

Organisation name	Ardmore Language Schools, seasonal multcentres (HO Maidenhead, Berkshire)
Inspection date	17 July 2018
Current accreditation status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: follow up on Points to be addressed

Recommendation

We recommend continued accreditation. However, evidence must be submitted within three months to demonstrate that weaknesses in publicity have been addressed.

Changes to the summary statement

The need for improvement in accommodation can now be removed.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Ardmore Language Schools summer multcentres in August 2017 and July 2018. The Accreditation Scheme assesses the standards of management, resources and premises, teaching, welfare, and care of under 18s and accredits organisations which meet the overall standard in each area inspected (see www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation for details).

This large private language teaching organisation offers residential and homestay vacation courses for under 18s.

The inspection report noted a need for improvement in the area of publicity.

Strengths were noted in the areas of staff management, student administration, quality assurance, academic management, care of students, and leisure opportunities.

The inspection report stated that the organisation met the standards of the Scheme.

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	2009
Last full inspection	2017
Subsequent spot check(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent supplementary check(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent interim visit(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	Study tour groups – no lessons, just full board and accommodation
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	Ardmore Language School (year-round)
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	English language courses in the USA and Outbound trips to Europe, South America and China through Ardmore Educational Travel. School Integration and Academic Year Programme.

Student and staff profile at centre inspected	At inspection	In peak week: July
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	165	189
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	9	9
Typical age range	9–17	9–17
Typical length of stay	14 nights	14 nights
Predominant nationalities	French, Tunisian and Italian	French, Italian, Spanish and Tunisian
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	7	8
Total number of managers including academic	5	5

Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	10	10
Premises profile		
Address of main site	Ardmore Language Schools, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Hall Place, Maidenhead SL6 6QR	
Additional sites in use	Brighton College, Eastern Road, Brighton BN2 0AL Brunel University, Kingston Lane, Uxbridge UB8 3PH Croydon College, College Road, Croydon, London CR9 1DX University of Brighton, Hillbrow, Denton Road, Eastbourne BN20 7SR Teikyo School, Framewood Road, Wexham, Slough SL2 4QS City of Oxford College, Oxpens Road, Oxford OX1 1SA Leith Academy, 20 Academy Park, Edinburgh EH6 8JQ Liddington, Foxhill, Swindon SN4 0DZ LV Ascot, London Road, Winkfield Row, Ascot SL5 8DR University of Westminster Harrow, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3TP Royal Hospital School, Holbrook, Ipswich IP9 2RX Shiplake College, Henley-on-Thames RG9 4BW St. Edmunds College, Cambridge CB3 0BN University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7AY University of Reading, Wantage Hall, Upper Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5JG	
Additional sites not in use	N/a	
Sites inspected	University of Brighton, Hillbrow, Denton Road, Eastbourne BN20 7SR	

Introduction

Background

Ardmore Language Schools summer multicentres were inspected in August 2017. Continued accreditation was recommended with a spot check the following summer focusing on publicity, teaching, accommodation and C4.

Preparation

The spot check was carried out by one inspector, who had not previously inspected the school. He contacted the provider to establish which centres were running and to find out whether there were any days which would not be suitable in the summer of 2018. The school was not informed when the inspection would take place, or which centre would be inspected. The Accreditation Unit sent the inspector the previous report and other relevant documents. The inspector checked the provider's website before the inspection.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 08.50 and departed at 17.00. The centre director showed the inspector around the Hillbrow and Welkin Halls sites on the University of Brighton at Eastbourne campus. Meetings were held with the centre director, the head of pastoral care, the head of sports and activities, the director of studies and the administrator. Group meetings were held with students, teachers and group leaders. The inspector visited the residential accommodation in use. Three lesson segments were observed.

Findings

Management

Head office carries out a number of management functions, such as strategic planning, staff and student recruitment and publicity. Communication at the Eastbourne centre works effectively, aided by the co-location of all the management and administrative staff in one shared office. Meetings are held as necessary and there are weekly teachers' meetings, run by the director of studies. There is also a messaging group for all staff.

Student feedback is collected at the beginning and end of each course on all aspects of the programme. The results are collated on a spreadsheet for analysis at head office. Matters which can be dealt with promptly are handled locally.

Human resources policies and procedures are thorough and are made known to staff through a detailed handbook, which all staff are required to sign that they have read. However, checks on the verification of teachers' qualifications revealed that one agency teacher had been employed without these checks being satisfactorily carried out. Induction of managers takes place centrally over four days; activity staff and teachers receive an on-site induction of approximately half a day from their manager. Performance monitoring and continuing professional development are carried out in a timely and sufficiently frequent way.

Publicity was a focus of the spot check and is covered below.

