

Organisation name	Country Cousins, Ilfracombe
Inspection date	2 & 10 August 2023
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 2026; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

Changes to the summary statement

The need for improvement in safeguarding under 18s and staff management can now be removed.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Country Cousins in September 2022 and August 2023. 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 was a compliance-only inspection during which the inspectors focused only on whether inspection criteria were met or not met. Inspectors did not evaluate the extent to which requirements were exceeded and no strengths were awarded. No new summary statement has been issued; please refer to the last inspection report for any areas of strength previously awarded.

Overall, the inspection report stated that the organisation met the standards of the Scheme.

Updated summary of inspection findings
Management

The provision meets the section standard. Clear values and objectives are in place, and feedback systems are appropriate. Suitable HR policies are in place and staff management procedures are followed. Student administration systems are good. There were a number of issues with publicity, but these were addressed during the inspection.

Safeguarding under 18s

The provision meets the section standard. There is appropriate provision for the safeguarding of students under the age of 18 within the organisation and in leisure activities and accommodation. Staff have received relevant safeguarding training and safer recruitment procedures are followed. Rules for what students may do outside the scheduled programme are suitable.

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	July 2013
Last full inspection	September 2022
Subsequent spot check(s) (if applicable)	August 2023
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	Guardianships & academic placements
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week: <i>July</i>
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	67	146
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	10	8
Typical age range	10–17	10–17
Typical length of stay	2 weeks	2 weeks
Predominant nationalities	Czech, Italian	Czech, Italian
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	5	6
Total number of managers including academic	3	3
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	3	3

Premises profile	
Address of main site	Bicclescombe Park, Ilfracombe EX34 8JN
Additional sites in use	N/a
Additional sites not in use	N/a
Sites inspected	Main site visited remotely.

Introduction

Background

Country Cousins (CC) is a family-run organisation originally set up in 1951 to provide homestay opportunities to teenagers from overseas. English language courses were introduced in 1973, and the current premises in Ilfracombe were acquired in 1980. The present owners took over the business in April 2006 and CC was first accredited in 2013. Year-round Country Cousins (CC) offers group courses for students aged 11–17. During summer and at Easter, open enrolment courses are also offered for 11–17 year-olds as well as 6–10 year-olds. In addition to English language tuition, courses include homestay accommodation and a wide range of sporting and cultural activities.

The 2022 compliance-only inspection report highlighted weaknesses in safeguarding under 18s and staff management. This signalled spot check was conducted to evaluate whether these weaknesses had been addressed.

Preparation

The inspector received a copy of the 2022 report and other documentation from the Accreditation Unit. He contacted the school and arranged a meeting to discuss the inspection with members of the leadership team of the school. He conducted a preliminary meeting with them concerning the points to be addressed and agreed with CC the timetable for the spot check. The inspector arranged for additional documentation to be sent to him, before the second remote visit to the school.

Programme and persons present

This spot check inspection, which was conducted remotely, took the equivalent of half a day spread over two afternoons. The inspector held meetings with the CEO, the director of studies (DoS), the senior teacher, and the welfare and accommodation officer, who is also the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). On the second afternoon, a focus group meeting was held with the teachers.

Findings

Management

Feedback from students and staff is appropriately gathered, collated and discussed with managers and staff. For staff management comments see the relevant sub-section below.

Teaching and learning

Although peer observations have been conducted, not all teachers have been formally observed. The observation template does not clearly make reference to action planning in order to improve and develop teaching. Records of work are kept for all classes to ensure that teachers are delivering the syllabus as intended. Students are directed to the student zone on the website where they can review lessons and learning resources. The leaving certificate continues to state that students have completed a level, which is not possible on short courses with no formal testing.

Safeguarding under 18s

See the relevant section below for comments on the points to be addressed.

Management

Staff management and development	Met
M8 The provider implements appropriate human resources policies, which are made known to staff.	Met
M9 The provider specifies the duties of all staff working with ELT students, and regularly reviews these.	Met
M10 There are effective procedures for the recruitment and selection of all staff.	Met
M11 There are effective induction procedures for all staff.	Met
M12 There are effective procedures for monitoring and appraising all staff, and for handling unsatisfactory performance or conduct. These procedures are made known to all staff.	Met
M13 There are effective procedures to ensure the continuing professional development of all staff to meet the needs of the individual, the students and the organisation.	Met
Comments	
M9 The DSL's safeguarding responsibilities have been included in a job description. M10 Two references are on file for all members of staff. M12 Appraisals have been conducted with some activity staff and are in the process of being carried out with teachers.	

