Spot check report

Organisation name	Kheiron School of English, Oxford
Inspection date	15 November 2017

BACKGROUND

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	February 2012
Last full inspection	September 2016
Subsequent spot check (if applicable)	November 2017 (this report)
Subsequent supplementary check (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent interim visit (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	N/a
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a

Current accreditation status and reason for spot check

Current accredited status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: follow up on Points to be addressed

Premises profile

Address of main site	9 Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HH
Details of any additional sites in use at the time of the inspection	N/a
Details of any additional sites not in use at the time of the inspection	N/a
Sites inspected	Park End Street

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week August 2017
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	119	140
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	16	16
Typical age range	18-40	18-40
Typical length of stay	6 months	6 months
Predominant nationalities	Spanish, German	Spanish, German
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	7	9
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	2	2

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Kheiron School was founded in 2007 by the current principal and first accredited in 2012. It has been located in the current premises since 2008. The school has a strong ethos of community involvement, and this is evident in the provision; discounts are offered to NHS staff and locally resident au pairs, and free classes are available to asylum seekers. Classes are available morning, afternoon and evening, and students are able to work on a flexible timetable to suit their availability. Class sizes are small, with an advertised maximum of twelve participants, but in practice classes rarely exceed six.

Following the last full inspection in September 2016 the school was asked to submit documentary evidence within six months to demonstrate that weaknesses in M3 (job descriptions), C3 and C4 (publicity and recruitment procedures for students under 18) had been addressed, along with an action plan regarding the rest of the points to be addressed. The documentation was provided and was confirmed as satisfactory.

The school was also informed that a spot check would take place within 12 months which would focus on course design and teaching. This is the report of that spot check.

Preparation

The inspector received documentation from the Accreditation Unit and she read the school's website.

Programme and persons present

The Accreditation Unit had been informed that the principal would be on maternity leave from 30 October, and the director of studies (DoS) on paternity leave from the beginning of December. Hence the inspector chose an afternoon for the visit, when it was less likely that the DoS, the sole member of the management team available, would be teaching. The inspector arrived at the school at 13.45, and left at 16.45. She had face-to-face discussions with the DoS, the senior teacher, two of the teaching staff and two advanced-level students. No lessons were scheduled, so she was not able to observe any teaching. However, she discussed in some detail the systems and training that had been put in place in response to points to be addressed.

FINDINGS

When both the senior managers will be on parental leave at the beginning of December, the senior teacher will take over the management responsibilities for approximately a fortnight in their absence. She has been well briefed (M2).

Academic management

Criteria	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
T6 Deployment of teachers	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
T7 Timetabling	☐	☒	☐	☐	
T8 Cover for absent teachers	☐	☒	☐	☐	
T9 Continuous enrolment	☐	☒	☒	☒	☐
T10 Formalised support for teachers	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
T11 Observation and monitoring	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐

Comments

T9 As there is no set programme of study and no weekly plan available, students are not informed in writing of lesson content that they have missed or what they will be studying in successive lessons. It is not clear how the needs of full-time and part-time students studying in the same classes are met.
Addressed. A new system has been introduced which the students interviewed by the inspector judged worked well for them. Teachers and students explained that their teacher discussed the students' priorities with the class, which helped to determine the specific content. Teachers then devise a weekly plan which is submitted electronically to the DoS by Monday morning. He then transfers this information to a large chart in the corridor. Skills rotate to a different day each week, so over five weeks the whole range is available to students. Students are able to consult the chart to see what is available when, and plan their attendance accordingly. This very neatly presents a solution to all the points made in the last report.
T11 Although written feedback is given, there is no set template in use and the style of written feedback is inconsistent between the management team. Some of the comments lack clear reference to action planning to improve and develop teaching.
Addressed. Two new observation templates have been devised, one for the observer and one for the teacher's lesson plan. The former is used by both senior managers. The form includes, among other things, an action plan section outlining areas to think about before the next observation, and many of the areas identified as in need of improvement in the Classroom observation section of the last report, such as a clear statement of learning outcomes and whether/how these were to be shared with the students.

