

Organisation name	Ardmore Language Schools, Maidenhead
Inspection date	14 June 2018
Current accreditation status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: follow up on Points to be addressed

Recommendation

We recommend continued accreditation. The next inspection falls due in 2021; there are no grounds for bringing this forward. 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 the area of accommodation can now be removed.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Ardmore Language Schools, Maidenhead in August 2017 and June 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 private language school offers residential and homestay courses for under 18s.

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

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

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 or activities, just full board and accommodation
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	Ardmore seasonal multcentres
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 Programmes.

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week: <i>July</i>
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	6	250
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	9	9
Typical age range	9–16	12–16
Typical length of stay	1 week	2 weeks
Predominant nationalities	French	French and Chinese

Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	1	9
Total number of managers including academic	2	6
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	1	15

Premises profile	
Address of main site	Ardmore Language School, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Hall Place, Maidenhead SL6 6QR
Additional sites in use	N/a
Additional sites not in use	N/a
Sites inspected	<p>The school is situated on a very large campus in countryside approximately five miles from Maidenhead. It is the home of the Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA), with whom Ardmore has a close working relationship. The head office of the Ardmore organisation is also based on this site.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection, the BCA students were following academic year courses so Ardmore staff and students were sharing the site but had their own dedicated areas which are out of bounds to BCA students. There were three classrooms available, a shared staff office, an equipment store room, a resources area and the dining hall. All these facilities are on the ground floor of the main building. The head office suite of offices is completely separate on the third floor. Ardmore has recently acquired use of additional facilities in Blossom House, a separate building near the main building. Outside the academic year the school also has access to further classrooms and facilities in BCA buildings.</p> <p>There are four accommodation blocks, all located close to the central block. Sports facilities include a new multi-purpose sports hall and outdoor football and rugby pitches. Specialist facilities are also available to support the 'Academy' programmes in horse-riding, tennis, and golf.</p>

Introduction

Background

At the last inspection in August 2017 accreditation was awarded with the recommendation of a spot check focusing on the course provision outside the summer season. In addition, evidence had to be submitted within three months to show that weaknesses in publicity, accommodation and recruitment procedures had been addressed.

Preparation

The inspector received copies of the previous full inspection report and correspondence between the school and the Accreditation Unit. The inspector contacted the school to check staff availability and school closure days. Additional documentation was also requested. No indication of the day of the inspection was given.

Programme and persons present

One inspector carried out the spot check inspection. The inspector toured the school, but did not visit the newly acquired Blossom House block with two classrooms, an office and common room, or the sports facilities. Meetings were held with the centre manager and the group leader. The inspector spoke briefly to the one EFL teacher, the activity leader, and the group leader, and had a group meeting with the commercial director, operations director and sales and marketing manager from the head office. Head office is in a separate part of the main building. A focus group meeting was held with all six students on the closed group. The one closed group class of individual students sent by one agent was observed briefly. The inspector arrived at 09.05 and left at 14.45. A short feedback session was provided for the centre manager.

Findings

Significant changes since the last inspection

The branding has been reviewed across the whole international Ardmore Language Schools group and new brochures have been produced. A new academic director was appointed at the end of 2017.

Premises and resources

The newly acquired building, Blossom House, with two classrooms, an office and common room has added

capacity to the centre.

Teaching and learning

Students are placement tested. Although the students had enrolled as individual students in their home country they had come from one agent as a single closed group and were taught in one class. Despite the wide age range and disparate language level of the class, the experienced teacher was able to provide a positive language learning experience, and this was evidenced by the short observation and feedback from the students and group leader in the two separate meetings held with them.

The small-group project-based work combined with individual presentations and feedback lent itself to the situation. No course outlines are shared with students and there are no specific study and learning strategies included in the programme.

Safeguarding under 18s

The recruitment manager and operations manager have received specialist safeguarding for designated lead training. Records showed that full DBS checks were being carried out and recorded on homestays.

