Educational Oversight Visit

Basil Paterson

11/06/2024

Head of Establishment	Till Gins
Review Date	8th April 2024
College Nominee	Claire Hunter
Lead HMI	Sarah Halliwell

1. Background

In Scotland, HM Inspectors of Education are responsible for providing educational oversight of provision up to and including Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 8, offered by private colleges or English language schools. These organisations are referred to as 'providers' and are either (a) existing, or are seeking to become, a student sponsor on behalf of Home Office UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI), or (b) delivering provision supported by funding from the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS). This review was undertaken as part of the educational oversight of provision offered by private colleges or English language schools, up to and including Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 8. Further information about how HM Inspectors undertake educational oversight reviews are available here.

During the review, the team engaged with managers, staff and learners. This report outlines the findings from the visit, and includes aspects of positive practice, aspects for improvement, and any associated main points for action. The report will be shared with the provider and SAAS and will be published on Education Scotland's website.

2. The organisation and its context

Basil Paterson is an autonomous college, established in 1929, located in Edinburgh city centre. It is part of Instill Education, an Oxford-based company, which owns a number of private colleges and English language schools across the UK. Basil Paterson has two main divisions, a school of English and a tutorial college. It is an open examination centre for English language testing for both Cambridge and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

The school of English and the tutorial college are each led and managed by a principal who are assisted in their roles by two academic managers, a support team and teaching staff. Within the school of English, learners study English as a foreign language (EFL), from elementary to examination preparation. The school provides the Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA). The tutorial college offers a range of qualifications at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 5, 6 and 7. It is an approved Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) centre and offers qualifications from other nationally recognised awarding bodies. Subjects offered include modern languages, science, and social sciences. Basil Paterson has current accreditation from the British Council. There are currently no learners studying via the Home Office Tier 4 sponsorship programme. In 2023 there were 301 learners who attended the Basil Paterson tutorial college and language school. This review was undertaken for the school of English.

3.   Outcomes of external review

The review team assigned the following grades for each of the three key themes:

Key theme	Grade awarded
Outcomes and impact	**Good**
Service delivery	**Very Good**
Leadership and quality culture	**Good**

4.   Summary of key findings

Learner progress and outcomes

How well are learners progressing and achieving high quality outcomes?

Areas of positive practice

- Rates of learner retention are high for all programmes over the last 3 years. Almost all learners successfully completed their programme.

- Rates of learner successful completion at the tutorial college are high, with almost all learners achieving their qualification.

- In 2023, 90% of learners who were presented for SQA Higher examinations successfully achieved a pass at A - C. For learners undertaking Advanced Higher examinations, 67% achieved a pass at A - C.

- Most learners who successfully complete tutorial college qualifications progress to further study in higher education.

- The language school offer a number of programmes which prepare learners successfully for external examinations. Learners are encouraged to undertake an externally validated examination during or at the end of their course. These include: Aptis, Linguaskill, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Cambridge main suite exams.

- Almost all learners undertaking the Cambridge Advanced English examination (CAE) were successful in 2023. For learners undertaking IELTS levelling, nine learners were awarded scores from level 6 to level 7 with an average score of 6.5.

- Learners on English language programmes receive a college certificate upon completion which states their level of English language skill against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Most learners progress at least one further level in their language placement tests.

- All learners on language programmes develop confidence in their English language vocabulary and grammar skills. They benefit from engaging with other learners and staff at the college to improve their listening and speaking skills.

- All learners are supported well to develop skills for life, learning and work, through classroom and extracurricular activities. Examples include creative writing, storytelling and writing curriculum vitae.

- A positive culture of equality and diversity is promoted and embedded within the college. Learners are supported well in developing a wider understanding of programmes in a multi-linguistic and multi-cultural learning environment.

- Ukrainian refugees are offered fee waivers to attend college programmes. This widens access and promotes inclusion for this key group of learners and raises staff and learner awareness of other cultures.

Areas for development

- Staff in the language school do not systematically track and monitor attainment data over time. This limits opportunities for staff to better understand the differentiated needs of learners and plan for provision of support if required.

- Arrangements for the tracking and monitoring of attainment do not currently meet fully the requirements of the Student Sponsor scheme.

- Learners do not have sufficient opportunity to celebrate and promote their achievements.

How well do we meet the needs of stakeholders?

Areas of positive practice

- The tutorial college offer a range of programmes from SCQF level 5 to 7 supporting progression pathways to further or higher education. This provides learners with access to a range of options to progress to a positive destination on completion of their programme.

- The language school offer a wide range of well-structured programmes that meet the needs of learners from A1 Elementary to C2 Proficiency levels. Programmes are mapped to the CEFR and support progression through the various levels of study. Completion of the programmes support learners to achieve the required levels of English to progress at work or pursue further study options.

- The language school offer a rolling programme of intensive English language study options. Learners join classes at a level appropriate to their needs and continue their studies for a duration which suits their circumstances.

- All staff are members of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme. Managers ensure all staff understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding. Arrangements are in place to safeguard young people and vulnerable groups.

- Host families are vetted and undergo appropriate PVG checks. Managers visit host family accommodation providers at least every two years to ensure required standards are met and maintained.

