

I have just completed three weeks on placement at the renowned English College in Prague as part of my teacher training course at the University of Cumbria, in conjunction with One Cumbria. I applied for this placement to enhance my experience of teaching and learning, particularly outside of my subject area and within the International Baccalaureate context, and I have certainly acquired a wealth of experience and insight that I am looking forward to implementing in my own teaching practice in the UK, with the eventual goal of teaching overseas as I progress in my future career. I am indebted to the English College in Prague, One Cumbria, and the University of Cumbria for this incredible experience!

I arrived on 19th May 2022, a little apprehensive, but more excited. One Cumbria organised everything



logistical flawlessly for us, and we were guided and supported on every step of the way. We arrived in the magical city of Prague and were met by the assistant headteacher who guided us to our accommodation via taxi. The head of HR met us at our accommodation, and brought us gifts and produce for our stay, which was in a perfect location just a short distance away from Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Although we were tired and slightly overwhelmed, after a short siesta we found our way and dined in the Little Quarter. That evening, I took a walk down to Charles Bridge and was literally breath-taken by the beauty of Prague. It is somewhere I had always longed to visit, and to be able to do so whilst acquiring the skills and experience of educational excellence at the English College as part of my PGCE was like a dream come true! The following day, we had a tour of the school and met with the Deputy Head for a talk about our placement and after completing some administrative tasks, were given access to the schools resources and online systems. We were made to feel truly welcome, and it was wonderful to be included and integrated fully into the life of the school. Over the first weekend, I took off and explored the length and breadth of Prague, venturing a little

further into the Old Town to visit all the sites and enjoy lunch beside the river, before attending a classical music concert at the Church that would become my spiritual home during my time there. Being an RE teacher, I love visiting religious sites, and I was certainly spoilt for choice in Prague- the “city of a hundred spires”! After the concert, I watched Prague’s famous Astronomical Clock strike, and the following day, I attended Mass at the Cathedral and had a lovely relaxing day strolling through the castle precinct and royal gardens before an event in the evening and dinner besides Charles Bridge.

Monday 23rd May- our first day at the English College! We had a CPD meeting about teaching and learning in the IB context, and were given the chance to examine and explore the similarities and differences between the GCSE and the International Baccalaureate. What really stood out for me is the IB’s focus on critical thinking, and training young people to acquire the skills needed to critically examine different curriculum areas in more analytical detail. Whilst many of the approaches to teaching and learning chimed with Rosenshine’s principles which we have been made accustomed to through our experience of teaching and learning in England, the IB programme seemed at first sight much more advanced and almost philosophical in nature, with pupils trained to think critically about theories of knowledge. We then had a

tour of the other school sites, before a very interesting meeting with the headmaster about the mission, ethos and history of the school, which strives to be a bastion of free and critical thinking following decades of right wing fascism and left wing communism in Czechia to enlighten and inspire young people not to simply settle for didactic and transmissional teaching (which remains the standard experience of education in the Czech Republic today), but aiming to get pupils to think for themselves freely and with an increased global awareness. To this end, what also became clear from the outset was the IB's structure of coherence and inclusivity, so that learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge to become well rounded and globally aware citizens. We also had a meeting to discuss safeguarding and pastoral care, which we were familiar with and committed to.



The following day was especially informative- a day of student shadowing, attending all the classes and observing the similarities and differences in the IB approaches to teaching and learning. In the afternoon, I taught my form group's PSHE lesson about mental health and sleep, which was a great experience in preparation for my combined role as RE and PSHE teacher following the course. Many of the issues and methods of teaching were familiar, but being a google school with pupils using their own electronic devices as learning tools was very interesting, insofar as pupils could make their own learning resources instead of my usual practice in England of preparing handouts for pupils to write on and glue in their books! It worked really well, and pupils could follow links from the presentation and do their own research, taking responsibility for their own independent learning. This approach seemed to characterise the entire IB programme- independent learning and research, facilitated by teaching and resources to promote critical thinking. Pupils were thoroughly engaged and focussed, and it struck me as an effective way for pupils to construct their own learning. The following day, we had further CPD sessions on learning support and supporting pupils with EAL. One difference I identified was the low demand for additional learning support among pupils in the school, which seems to be a major focus in the comprehensive state schools I have worked at in England. As such, it was very useful for me to experience this selective and fee-paying grammar school as part of my PGCE, as I have not had the opportunity to do so, and perhaps wouldn't if it wasn't for this placement. Indeed, the difference and disparity between young people in different school settings was enlightening to experience.

Besides observing lessons for the remainder of the time, we also met with the governors and headmaster on the demand and desire for English Grammar style schools in the international context and were given the chance to share our experiences from working in comprehensive contexts. It really helped me to be more clear about the type of school I feel I would be better suited to in my own future career as a teacher. Another great part of this placement was all the insightful and informative CPD sessions and meetings with leaders to understand the theory and philosophy behind the teaching and learning in practice that we gained a lot from through our lesson observations which complimented them. On Friday evening, I was

invited to attend the graduation ceremony for the school leavers, many of whom are proceeding to some of the world's best universities. It was an honour to be part of the ceremony, and was inspiring to see the potential of the leavers fulfilled, thanks to the educational excellence of the English College in Prague, and some of the testimonies and speeches from pupils demonstrated their respect for their teachers, and bore witness to their recognition of the place of ECP in achieving their dreams for the next stage of their lives. As a prospective teacher, this really confirmed my vocation and was so inspiring to experience... I even shed a tear or two myself! This crowned my first week at the English College, Prague. I learnt a lot myself and have loved the placement so far!