Safeguarding under 18s

Safeguarding under 18s	Met
S1 There is a safeguarding policy which specifies procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of all students under the age of 18. A named member of staff is responsible for implementing this policy and responding to child protection allegations.	Met
S2 The provider makes the policy known to all adults in contact with under 18s through their role with the organisation, and provides guidance or training relevant to its effective implementation.	Met
S3 The provider has written parental/guardian consent reflecting the level of care and support given to students under 18, including medical consent.	Met
S4 Recruitment procedures for all roles involving responsibility for or substantial access to under 18s are in line with safer recruitment good practice and the organisation's safeguarding policy.	Met
S5 There are suitable arrangements for the supervision and safety of students during scheduled lessons and activities.	Met
S6 There are suitable arrangements for the supervision and safety of students outside the scheduled programme.	Met
S7 There are suitable arrangements for the accommodation of students.	Met
S8 There are suitable arrangements to ensure contact between the provider and parents, legal guardians or their nominated representatives concerning the welfare of students.	Met
Comments	
All students on courses are aged under 18. S2 The DSL and the designated safeguarding person have recently received specialist-level training. Other staff receive in-house basic awareness training and links to external courses. S4 The reference request form has been amended to include a question about candidates' suitability to work with under 18s and appropriate references are on file for all staff and homestay hosts. S6 CC have devised a useful controlled free time document that clarifies the times when different age groups are unsupervised.	

Action taken on points to be addressed

Safeguarding under 18s

S2 Evidence of basic awareness training was not available for all staff. The DSL's specialist training is in need of updating.

Addressed. The DSL and the designated safeguarding person have recently received specialist-level training. Other staff receive in-house basic awareness training and links to external courses.

S4 Safer recruitment procedures are not always followed sufficiently closely: sampled staff and host files did not all contain the requisite references. In addition, there has been a period when the reference request form did not ask a question regarding candidates' suitability to work with under 18s.

Addressed: The reference request form has been amended and references are on file for staff and homestay hosts.

S6 Some rules for outside the programme require more specific detail, and arrangements are not risk assessed.

Addressed. CC have devised a document that clarifies the times when different age groups are unsupervised.

Other points to be addressed

Management

M5 There is no systematic approach to the collating of student feedback or recording action taken in response.

Addressed. Feedback is collated and discussed weekly within the leadership team and with other relevant staff.

M6 There is no systematic approach to the collating of staff feedback or recording action taken in response.

Addressed. Staff feedback is gathered through meetings, appraisals and an anonymous post box.

M9 Job descriptions for the safeguarding leads make no reference to their specific responsibilities in this area and no job descriptions showed evidence of review.

Addressed. The DSL's safeguarding responsibilities have been included in a job description.

M10 Not all staff files contained the required two references.

Addressed. Two references are on file for all members of staff.

M12 Teachers and activity leaders on temporary contracts receive no form of appraisal.

Addressed. Appraisals have been conducted with some activity staff and are in the process of being carried out with teachers.

Premises and resources

P12 There is no policy in place to inform the review of resources.

Addressed. Teacher suggestions are gathered on an ongoing basis and resources will be reviewed more formally in the post-summer review meeting.

Teaching and learning

T10 Observation records showed little evidence that attention is paid to areas for development.

Not yet addressed. Although peer observations have been conducted, not all teachers have been formally observed. The observation template does not clearly make reference to action planning in order to improve and develop teaching.

T11 There are no systems in place, such as records of work, to ensure that teachers are delivering the syllabus as intended.

Addressed. Records of work are kept for all classes.

T15 The syllabus does not specify study and learning strategies for each level, and no evidence was seen that they are covered systematically.

Addressed. Students are directed to the student zone on the website, where they can review lessons and learning resources.

T21 The leaving certificate claims that students have completed a level, not possible on short courses with no formal testing.

Not yet addressed.

Welfare

W6 General information on transport is limited.

Not addressed. Although the website indicates the costs of transfer arranged through the provider, the approximate costs of independent travel are not specified.

Conclusions

The school has addressed all of the safeguarding and staff management issues and most of the other points to be addressed in the 2022 report. There are no grounds for bringing forward the date of the next inspection.