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.	Not met
M27 Publicity gives an accurate description of any accommodation offered.	Not met
M28 Descriptions of staff qualifications are accurate.	Met
M29 Claims to accreditation are in line with Scheme requirements.	Met
Comments	
M22 The website and downloadable brochures are extensive and cover courses in the UK and USA. Detailed information about courses and locations is available.	
M24 Key information is provided but not always easy to find as it is spread across several sections of the website and brochure (within courses, school centres and under FAQs). Courses are offered at six levels and students are grouped according to their English ability and not their age or nationality. The closed group of students studying, at the time of the inspection, had enrolled individually with an agent and came together as a group. The students aged 10 to 16 years were of different levels. It was not clear what information they had received regarding the class levels that would be available.	
M25 Information on costs is insufficient and not easy to find.	
M26 The information available on the level of care and support given to students under 18 is not easily accessible.	
M27 Only a very limited description of the accommodation at each centre is provided on the individual fact sheet for the centre.	
Accommodation (W9–W22 as applicable)	Met
<i>All accommodation</i>	
W9 Students have a comfortable living environment throughout their stay.	Not met
W10 Arrangements for cleaning and laundry are satisfactory.	Not 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

W9 Not met. The residential accommodation included two sets of bunk beds per room in some cases consequently the rooms were cramped and had insufficient storage space. Homestay accommodation was not inspected.

W10 Cleaning of the residential bedroom accommodation is only possible when the rooms are unoccupied and student belongings are not there. The bathroom facilities inspected were clean but the age and staining in some of the shower units was unsatisfactory.

W11 The records available showed that the nine homestays on the register had completed risk assessments appropriately.

Accommodation: homestay only

W16 Homestay hosts accommodate no more than four students at one time.	Met
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W17 Homestay hosts do not accommodate more than one student with the same language, unless the students, their agents, parents or legal guardians specifically request this in writing.	Met
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W18 No more than two students share the same bedroom, unless the students, their agents, parents or legal guardians specifically request this in writing.	Met
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W19 English is the language of communication within the homestay home.	Met
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W20 Hosts ensure that there is an adult available to receive students on first arrival.	Met
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Comments

No homestay accommodation was visited during the 2018 spot check.

The comment from the 2017 inspection remains.

W17 and W18 The group in homestays at the time of the inspection had specifically asked, in writing, for there to be up to four students in a room, and for students with the same first language to be lodged in the same home.

Accommodation: other

W21 Students receive information about the implications of their living in private rented accommodation and advice in case of difficulties.	Met
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W22 The provider monitors any other accommodation recommended, and booking and payment arrangements are clear.	Met
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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.

Management

M22 Exaggerated claims are made about the range of nationalities students will encounter on a course.

Addressed. The brochure now describes the international mix 'across all' the centres.

M26 (2018:M27). The number of toilets/showers per student in residential accommodation was lower than advertised.

Partially addressed. The maximum number of people per block has been reduced to stay within the ratios advertised on the centre fact sheet.

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.

Addressed. The qualifications statement has been modified and the qualifications of the teacher employed at the time of the inspection was consistent with the publicity. "Our teachers are qualified professionals, and are qualified to teach English as a foreign Language, with some also holding a Trinity Certificate or Cambridge CELTA teaching qualification."

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. The Accreditation Scheme marque in use on the website and the brochure now includes the rider 'in the UK'.

Resources and environment

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

Addressed. The classrooms, labelled by UK city, in the main building have all been refurbished and decoration reflects the city name with professional full panel sized vinyl photographs and stencils. Display material was centrally produced.

Teaching and learning

T15 There is no specific focus on study and learning strategies in the in-house material.

Not yet addressed.

Welfare and student services

W9 A number of bedrooms were overcrowded. As a result of this, bathroom and toilet provision was barely sufficient for the number of students in some blocks.

Not addressed (see above).

W10 Hosts were unaware of the need to carry out fire risk assessments.

Addressed (see W11 above).

W12 There is no record that fire risk assessments are in place.

Addressed (see W11 above).

W22 One shower inspected had mould round its tray.

Partially addressed (see W10 above).

Care of under 18s

C3 (2018: M26) 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.

Not addressed (see M26 above).

C4 (2018: S4) Two members of a homestay visited did not have DBS clearance. No evidence was seen that prescribed measures were being taken in relation to members of staff whose DBS clearance was pending.

Addressed. Records showed that all homestay adults had been DBS checked. There were no staff with DBS clearance pending; appropriate provision is made in the safeguarding policy.

Conclusions

The school has continued to improve its services and, in the main, has acted appropriately on the previous inspection points raised. The head office team have tightened the monitoring of accommodation provision and records are improved. Points arising from the last full inspection have, for the most part, been adequately addressed. However, publicity remains a need for improvement.
