

# Seven secrets of a top school

John and Margaret Duncan and Andrew Edwards of ELC Bristol have made a habit of acing inspections. We asked them for their top tips for school managers

1. **Recruit and retain.** Having and keeping great staff is the key to running a great school. We believe not just in recruiting, but in keeping – and keeping happy as best we can – a team of both non-teaching staff and long-serving teachers. Many of our teachers have over 20 years' experience with us.
2. **Train, train, train.** We believe in supporting training and development for all staff. We fund Diplomas for teachers and send admin staff to conferences run by the TEN group of independent language schools so they can share ideas with their peers. It's all so important for continuous professional development. Happy, well-supported staff lead to happy students.
3. **Put students at the centre.** Everything we do has the student experience at its heart – from the social programme to accommodation and welfare, to the facilities we have in the school – and we are always looking for ways to continuously improve in all areas.
4. **Keep it personal.** We treat all our students as individuals with individual needs and ambitions. We get to know all our students by name and are constantly talking to them to see how they are and whether there is anything we can do to help them. We feel it is so important for all of us to know our students and for them to know us and see us as approachable and there to support them.
5. **Share best practice with other schools.** No school should operate in isolation and all staff should have a holistic



ELC Principal Andrew Edwards (centre) celebrates the school's inspection success with Directors John and Margaret Duncan

understanding of what the school does and why. Education should be about life-long learning, not just for the students, but also for the school team. No matter how long you've been in the industry, you should always keep learning. TEN (The English Network) is for us a wonderful way to share best practice with highly-experienced professionals and friends. Both of us are ex-ELC teachers and accommodation managers. We have both been international schools' inspectors with IALC, and also chaired the IALC Best Practice committee – an excellent way to learn from other great schools from around the world.

6. **Keep a good nationality mix.** We try to ensure no nationality or mother tongue exceeds 15 per cent of the student body. This means students not only have to speak English but also get to meet and make friends with a large number of people from all around the world.
7. **Concentrate on your core course(s).** At ELC Bristol, we have focused for many years on doing what we do well, which is offering full-time General English and examination preparation courses to adults over 16. Don't dilute your offer or sacrifice quality by trying to run lots of different courses. Specialising in doing the one thing you do well may be a better way of ensuring quality than trying to offer too many products.

But Most of all – enjoy and take pride in the work the school does and try to make sure the students have the best time of their lives. Education should be fun too, after all...

■ Andrew Edwards is the Principal of ELC Bristol and John and Margaret Duncan are the Directors. The school has achieved a perfect score in its British Council Inspection twice in a row. Andrew rejoined ELC before the inspection, having worked there for 15 years previously. Prior to returning, he was Principal of LSI Portsmouth when they also achieved a perfect score from the British Council.



ELC students at the Goldpey Hall summer residence