Premises and resources

The university campus provides a pleasant environment for students and staff, with plenty of space both indoors and outdoors for relaxation. Classrooms provide a generally suitable study environment, although in some of the smaller rooms there is too much furniture. One significant disadvantage of the site is that two of the seven teaching rooms are a mile distant from the centre office, the student residence and the dining hall. Students and staff have a fifteen minute walk to and from their lessons, which cuts into breaks and makes it difficult to check on attendance. There is a large dining room where students and staff take three cooked meals a day. The facilities are shared with two other language schools, but they are timetabled to eat at different times. Considering the size of the site, the spread-out location of the facilities and the number of other users, signage is barely adequate. However, students are shown where they need to go and none reported problems of getting lost.

Learning resources for students are sufficient and appropriate to the age of the students and the type of course on offer. There are in-house workbooks for each level and each student receives a copy. There are detailed teacher's books which accompany them. All classrooms have adequate board space and video projection facilities. The university provides suitable technical backup.

Teaching and learning

The academic staff profile comprises a team of seven teachers, two of whom are qualified to diploma level, three to certificate level and two who do not have qualifications which meet the requirements of the Scheme. Rationales were provided for these two teachers, which showed that they had relevant experience and in-house training which mitigated for their lack of qualifications, so they were accepted within the context of this inspection.

Academic management is shared between the director of studies who is qualified to certificate level and a peripatetic academic manager qualified to diploma level, who is appointed by head office to carry out formal lesson observations. Matching teachers to courses and timetabling are in general carried out effectively, although the spread-out location of the classrooms causes logistical problems. Another problematic area is continuous enrolment, which had taken place almost every day in the first week of the current course. Registers were changed every day and morning assemblies when students and teachers gather before walking together to class were sometimes chaotic. However, the director of studies had taken sensible measures to mitigate the effects of this on the students by shortening the placement test and teaching new groups an introductory lesson before they join their groups to make them feel included.

Lesson observation is handled effectively, with formal observations by an academic manager from head office being backed up by informal observations by the director of studies.

Course design is principled and coherently structured. In-house workbooks at six levels are the basis of half of the lesson content. The other half of lesson time is taken up with project work. The workbooks have a course outline at the front. There is a conversation club once or twice a week, which includes games and makes a helpful contribution to language acquisition. Classes also prepare students for the excursions.

Classroom observation was a focus of the spot check and is covered below.

Welfare and student services

Students' safety and security on site is well taken care of. There are detailed risk assessments, which the head of pastoral care is involved with updating. Fire evacuation drills are carried out regularly and sufficiently frequently. The organisation has an emergency plan, which is included in the staff handbook. However, not many staff were aware of this. Pastoral care is understood to be the shared responsibility of all staff, but the head of pastoral care and two welfare leaders are the nominated people to whom students are referred. There is a helpful students' handbook which provides appropriate advice and information about life in the UK. Health care is suitably provided for.

Accommodation was a focus of the spot check and is covered below.

Leisure opportunities are integrated into the programme. Although the programme is pre-booked, the head of sports and activities tries to cater flexibly for different needs, responding where possible to last minute requests, which usually come from group leaders. The content of the leisure programme is well suited to the ages and interests of the students. Students' health and safety is effectively provided for and staff supervising sports are suitably experienced and trained.

Safeguarding under 18s

All staff receive online safeguarding training and the staff handbook covers safeguarding procedures. Informed parental consent is required. Suitability checks are carried out on all staff and procedures are in place for the checking of all adults resident in homestays. However, evidence was not available to show that up-to-date checks

of adults in homestays were in place. Suitable arrangements are in place for the safety and security of students during scheduled activities. There is very little scope for students to do things unsupervised. Suitable arrangements are also in place in the residential accommodation and in homestays. Taxis are provided to take students to and from the homestays at the beginning and end of the school day.

Management

Publicity	Need for improvement
M22 All publicity and information is accurate, and gives rise to realistic expectations about the premises, location, and the extent and availability of the services and resources.	Met
M23 All publicity and information about the provider and the services it offers is in clear, accurate and accessible English.	Met
M24 Publicity gives clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on the courses.	Not met
M25 Publicity includes clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on costs.	Not met
M26 Publicity or other information made available before enrolment gives an accurate description of the level of care and support given to any students under 18.	Met
M27 Publicity gives an accurate description of any accommodation offered.	Met
M28 Descriptions of staff qualifications are accurate.	Not met
M29 Claims to accreditation are in line with Scheme requirements.	Met

Comments

M22 Publicity is accurate and generally gives rise to realistic expectations about the premises and location, although it could be challenged that transport links with London, Gatwick and Brighton are 'excellent', as claimed.

