

El Limonar International School, Villamartin Las Filipinas 15, Urb Blue Lagoon 03193, Alicante

School's regional authorisation number: BOE 03020344

Date of Inspection:
17th November 2023

Inspection Team:
Terry Binns (Lead Inspector)
Nicole Fielding (Team Inspector)

Reason for the Inspection:
To assess the school from nursery to year 13 for the renewal of the current authorisation as a British school in Spain.

Overall Recommendation:
The school is recommended for authorisation from nursery (age 3) to year 13 (age 18) for a period of 4 years - for 750 pupils.

The next inspection is due in November 2027.

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History and Context of the School:

El Limonar International School (ELIS) opened in September 1990 in La Alberca (Murcia). The ELIS Villamartín site had its origins in a small rented school site in Torrevieja town centre and moved to the current, purpose-built site in 2004. In 2008, El Limonar International School became part of the Cognita group. From 2008 the school began to teach a full British international curriculum, introducing it gradually year by year.

Approximately 26% of students are Spanish, 11% are from the UK, 20% are from Russia, 9% are from Ukraine, 7% are from Poland and 7% are from China. The remaining 20% of students are from over 30 different countries.

Accommodation and Resources:

The school provides good accommodation in which both staff and students feel safe and comfortable. Teaching resources are varied and stimulating. They enable effective delivery of the curriculum.

The school occupies a large secure site. Access and exit are well controlled at the start and end of the day. Classrooms are of a suitable size, are bright, and display good examples of student learning. The standard of displays throughout the whole school is excellent and showcases the students' work to good effect, especially the work from the art department that has recently been awarded prizes.

The Early Years department is very well resourced, both indoors and outdoors. It provides a stimulating and safe environment for children to try out ideas and investigate.

A range of teaching resources is used to enhance learning by helping teachers to offer well illustrated and clear explanations. This includes effective use of interactive whiteboards. In a physics lesson, for example, one was used in collaboration with the student's devices to help students to complete a virtual practical investigation allowing them to think through and experiment with different electronic circuits.

Specialist facilities, for example, music soundproofed rooms, laboratories, the computer suite, art studio, drama space and physical education (PE) areas are of a high quality and contribute to effective practice.

A library area has been developed with the help of sixth form students; however this will need more books to make it completely fit for purpose. There are plans to develop this further over the coming years. All primary and Early Years classes have reading areas. There is also a sixth form study area, which helps students to be independent learners.

Dining and toilet facilities are appropriate for the number of students and a lift enables access to all floors of the school. Social spaces are used well between lessons and at other social times. The sixth form appreciates their independent patio area and this is well used.

Health, Safety and Welfare:

School accommodation is safe. Detailed policy documents support consistent practice and as a result cases of incidents or accidents are low. Evacuation instructions are clear and regular fire, lock down and bus evacuation drills take place. Effective risk assessment ensures that activity is well controlled on and off site. Potentially hazardous chemicals are stored adequately and organised safely.

First aid is administered competently, and records of injuries are monitored to ensure potential hazards are controlled. Medical tracker software records a full picture of a student's medical needs.

Safeguarding practice is good and both staff and students understand how concerns are to be communicated. Clear safeguarding and child protection policies support this practice. The school takes measures to ensure that adults who are employed to work with children are suitable.

There is an effective anti-bullying strategy where students nominate three adults at the start of the year who they can speak to if they have a problem. This is followed up by anti-bullying week, with assemblies to highlight tolerance as one of the school's values

Consequently there is very little bullying and if any issues arise they are dealt with in a timely manner. Behaviour around the school is excellent and a clear policy ensures that cases of transgression are dealt with effectively.

The Curriculum:

The curriculum is broad and balanced. It fulfils the requirements of both the UK national curriculum and the Spanish curriculum. Options at key stages four and five enable students to gain a range of appropriate accreditations and access to university and training opportunities after leaving the school.

Adequate time is allocated to subjects from both British and Spanish curricula, allowing pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding in each area of learning. Curricular plans and schemes of learning are well thought out.

Opportunities to develop practical skills in science are included in planning and practical science is well developed. To a greater extent than at the previous inspection, it engages students in the learning of the subject throughout the school and is well supported by the secondary lab technician.

Students with additional needs are well supported by support staff. They are closely monitored by the additional learning needs (ALN) team through personal support plans and are tracked for progress regularly, meaning there is a well-developed system for monitoring children with additional needs.

An immersion programme supports students for whom English is not a first language and the school monitors the effectiveness of this preparation for students' integration into the mainstream curriculum. This is well appreciated by staff and students alike.

The English language is used as the language of instruction in all lessons and students reach acceptable standards because of this.

Opportunities to learn beyond the school are good with many trips and visits linked to clear aims for learning. These include art trips to Madrid, drama trips to London and national ski trips. Extracurricular provision is also good, especially in music where over 140 students regularly engage in individual instrumental lessons. The Duke of Edinburgh scheme also provides a valid educational experience.

Staffing:

Staff are well qualified with sound experience to meet the needs of the students. Staff are well motivated and retention rates are good. Teachers are deployed effectively to best match their skills to the needs of the school.

The ratio of teachers to students is generally good.

Staff feel that the school has a clear sense of direction and know what is expected of them. This is seen in the classroom where consistent practice in adherence to school policies is starting.

