

## Study Guatemala site visit to Liceo Britanico March 2022

### Overview

A Study Guatemala trustee, Simone Riddle, visited Guatemala in March 2022 and went to visit the school, Liceo Britanico in Zone 5 Guatemala City. This was the first site visit since the school is under new leadership since the tragic death of Eduardo Estrada due to Covid-19 in 2021.

There are 180 students in the school. 150 of those students pay, although significantly less than other schools in the area (approximately \$70-80 compared to the \$20 monthly cost at Liceo Britanica. 30 students are on scholarships paid for by Study Guatemala. Numbers have dropped slightly at the school since the start of the pandemic (170) with some parents waiting for the pandemic to finish and the college to open fully. Demand for places is still high.

### School leadership



Christy, Eduardo's wife took over leadership of the school since Eduardo's death. Thankfully, Eduardo had coached and trained Christy in preparation to take over leadership of the school should anything happen to Eduardo.

Christy told us that she had recently finished a Masters in Leadership

which was one of the requirements in order to become the school's director. She now needs to take a course/exam called 'profesionado' which takes six months to be able to become the legal director. To this end, the school is still not legally in Christy's name. Karen and Claudia, Eduardo and Christy's children plan to take this exam.

Christy seemed to be taking the new role in her stride. She came across confidently, passionate and very involved, being on site at the school Monday-Friday.

Christy shared how she was connected with other headteachers in Zone 5, with between 30-50 senior leadership teachers in a Whatsapp group who regularly share info and support one another with arising issues. This group seemed to be a valuable resource of support for Christy. She gave an example of how the ministry of education had asked for them to register the school which required using a lawyer. The recommended lawyer who they approached to deal

with was demanding all the money up front, which was not the usual process. Christy told the network about him and now no one within the network will use his services. The network also advised Christy against filing this requirement as they felt it would put an expiration date on the school as they would need to register every 5 years so it sounded like she wouldn't go ahead with this based on this advice.

### **How Covid-19 pandemic has impacted students**

Currently students are being taught at home, in line with government recommendations. Teachers have been coming into the school to give online lessons, and one of the teachers was giving a class while I was visiting the school.

Parents and some students came into school on a Friday to collect new homework and get the



previous week's work marked by teachers. Students who are struggling academically are given the opportunity to come into the school and get supplementary support on Fridays. Many students are struggling without the face to face support. Christy gave examples of families having one room to live and sleep for the entire family which makes online learning challenging. One

student was coming in to use one of the classrooms to study but had to return home when they contracted Covid.





The school was required to create a clinic for students that may get sick and need medical care. This was very well equipped and managed by Christy. Part of the office area had been converted into the clinic.

Mental health of students has been impacted by all living in small quarters- but Christy didn't give much information on this. She shared a wellbeing resource she had shared with students which included self-care, and personal hygiene.

There was a sense that levels of crime had increased since the start of Covid due to the cost of living crisis, and as foreigners, we were advised to take care when out and about. However no more details were provided on how this had impacted the school.

### State of the building



The school looked in relatively good condition. The outside was due to be painted but Christy mentioned they were waiting for plaques of Eduardo and Phil to be ready before painting.



Inside the main issue was the leaking roof. They have had several people come to fix it but it was still leaking, which was particularly an issue in the science laboratory as this could be dangerous with the electrics.

Christy said she had gone to ask for a loan at her bank to build a 'terraza' (a roof top terrace) but that would have cost millions of Quetzals and the bank refused a loan as Christy doesn't have a credit record. This was the only mayor issue I could see and that was raised to me.

### **Equipment**

Projectors and whiteboards still seemed to be up and working.

They would like to replace all the wooden desks and chairs with plastic ones (or possibly the other way round!) which are more expensive but they tend to last for around five years rather than one.



### **The Band**

The band wasn't currently practising. Some of the instruments are being serviced in Antigua. The school given out the mouth pieces and possibly instruments to students to practice when the pandemic hit but students haven't returned them so they can't perform without these.

Christy showed me a drum kit I think they had bought with the money Jane, chair of trustees had donated.



The new music teacher is teaching the students to read music- something other teachers haven't done before. Students pay extra to attend an extra session on Tuesdays to learn this. The band usually plays on Saturdays.

### **Honour given for Eduardo's service to education**

Christy, miss Jennifer and the children had recently attended a ceremony in Antigua organised by the ministry of education, who have a special honour to Eduardo for this longstanding service to education in Zone 5. This was a prestigious honour, and Christy has the certificate framed and up in the school's director's office.



### Final Reflections

Overall, things seemed to be going well at the school, and the team have adjusted remarkably well to the tragic death of Eduardo. Bureaucratic processes within the ministry of education seemed to be the biggest challenge, both in terms of transferring the legal leadership and registration of the school as well as allowing students to return to the classroom. We were lucky to visit on a Friday when parents and some students were visiting to drop off work and collect new works. What was most striking is that it is the students and staff team who bring life into the building to make it the special place it is. I look forward to seeing the school's development as students return to their rightful place in the classroom on the next visit to Guatemala.

Report written by Simone Riddle, Study Guatemala Trustee  
May, 2022