M24 Much of the required information on courses is clear and easy to find, but it was not possible to find information on the levels of the course and the times of classes. Maximum class size is included in frequently asked questions, but this is not sufficiently easy to find. When these points were drawn to the attention of management, it was undertaken that they would be addressed shortly.

M25 Under frequently asked questions on booking, the website says 'contact an Ardmore member of staff for pricing questions'. This appears to be the only publicly-available information on costs and is neither sufficient nor easy to find.

M28 It is claimed that teachers are 'qualified to teach English as a foreign language'. However, this was not true of all teachers at the time of the spot check. When this point was drawn to the attention of management, it was undertaken that it would be addressed shortly.

Teaching and learning

Academic staff profile	Met
T1 All academic staff have a level of education normally represented by a Level 6 qualification on the Ofqual register of regulated qualifications.	Met
T2 The teaching team has ELT/TESOL qualifications relevant to the courses they are teaching.	Met
T3 The teaching team has a range of experience, knowledge and skills appropriate to the courses offered and the needs of the learners.	Met
T4 The academic manager/academic management team has an appropriate professional profile to provide academic leadership.	Met

Comments

T1 One member of staff does not have a Level 6 qualification. However, a rationale was submitted which shows that he is awaiting the results a Level 6 course which he has recently completed. The rationale was accepted.

T2 Two members of staff do not have TEFL qualifications which meet the requirements of the Scheme. Rationales were provided for these two teachers, which showed that they had relevant experience and in-house training which mitigated for their lack of qualifications, so they were accepted within the context of this inspection.

T4 The DoS is qualified to certificate level. However, he is part of an academic management team of four coordinated from head office. The others are diploma qualified and one has a peripatetic role of providing support for teachers and carrying out lesson observations at Eastbourne. A rationale was presented for the certificate level DOS, which was accepted within the context of this inspection.

Teaching: classroom observation	Met
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T23 Teachers demonstrate sound knowledge and awareness of the use of English and the linguistic systems underlying it, and provide appropriate models of both spoken and written English.	Met
T24 The content of the lessons shows that the course objectives, the learning needs and cultural backgrounds of the students have been taken into account.	Met
T25 Lessons lead to relevant learning outcomes, made known to students and achieved through a coherent sequence of activities.	Met
T26 Teaching techniques are appropriate to the focus of the lesson and to the needs of the group and individual learners.	Met
T27 Teachers promote learning by the effective management of the classroom environment and resources.	Met
T28 Students receive appropriate and timely feedback on their performance during the lesson.	Met
T29 Lessons include activities to evaluate whether learning is taking place.	Met
T30 Teachers demonstrate the ability to engage students and create a positive learning atmosphere.	Met

Comments

T23 Teachers generally showed sound awareness of the use of English and gave appropriate models. There were, however, occasional errors in word stress.

T24 Lessons followed a shared scheme of work based on project work, which was suited to the objectives of the course and students' learning needs and backgrounds.

T25 Learning outcomes were relevant and linked to a coherent sequence of activities. However, only in a minority of cases were these explicitly shared with students.

T27 Classes were effectively managed. Instructions were clear and appropriately checked. Discipline was maintained appropriately, although occasional use of L1 was insufficiently challenged. Furniture was arranged appropriately for group work and students were encouraged to move around and use the classroom resources. Audio visual equipment was competently used.

T30 Teachers effectively involved their students in the activities, giving them plenty of opportunity to practise speaking. Student contributions were listened to and valued. An engaged, collaborative atmosphere was created where students were encouraged to respect each other.

Classroom observation summary

The teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to good, with the majority being satisfactory. Teachers showed generally sound knowledge of the language system and provided appropriate modelling. Content was relevant and coherently structured, although learning outcomes were not always explicitly shared with students. Classroom management was effective and well suited to the age and backgrounds of the students. There were missed opportunities for correction and feedback. Students were engaged in the activities and a positive learning environment was created. The teaching observed met the requirements of the Scheme.

Welfare and student services

Accommodation (W9–W22 as applicable)	Met
<i>All accommodation</i>	
W9 Students have a comfortable living environment throughout their stay.	Met
W10 Arrangements for cleaning and laundry are satisfactory.	Met
W11 A responsible representative inspects all accommodation (for safety and suitability) before students are placed, and at least every two years after that.	Met
W12 Students receive written confirmation of accommodation booked, giving clear and accurate information.	Met
W13 There are effective procedures for identifying and resolving any problems students have with their accommodation.	Met
W14 Accommodation providers receive written confirmation of the rules, terms and conditions applied by the provider with respect to the provision of accommodation services.	Met
W15 Students receive meals as agreed; these offer a well-balanced diet, taking into account any reasonable dietary requirements students may have.	Met
Comments	

None.

