

Organisation name	Atlas Language School, Liverpool
Inspection date	19 November 2025
Current accreditation status	Accredited by extension
Reason for spot check	Signalled: first inspection of new extension

Recommendation

We recommend continuation of the extension of accreditation pending a full inspection of the provision within 12 months. However, evidence must be submitted within three months to demonstrate that issues in safeguarding, publicity and academic staff profile have been addressed.

Changes to the summary statement

There is no relevant previous summary statement.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Atlas Language School Liverpool in November 2025. The Accreditation Scheme assesses the standards of management, resources and premises, teaching, welfare, and safeguarding 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 courses in general English for adults (18+).

The inspection report noted a need for improvement in the areas of publicity and academic staff profile.

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

Summary inspection findings

Findings for this inspection are reported under the relevant headings below.

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	November 2025
Last full inspection	N/a
Subsequent checks/visits (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	N/a
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	Atlas junior centre Chichester
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	Atlas language schools in Dublin, County Clare, Malta

Student and staff profile	At inspection	Estimate at peak: July
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	67	180
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	18	18
Typical age range	18–62	18–62
Typical length of stay	8 weeks	4 weeks
Predominant nationalities	Saudi Arabian, Brazilian, Mexican, Colombian	Italian, German, Spanish, French
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	6	15
Total number of managers including academic	3	3
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	2	2

Academic manager qualifications profile

Profile at inspection	
Professional qualifications	Number of academic managers
TEFLQ qualification and at least three years' full-time relevant teaching experience	0
Academic managers without TEFLQ qualification or three years' relevant experience	1
Total	1

Comments

The Director of Studies (DoS) is one of the former owners of Imagine English. He has many years of experience and is TEFLI. A rationale was provided. See findings under Teaching and learning.

Teacher qualifications profile

Profile in week of inspection	
Professional qualifications	Number of teachers
TEFLQ qualification/profile	1
TEFLI qualification	5
ATEFL registered portfolio in progress*	0
Non-ELT-related qualified teacher status only (for short courses for under 18s)*	0
Holding specialist qualifications only (for ESP/CLIL)*	0
Alternative professional profile*	0
Total	6

Comments

The DoS is not included in these figures. They do not have a teaching commitment but are available for cover.

Premises profile

Address of main site	St John's House, 2 Queen Square, Liverpool L1 1RH
Additional sites in use	N/a
Additional sites not in use	N/a
Sites inspected	Queen Square

Introduction

Background

Atlas Language School Liverpool (AL) was established by the Atlas organisation (which has schools in Ireland and Malta as well as an accredited junior summer centre in Chichester), and the former Imagine English (IE) language school based in Liverpool. IE was acquired by Atlas in December 2024, and the new entity AL moved into new premises in April 2025.

The Atlas junior centre in Chichester was first accredited in 2014, reaccredited in July 2019, and last inspected in July 2025. AL is operating as an extension of Atlas Chichester; this spot check was carried out as a first inspection of the new extension.

Preparation

Documentation, including previous reports from Atlas Chichester, was provided in advance by the Accreditation Unit. The inspector contacted the school prior to the inspection to agree approximate timings.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 10:00 and left at 13:15. Meetings were held with the DoS, the CM, the DoO (virtually), and the two front of house officers. A brief focus group meeting was held with three of the teachers, and one with a class of 13 students. Documents viewed included premises risk assessments, fire evacuation records, the critical incident plan, safeguarding policy, and staff files. Publicity was examined further after the site visit.

Findings

Management

The school is managed by the two former owners of IE, who have taken on the roles of centre manager (CM) and director of studies (DoS), responsible for operations and academic management respectively. The DoS manages the teaching team, and the CM manages the two front of house officers.

The DoS and CM are overseen by the director of operations (DoO) and the Dublin director of studies (DoSD) from the main Atlas head office, both of whom are based in Dublin but have oversight across all schools. The DoO and DoSD report to two company directors.

Communication within the school and with Dublin works well; there are regular meetings, and all staff were aware of developments and felt comfortable in their roles. Everyone was looking forward to occupying the extended premises. Teachers in the focus group expressed satisfaction with and appreciation of the friendly and supportive nature of their working environment, and felt that the transition from IE to AL had been seamless and they had been consulted and kept informed throughout.

In collaboration with head office, the school has been able to produce most, but not all, of the documents required for a full inspection; those seen generally indicated appropriate management systems and procedures. There is a recruitment policy, and job descriptions have been produced for all staff. The Atlas HR manager provides central support to the recruitment process. Teaching staff files include appropriate details of qualifications and experience. Feedback systems are in place; the DoO collates feedback, and it is discussed at meetings. Training has been provided for staff members as appropriate, and a self-evaluation against Scheme criteria has been produced.

Atlas also provides a central admissions and marketing function

Publicity	Need for improvement
M21 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
M22 All publicity and information about the provider and the services it offers is in clear, accurate and accessible English.	Not met
M23 Publicity gives clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on the courses.	Not met
M24 Publicity includes clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on costs.	Met
M25 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
M26 Publicity gives an accurate description of any accommodation offered.	Met
M27 Descriptions of staff qualifications are accurate.	Not met
M28 Claims to accreditation are in line with Scheme requirements.	N/a
Comments	

Publicity includes the general Atlas website, with a section on AL, and the Imagine English website. On the Atlas website, there is a downloadable general brochure and a mini-brochure for AL.