- Arrangements to monitor the attendance of international students are robust and comprehensive. Welfare checks are conducted regularly, and an attendance tracking system supports managers to follow up absences where required.

- All staff complete PREVENT training as part of safeguarding arrangements. Managers draw constructively on participant feedback to embed key principles of PREVENT into organisational policies, procedures, and teaching materials.

- Learners provide regular feedback on their learning experiences through completion of formal surveys and informal discussions held with academic and support staff. Feedback provided is used well to inform curriculum planning or to develop teaching approaches.

- The college offers designated locations for prayer and quiet contemplation. These areas provide a quiet environment for individuals seeking religious observance or personal reflection.

- Learners are motivated to achieve and attain their qualification. Learners are supported well to participate fully in a range of cultural activities designed to enhance their learning. A well-designed social programme demonstrates a high level of awareness by staff of learners' cultural and linguistic diversity.

- All staff use formal and informal arrangements effectively to monitor learner progress. Teaching staff meet regularly with learners to discuss progress. Staff make good use of weekly team meetings to ensure arrangements to support individual learners are communicated and actioned promptly.

- All staff engage well with quality assurance arrangements to ensure a high level of compliance with SQA and other awarding agency external verification requirements.

Areas for development

- Most classrooms are not sufficiently accessible for learners with mobility difficulties.

- Staff do not systematically analyse areas for improvement to inform strategic decision-making and to enhance learner satisfaction.

5. Service delivery

Delivery of learning and teaching:

How good is our delivery of learning and teaching?

Areas of positive practice

- Teaching staff set high standards and provide learners with appropriate levels of support to develop and enhance their academic and language skills. They encourage and support learners well to take responsibility for their learning.

- All staff take good account of individual needs and provide opportunities for learners to select learning methods that reflect their abilities and learning preferences. Learner progress is measured and tracked using an online portal and discussed with learners during weekly coaching sessions. The online portal helps staff identify areas for improvement and provides learners with personalised support.

- Almost all learners value the high level of support they receive from staff throughout their college programme. Learners benefit from the advice they receive from teaching staff during weekly coaching sessions, homework tasks and formative assessments.

- Teaching staff promote an inclusive culture that embeds equality and diversity themes. Staff ensure the curriculum is inclusive and is specifically designed to meet the learning needs of different groups.

- All learners at the language school develop a wide range of English language skills including improvements to their listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As a result, many are encouraged by their progress and explore further study options.

- Staff arrange frequent visits to events and activities to provide English language learners with insights into Scottish heritage and culture. These experiences encourage learners to engage socially with each other and stimulate discussion points in the classroom.

- All staff participate in bi-annual peer observation arrangements. This helps improve and enhance learning and teaching approaches and encourages sharing of best practice. Peer observation arrangements are collaborative and help to ensure consistent teaching standards across the school.

- Language school teaching staff demonstrate high levels of pedagogical expertise. They apply their knowledge effectively to ensure teaching approaches are diverse and appropriate.

- Learners actively design and plan learning activities. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst learners, leading to increased levels of motivation and engagement. This promotes personalised and learner-centred educational experiences.

Areas for development

- There is no strategic approach to the use of digital technology by staff in learning and teaching. This limits opportunities for learners to access additional materials to reinforce their learning.

- Staff have limited opportunities to access further professional development to improve their digital skills.

Management of learning and teaching

How good is our management of the delivery of learning and teaching?

Areas of positive practice

- Well-considered pre-course literature provides learners with useful information about their programme and the range of services provided to support their learning. Where individual learners disclose a specific learning need, staff make appropriate adjustments and accommodate individual circumstances.

- Recruitment arrangements in the language school help to place applicants on an appropriate level of English language programme. This ensures each learner is placed in a class that aligns closely with their current language proficiency and maximises their potential for learning.

- All learners have good opportunities to disclose their additional support needs. Staff and managers work purposefully together to support learners to overcome barriers and make good progress.

Area for development

- Arrangements for evaluating learning and teaching are not sufficiently systematic. Teaching staff are not yet able to contribute fully to identifying actions for improvement.

- Staff do not use college data sufficiently to inform programme evaluation and inform actions for improvement.

- Equalities data is not systematically captured during the recruitment process to support staff to plan for individual learner needs.

6. Leadership and quality culture

How good is our strategic leadership?

Areas of positive practice

- Managers have a shared vision and aspiration for the college and communicate this well with staff. They take good account of the local context and ensure this is reflected in their planning and strategic direction.

- All staff work well as a team. They are committed to delivering a curriculum which contributes to a culture of quality improvement and ongoing development of the college's programmes and activities.

- The language school gathers the views of learners regularly, to inform the review of the quality of the learning experience. Weekly staff meetings are particularly useful for identifying any operational issues, with interventions implemented promptly to help resolve difficulties.

Areas for development

- Managers do not systematically collate, analyse, or reflect upon data to support action planning for improvement. This limits the development of college strategies and arrangements for improving the learner experience.

- There is no strategic approach to self-evaluation within the organisation. This limits effective action planning to drive improvement. Managers are developing a new quality assurance framework to support self-evaluation more effectively. However, this has not yet been fully implemented.

7. What happens next?

We are confident that the provider has the capacity to continue to improve and we will make no further visits as a result of this review.

Sarah Halliwell
HM Inspector