Action taken on points to be addressed

Points from the previous full inspection and/or subsequent spot checks or interim visits with comments (in bold) to indicate how far these have been addressed. Only points reviewed during this spot check are included here. Any points outstanding will be checked at the next full inspection.

Points which must be addressed within 12 months

Management

M22 A number of exaggerated or inaccurate claims are made about the services and facilities offered.

Partially addressed. Publicity is accurate and generally gives rise to realistic expectations about the premises and location, although it could be challenged that transport links with London, Brighton and Canterbury are 'excellent', as claimed.

M28 It is claimed that 'all teachers are CELTA or Trinity TESOL qualified'. This was not true of all teachers working at the time of the inspection.

Not addressed. It is claimed that teachers are 'qualified to teach English as a foreign language'. However, this was not true of all teachers at the time of the spot check.

Welfare and student services

W12 Accommodation registers are not kept up to date with accurate information about when visits took place and whether fire risk assessments and Gas Safe certificates are in place.

Addressed.

Care of under 18s

C4 One member of a homestay visited did not have DBS clearance. No evidence was seen that the measures supposed to be in place in relation to a member of staff awaiting clearance were actually in place.

Partially addressed. Suitability checks are carried out on all staff. However, although there are procedures for the checking of all adults resident in homestays, evidence was not available to show that up-to-date checks had taken place.

Other points to be addressed

Management

M29 The Accreditation Scheme marque in use on the website and the brochure does not contain the rider 'in the UK'. As a result, its use on pages which include references to courses taking place outside the UK is potentially misleading.

Addressed.

Resources and environment

R3 At the Harrow centre, large classrooms were full of tables laid out in lecture mode, which made it difficult to create space for interactive language teaching activities; in Cambridge, the use of the marquee for teaching purposes meant that some classes were held in less-than-ideal conditions.

Not addressed. Classrooms provide a generally suitable study environment, although in some of the smaller rooms there was too much furniture. One significant disadvantage of the Eastbourne site is that two of the seven teaching rooms are a mile distant from the centre office, the student residence and the dining hall. Students and staff have a fifteen minute walk to and from their lessons, which cuts into breaks and makes it difficult to check on attendance.

R5 The locally-produced signage and display material was sometimes rather scrappy. Very few classrooms had any ELT-related posters or material on display.

Partially addressed. Considering the size of the site, the spread-out location of the facilities and the number of other users, signage is barely adequate. However, students are shown to where they need to go and none reported problems of getting lost.

Teaching and learning

T2 At the centres visited, two teachers had teaching awards which do not meet Scheme requirements.

Partially addressed. At the centre visited, two teachers did not have teaching qualifications which meet the requirements of the Scheme. Rationales were provided for these two teachers, which showed that they had relevant experience and in-house training which mitigated for their lack of qualifications, so they were accepted within the context of this inspection.

T23 There were instances where the teacher's L1 interfered with the pronunciation of English to the extent that it was very difficult to follow; occasionally the models provided by the teacher to illustrate a language point, while grammatically correct, were very uninspired and had no relevance for the students.

Partially addressed. Teachers generally showed sound awareness of the use of English and gave appropriate models. There were, however, occasional errors in word stress.

T25 There was very little evidence of a focus on learner outcomes. In general, the approach was to go through the workbook activities in sequence, without identifying outcomes.

Partially addressed. Learning outcomes were relevant and linked to a coherent sequence of activities. However, only in a minority of cases were these explicitly shared with students.

T26 With rare exceptions, teachers made use of a very limited range of techniques.

Addressed.

T27 In some instances, use of the whiteboard was poor, with spidery writing, little attempt to organise the board – and very faint pens being used.

Addressed. Classes were effectively managed. Instructions were clear and appropriately checked.

Discipline was maintained appropriately, although occasionally use of L1 was insufficiently challenged.

Furniture was arranged appropriately for group work and students were encouraged to move around and use the classroom resources. Audio visual equipment was competently used.

T28 There were many missed opportunities for students to be helped to correct or extend their contributions.

Partially addressed. Students were given encouragement, but there was little correction or feedback seen.

T30 The lack of 'presence' of some (often inexperienced) teachers resulted in a low-key learning atmosphere.

Project classes were characterised by a lot of L1 discussion among the students.

Addressed.

Care of under 18s

C3 Although publicity makes some reference to different aspects of the level of care and support given to students under 18, the information is scattered and incomplete.

Addressed.

Conclusions

Good progress has been made in addressing the issues in teaching and accommodation identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. Publicity remains a need for improvement, but action to remedy the weaknesses has been promised within a short time.
