

Organisation name	Ardmore Language Schools, head office: Maidenhead
Inspection date	22 October 2019
Current accreditation status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: monitor effect of change of provision

Recommendation

We recommend continued accreditation. The next inspection falls due in 2021; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

Changes to the summary statement

No changes need to be made to the summary statement, apart from adding the date of this inspection.

Changes to summary inspection findings
Management

At head office the managing director of Ardmore reports to the managing director of the Active Learning Group, who is in on site two days per week. As well as the existing operations director and academic director, the company has recently employed a finance director and head of marketing.

New summary inspection findings

None.

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	2009
Last full inspection	2017
Subsequent spot check(s) (if applicable)	2018
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 accommodation.
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
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: July
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	104	219
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	8	8
Typical age range	10–15 years old	9–15 years old
Typical length of stay	7 nights	14 nights
Predominant nationalities	French	French and Chinese
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	4	11
Total number of managers including academic	4	5
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	4	10

Premises profile	
Address of main site	Ardmore Language Schools, Berkshire College, Maidenhead SL6 6QR
Additional sites in use	Ardmore Language Schools, Academy St Albans Shenley Lane, London Colney, St Albans AL2 1AF (Short Stay Winter Programmes only)
Additional sites not in use	Brighton College Brunel University Cambridge University City of Oxford College Eastbourne Edinburgh Academy Fulmer Grange Kings College Royal Hospital School Royal Masonic School LVS Ascot Shiplake College University of Reading University of Bath University of Hertfordshire University of Westminster Warminster School Liddington
Sites inspected	Berkshire College

Introduction

Background

This was a spot check signalled by a change of ownership. As of December 2018, Ardmore Language Schools is now owned by Cognita Ltd and is part of their Active Learning Group.

Preparation

The spot check was carried out by one inspector, who had not been involved in either the full inspection of 2017 or the spot check of 2018. The inspector contacted the centre to check if there were any dates which would not be suitable. It was agreed that in order to ensure that the centre would be running sufficient programmes and that the key staff would be present, the inspection should take place at some point during a two-week period in October. The Accreditation Unit sent the 2018 action plan and other relevant documents. The school sent an updated version of the action plan and a small number of other documents.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 09.30 and left at 13.15. He had meetings with the managing director and the operations manager. He also briefly met the centre director and the academic director. There were no formal observations of teachers, but the inspector watched the classes in action to see how they used the premises and facilities. Accommodation blocks were visited, including one that had recently been refurbished. All relevant documents were provided for the inspector. This included new brochures, floor plans of accommodation and records of homestay hosts.

Findings

Management

Ardmore was previously owned by a single owner, who in 2018 decided to sell the business. In December 2018, the company was bought by Cognita Ltd. as part of their Active Learning Group (ALG). This group includes providers of outdoor education, day care and summer camps. Becoming part of this group has given Ardmore language schools the resources to invest in renovating their year-round school, as well as giving them access to expertise from within the group (e.g. health and safety audits). They also have the opportunity to develop projects and services in collaboration with the other providers within ALG as well as the larger Cognita brand, which specialises in mainstream private schools around the world.

Premises and resources

As a result of the acquisition by Cognita, Ardmore now have a long-term lease on the accommodation blocks at Berkshire College and have begun a programme of renovation. At the time of the inspection, one of the three blocks had been renovated with plans to have the other two completed by the new year.

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.

Management

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

Addressed. These comments have been changed and now give an accurate picture.

M26 The number of toilets/showers per student in residential accommodation was lower than advertised.

Addressed. The advertised number is accurate.

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. This claim has been removed, and comments regarding teacher qualifications are now accurate.

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 correct marque is now in place.

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. Signage and display materials both in classrooms and around the school are perfectly suitable.

Teaching and learning

T2 One teacher had a teaching award which does not meet Scheme requirements.

Addressed. All teachers at the time of the inspection had appropriate qualifications.

T24 Some teachers were not able to adjust the topic to the age range and background of their students.

Partially addressed. Teacher development materials have been developed to address this, but the application of this in the classroom was not checked.

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.

Partially addressed. Teacher development materials have been developed to address this, but the application of this training in the classroom was not checked.

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.

Addressed. The maximum number of beds in one room is four, and in the rooms visited the size was adequate. Bathroom and toilet provision are suitable.

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

Addressed. This is made clear in the guide for homestay hosts, and all hosts sign that they have read and agreed to all the requirements contained therein.

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

Addressed. Records were seen of fire risk assessments for hosts on a central register.

W17 One homestay host did not have a copy of the terms and conditions relating to hosting.

Addressed. Records were seen of signed host agreements.

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. There is a brief description regarding the level of care for students under 18 in the brochure, and the safeguarding policy is available on the website.

C4 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. In records sampled, all adults in homestays had DBS clearance.

C6 Not all homestay hosts were familiar with the rules about what students may and may not do in unsupervised free time.

Addressed. This is made clear in the guide for homestay hosts.

Conclusions

The change of ownership has been handled smoothly, with the existing senior management team remaining in place. Staff spoken to felt that the change has had a positive effect on the Ardmore group, with added layers of

support and expertise now in place; as well as resources to carry out material improvements and further development of services. The majority of outstanding points arising from the previous inspection have been satisfactorily addressed.