Staff value opportunities to work with colleagues from other partner schools. They also benefit from a range of wider professional development opportunities provided by the school. The staff are very grateful for these opportunities and feel the training has been useful in developing new policies and making them feel empowered and valued. However they do not always feel they have the time to take part.

Teaching and Learning:

The overall standard of teaching and learning is good and as a consequence pupils generally make good progress. Of the 21 teaching sessions observed, the majority were good, with a significant number of examples of excellent practice. Generally, the students make good progress in lessons, the teachers offer clear explanations, work is set at the correct level for students and lessons proceed at a good pace.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) teaching reaches a high standard by using differentiated tasks to engage the children and support the learning of different skills. As was observed in a Foundation class where a phonics lesson was followed up by a variety of table top phonics tasks, aimed at promoting both independent and teacher-led learning

In many primary classes, there was an emphasis on both revising keywords from previous lessons and teaching higher-level vocabulary which allowed the children to embed the language and use it appropriately. For example, in a science lesson, children were encouraged to answer higher level questions, explaining their reasoning and using the correct scientific language, and in a humanities level, elevated vocabulary about World War Two was taught in order to enhance the writing of a diary entry.

In an observed mathematics lesson all students were engaged and there was a high level of enthusiasm around the learning of angles. All students were making progress, because of clear explanations, expectations and the good pace of the lesson. Further to this, high ability students were learning independently and progressing with support from the teacher when needed, meaning that all students within the lesson were making progress, regardless of ability.

There was also a high level of engagement in a history lesson where students were preparing for an argumentative essay. Highly informed students were debating and judging arguments during a group work session. They were able to do this because of a well-planned, clearly explained and well thought out activity that all students could build on their previous learning.

In all lessons, learning intentions were observed and referred to. Students knew what was required of them during the lesson and what they needed to achieve to be successful. The level at which work was pitched was very good in some classes, but this was not consistent across all lessons because of a lack of differentiation.

Assessment:

Teachers assess the progress of their students with sufficient rigour and frequency. The resulting information is generally used well to track individual performance.

Tracking records help the students to see the progress they are making, although this practice is not consistent across the whole school, as in some lessons, students did not know the level they working at or what they needed to do to improve.

The school has begun developing more detailed written feedback to students about their work, but it is not used consistently. Consequently, students are not always sure how they could make further progress.

Middle leaders are starting to work with assessments to improve target setting and monitoring. As a result students are starting to see how to progress from their mistakes.

Achievement:

Student achievement is very good overall.

From the EYFS to key stage two, most students are achieving expected levels based on their standardized testing. However, a larger than usual intake of non-native English speakers has resulted in some year groups not achieving these results. The school has taken measures to improve this, for example, by introducing a new way of teaching English grammar. As a result, there has been an increase in achievement from the previous year.

Throughout key stage four and five attainment is good overall.

At key stage five 99% of students achieved A* to E grades.

At key stage four, there was a 100% pass rate in mathematics, history, geography, art and drama. Other subject departments plan to raise standards with use of lunchtime clubs to help with revision and to help with understanding and misconceptions. Further to this, the science department plan to enter students for exams based on ability so that all of the students can achieve their optimum grade.

Those students at risk of underachievement resulting from English being a second language achieve well because they are well supported as part of the immersion programme. Progress is systematically evaluated to ensure timely progression and integration into mainstream classes.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development:

Attitudes to learning are excellent. Students behave well around the school and are proud of their achievements. The school's values are evident within lessons and are displayed around the school. Therefore, students feel that the school provides a supportive and friendly environment. Children speak highly of their teachers and feel safe.

The school council is active in organising extra-curricular clubs, with the help of the sixth form.

Leadership and Management:

The school receives strong governance within the Cognita group of schools and an executive head teacher works very effectively with the newly appointed head teacher. Together with the school's senior leadership team, they effectively support improvements in teaching and learning.

A clear management structure with defined roles ensures that responsibilities are well understood. The management team are visible around the school ensuring standards are met and are rolling out new policies, such as feedback and behaviour, with the collaboration of students and staff. These policies are starting to be used effectively in the classroom and result in students making progress and feeling involved in the school.

A detailed school improvement plan has clear and sensible priorities.

An effective staff appraisal procedure is used to set targets for improvement for each member of staff.

Response to the previous inspection report:

1. Continue to develop a more rigorous tracking programme, especially in key stage three, which reviews achievement and sets targets so that students, their families and teachers better understand their academic progress.
 - A programme has been developed, but still does not at the present time enable students to know their targets and what to do to improve.
2. Increase the quantity and quality of practical and investigative opportunities within the secondary science curriculum.
 - This has been planned into the curriculum and there is much better practice around the school. This is appreciated by the students
3. Provide a library designed to promote reading and independent study skills.
 - A library is now in place but has to be fully resourced.
4. Improve existing marking and feedback to students about their work so they clearly understand their next steps in learning more.

- A new policy has been developed, but is not yet used consistently. As a result students are not always aware of their next steps
5. Review the storage provision for potentially hazardous chemicals.
- This has been accomplished to a high standard.

Recommendations:

- The tracking programme, which reviews achievement and sets targets for the students, should be used more consistently across the school so that all students know their targets and how to improve to achieve them.
- Ensure that marking of and feedback about students' work gives them the information and guidance they need to improve their work.