M22 The website states: 'Come learn English in Liverpool – the city of The Beatles, football legends, and the friendliest people in the UK!' No objective evidence can be found to support the claim about Liverpool having the 'friendliest people in the UK'.

M23 In most places publicity does not state the number of hours taught per week.

The AL *Terms and conditions* stated that the school accepts 17-year-olds but has no legal responsibility for them. This comment was removed shortly after the inspection and is no longer a point to be addressed. However, the minimum age for adult courses remains unclear. The Imagine website states that 16 and 17 year-olds can study on adult courses, whereas the Atlas Liverpool trifold brochure indicates that the minimum age is 17. The safeguarding policy states that students aged between 14 and 18 can study on year-round courses, but it is unclear what these year-round courses are apart from adult programmes.

M28 The claims for the qualifications of the teachers are not accurate, as most of them have certificate-level qualifications. The AL website states: 'Our expert team delivers a range of high-quality courses including General English, Intensive English, Exam Preparation (IELTS & Cambridge). In other parts of publicity teachers are referred to as 'highly trained and experienced', and 'fully qualified and experienced teachers'.

Publicity is a need for improvement.

Premises and resources

The school currently occupies the third floor of a large five-storey building in central Liverpool; a complete refurbishment of the second floor, which will allow the school to expand considerably, is nearing completion. Access to the school is by stairs or lift. There is an entry phone and keypad both at street level and at the third-floor entrance. The building is not currently used by anyone other than AL, and the landlord's company office on the fifth floor.

The current premises consist of a reception area at the entrance, a student common room, an examinations/testing

room, toilets, an office, a teachers' room, and seven classrooms.

The second-floor footprint is the same as the floor above, and once completed, will house a new teachers' room and eight further classrooms. Offices and reception will be re-configured to make use of the new space. Risk assessments for the premises and records of fire drills were seen.

Teaching and learning

The DoS is not TEFLQ, and has been responsible for all teacher support including observations until very recently. At the time of the inspection, the TEFLQ senior teacher was beginning to take on observations. A rationale was provided for the DoS as a member of the academic management team. However, the new academic management arrangements had not been formalised at the time of the inspection. The school did not submit a *Recruitment and Support Policy* document. *Academic Staff Profile* is a need for improvement.

The six teachers timetabled during the inspection were all suitably qualified and experienced. The senior teacher is TEFQL, and others are TEFLI. Three teachers have been offered the opportunity to undertake a programme leading to TEFLQ status, organised by Atlas Dublin.

The teaching has yet to be observed.

Welfare and student services

Students in the focus group were very happy with the school, its facilities and resources, and the support they received from staff. They felt able to approach any of the staff with concerns or problems. The majority of them were living in residential accommodation organised by the school; no problems were reported.

The school offers accommodation in a range of student residences, as well as homestay and private home accommodation.

A leisure programme is offered using an external provider, and some group activities are organised by the school. Although a sample risk assessment was seen, this area was not fully assessed.

Safeguarding under 18s

AL states that it only accepts adult (18+) students at the moment. However, there are plans to accept under 18s in the near future, potentially starting with closed groups, and a number of steps have been taken in preparation for this. The CM is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), with no deputy as yet. All staff have undergone basic awareness safeguarding training and suitability checks; the DSL has specialist level training. There is a safeguarding policy, however this states: 'We take 14 to 18 year old students onto our year-round courses and in addition we take closed groups (i.e. not mixed with other students) of young learners year-round in the school in Liverpool'. It is not clear what year-round courses 14 to 18 year-olds are accepted on.

Premises and resources

Premises and facilities	Met
P1 Providers ensure the safety and security of students on their premises by measures appropriate to their age and background, and the location.	Met
P2 Premises, including any external areas, are in a good state of repair, cleanliness and decoration, and provide a comfortable environment for students and staff.	Strength
P3 Classrooms and other learning areas provide a suitable study environment.	Met
P4 Students have adequate room and suitable facilities for relaxation and the consumption of food.	Met
P5 There is adequate signage to buildings, routes, rooms and exits, and there are facilities for the display or sharing of general information.	Met
P6 There is sufficient space for all staff, for work, meetings, relaxation and the storage of personal possessions.	Met

Comments

P2 The premises are in an excellent state of repair and cleanliness.

P3 Classrooms are well appointed and equipped. The rooms in use at inspection were of a good size for the numbers of students in them. However, both existing and proposed classrooms are likely to be rather small for the planned maximum class size of 15.

Action taken on points to be addressed

None of the points to be addressed from the last inspection of the parent accreditation (Atlas Chichester) are relevant to the operation in Liverpool.

Conclusions

The school has been operating in its current form for a relatively short period, but policies and procedures relating to all aspects of the school's services have been set up. The combined experience of IE and Atlas brings very helpful insight and practical knowledge to the school, and the transition is clearly being managed effectively. There are a number of issues with the publicity including differing statements about the current minimum age accepted on adult courses. The teachers are suitably qualified, however, although appropriate academic management procedures are being introduced, these had not been fully formalised at the time of the inspection. Students reported very favourably on all aspects of their experience in the school, and teachers were equally positive. The majority of systems and procedures sampled during the inspection were satisfactory. Initial safeguarding systems have been set up, staff have received relevant training, and suitability checks have been carried out. Further information needs to clarify which courses under 18s can study on and who the deputy DSL will be.