organisation, observed the enrolment and initial placement process including the administration systems, scrutinised key planning and monitoring documentation, and evaluated the organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant inspection documentation.

3.3 The arrangements for the inspection of care, guidance and support and the safeguarding of vulnerable groups include the opportunity for students to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as a meeting by the inspection team with a group of students. One hundred questionnaires were issued to the students; 53 (53%) of the questionnaires were returned to the Inspectorate and 18 of them contained additional written comments. The returns show that the students' experiences in International House Belfast are satisfactory. In particular, they appreciate the good support they receive from staff and the quality of the provision for learning and teaching. A significant minority of students indicated, however, that they would like more information about the standards required for their course, and additional feedback on how they were progressing in their learning. The Inspectorate has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires and the discussions held with students to the manager.

### **4. MAIN FINDINGS**

4.1 Overall, the quality of education provided by International House Belfast is satisfactory and meets the necessary standards for Tier 4 Educational Oversight inspections. Strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the quality of the provision in International House Belfast through the annual health check process.

4.2 The main strengths are the:

- effective and cohesive quality of the leadership and management of the school;
- broad and balanced curriculum offer which is enhanced by an interesting range of social and cultural activities;

- sound quality of most of the learning and teaching in the lessons observed;
- highly motivated students, who are achieving high standards and are progressing well in their learning;
- inclusive, respectful and welcoming learning environment; and
- high outcomes achieved by the students in both the in-house certified and external examination classes.

4.3 The main areas for improvement are the:

- need to develop further the use of ICT to support and enhance the quality of the provision for learning and teaching; and
- need to formalise a culture of sustained self-improvement through more effective self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes.

**Table of Performance Levels**

<b>Overall Performance Level</b>	Satisfactory
<b>Contributory Performance Levels</b>	
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory
Quality of Provision for Learning	Satisfactory
Achievements and Standards	Satisfactory

## **PART TWO - OVERALL QUALITY OF PROVISION**

### **5 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

5.1 The quality of leadership and management in International House Belfast is satisfactory.

5.2 The Manager and the Director of Studies are highly effective in providing cohesive strategic leadership and management for the school. There are effective lines of communication between staff at all levels, supported by weekly staff meetings. The roles and responsibilities of all the staff are clearly defined; they are well qualified and experienced in the administration and delivery of language development programmes. An established system of staff appraisal provides effective support, feedback and guidance to tutors, and management provide appropriate opportunities for staff to undertake relevant continuous professional development.

5.3 Management and staff have worked hard to provide a warm and welcoming learning environment that promotes enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning. The students report a high level of satisfaction with their learning provision, and with their residential and host family accommodation; they value the school's proximity to the city centre and its cultural and social attractions.

5.4 The management has developed a wide range of local and international links and partnerships with businesses, other academic institutions and sporting and cultural organisations which contribute to, and enhance, the development of English language programmes.

5.5 Effective registration and enrolment processes are in place for students. Appropriate management information and administration systems are also used to help inform and support management decision making. These mechanisms, however, need to be integrated more effectively to better inform planning for continuous improvement. In addition, formal processes for the self-evaluation of the provision are underdeveloped, and more work needs to be done to implement and embed this practice and to develop a culture of sustained self-improvement at all levels across the organisation.

### **6. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

6.1 The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

6.2 The curriculum provided is well-structured and provides a sound framework for teacher planning and for the effective integration of social and cultural development. This is enhanced further by the opportunity for students to undertake an appropriate range of cultural events and visits.

6.3 The Manager and Director of Studies, in collaboration with the teachers, have developed sound systems to monitor and review teaching practices and support staff development. During the inspection, the team visited 15 in-house certified teaching sessions and the quality of teaching observed was mostly good or better. Characteristics of the most effective practice include lessons that are well-paced, with ample opportunities to build on prior learning. In these lessons, the planning is focused on the learning to be achieved and there is an appropriate balance between the development of oral and reading skills. The lessons demonstrate very productive working relationships within the classes including the teachers' ability to adapt teaching approaches to accommodate and support the range of ability levels of their students.

6.4 In a minority of the lessons the teaching was overly directed with opportunities missed for more active learning by the students; opportunities for consolidating new learning and experiences were underdeveloped. The teachers need to reflect on and evaluate more carefully the effectiveness of their lessons, and the impact of the teaching strategies employed, including the possible development and use of individual education plans to strengthen and enhance feedback to the students. In almost all the lessons observed the use of ICT to support and enhance the quality of learning and teaching was underdeveloped.

6.5 During the inspection the students were enthusiastic about their learning, highly motivated and always willing to participate in the lessons; they reported very positively about their experiences, and use well the opportunities for peer-learning.

6.6 The Director of Studies is currently reviewing the processes for recording and monitoring individual student progress; she creates a welcoming and positive atmosphere in the placement sessions with new students. While the induction processes work well for the majority of students, a minority of students with very limited language skills would benefit from an enhanced introduction to the learning process, and a clearer outline of learning goals and progression targets against which progress can be measured. In addition, although the learners are well supported in their learning, management need to formalise the arrangements to identify and support students who present with special educational needs, such as physical disabilities or specific learning support needs.

6.7 On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, while the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups comply satisfactorily with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, the following area(s) need to be addressed:

- International House Belfast needs to update its Child Protection policy to one based on the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults; and
- improved signage and information needs to be displayed around the organisation including posters and the identification of key designated staff.

## **7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

7.1 The achievements and standards demonstrated by most of the students are satisfactory.

7.2 In oral and reading skills, the students attain high standards in line with their abilities. In the lessons observed, students make effective and consistent progress in their learning both within and across levels.

7.3 Over the past four years, in the in-house certified General English courses, nearly all (99%) of the students who were enrolled completed and achieved their qualification at the targeted level.

7.4 Over the same period, in the University of Cambridge (ESOL) examination examinations the school's achievement rate for its own students, including partial achievements is high at 87%. The school has made a good start in analysing and benchmarking data in order to identify underachievement, and track the progression of those students undertaking external examinations.



**OVERALL SUMMARY TABLE (Over the past 4 years)**

<b>Qualification (in-house certified)</b>	<b>Number enrolled</b>	<b>Retention</b>	<b>Achievement (inc partial achievements)</b>
General English	2171	2160 (99%)	2160 (100%)
Custom Designed Courses	51	51 (100%)	51 (100%)
Executive Immersion	11	11 (100%)	11 (100%)
CLIL for Teachers	6	6 (100%)	6 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2239</b>	<b>2228 (99%)</b>	<b>2228 (100%)</b>
IELTS Preparation	236	n/a	n/a
<b>(external examination)</b>			
Cambridge (ESOL)	184	184 (100%)	159 (87%)

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