Course design and implementation

Criteria	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
T12 Principled course structure	☐	☒	☐	☒	

	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
T13 Review of course design	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T14 Course outlines and outcomes	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T15 Study and learning strategies	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T16 Linguistic benefit from UK	☐	☒	☐	☐	

Comments

T12 There is no clear course structure available in writing to teachers or students for the general English classes. Teachers are advised to make their lessons student-centred by negotiating course content with the students and are discouraged from following coursebooks sequentially. However, the initial placement test is rudimentary and there are no clear mechanisms for identifying students' needs, such as individual needs analysis forms or tutorial forms. There is no clear guidance for teachers on how to structure a coherent and appropriate course and there is a lack of coherence or systematic development of language in the delivery of all general English courses. There is no evidence that this approach to course delivery meets the needs of both the full and part-time students who attend the same classes.

Addressed. The school has adapted the Council of Europe Framework (CEFR) as a syllabus for each general English level, and weekly plans are guided by these. Via the Web-based application used for the weekly plans (see T9) the DoS monitors teachers' adherence to the syllabus. Students now complete a needs analysis form on registration, and this is followed up by teachers in class alongside the negotiations. A further application which is searchable is used to maintain a record of work for each class, which teachers use to share information with colleagues, and managers to monitor. See also T14 below.

T13 Feedback from students has influenced some aspects of provision such as the times of lessons and the introduction of the pre-notification system for attendance. Although significant changes have been made to course design since the last inspection, there is no documented evidence of review and discussion that led to the decision to move away from coursebooks or a structured course design.

Addressed. A web-based application is now used to record minutes of teachers' and senior management meetings.

T14 There are no written course outlines and no weekly plans or intended learning outcomes are available to students.

Addressed. See T9. In addition, after some experimentation with a larger number of categories, for each language skill three outcomes are identified, one such being reading for detail, and these are assigned a code. Each lesson has a code or codes, which are included on the chart mentioned in T9 above, alongside a key. Students and managers are therefore able to identify the outcomes planned for each lesson.

T15 Homework tasks are given daily and students are given some general advice for further study in six weekly reports. However, no regular tutorials take place and students are not supported by means such as an individual learning plan. There is no evidence of an agreed approach to error correction strategies or systematic use of the whiteboard in the classroom. No systematic guidance is given to students on general English courses regarding study skills and learning strategies.

Addressed. Regular tutorials are scheduled every six weeks. Students are emailed to make an appointment, and in their response complete a simple questionnaire which, together with the initial information from the needs analysis, sets the agenda for the tutorial meeting, which is conducted by the DoS or the principal. They complete a confidential written record, the basis of which is extracted as feedback for the relevant teacher(s). The students interviewed by the inspector confirmed that they had received tutorials, and that they were encouraged to complete a personal record of progress form, which identified goals for the next six week period. This system also allows the principal to track at first hand an individual student's progress through the school.

Error correction (December 2016) and use of the whiteboard (March and April 2017) are both topics which had been covered in the in-service training sessions (INSETs), which are scheduled fortnightly.

Learner management

Criteria	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
T17 Placement for level and age	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
T18 Monitoring students' progress	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐
T19 Examination guidance	☐	☒	☒	☐	☐
T20 Assessment criteria	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
T21 Academic reports	☐	☒	☐	☒	☐
T22 Information on UK education	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐

T18 Although students are invited to request tutorials, there is no evidence of recent tutorials having taken place. Teachers are encouraged to carry out formative assessment tasks in class but there is no testing or record of grades or student progress.
Addressed. See T15.
T21 Reports are given every six weeks or on request. These tend to make general, narrative descriptions of progress and would benefit from the inclusion of a formal method for tracking progress.
Addressed. Six-weekly reports have been replaced by the tutorial record.

Classroom observation

Criteria	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
T23 Models and awareness of English in use	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T24 Appropriate content	☒	☐	☐	☒	
T25 Learning outcomes	☒	☐	☐	☒	
T26 Teaching techniques	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T27 Classroom management	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T28 Feedback to students	☐	☒	☐	☒	
T29 Evaluating student learning	☒	☐	☐	☒	
T30 Student engagement	☐	☒	☐	☒	

As no teaching was observed, the 'Not met' and 'Met' boxes above replicate the conclusions of the original inspectors. Although all the points made in the report have been addressed either through the newly-introduced systems, in teacher development sessions or via the observation template, the outcomes in terms of improved classroom practice could not be evaluated in the course of a half-day spot check.
T23 There was a lack of attention to pronunciation features in most lesson segments.
Addressed. An INSET, led by one of the teachers, had been given on this topic. **However, pronunciation does not explicitly appear on the observation template for the teacher or the observer.**
T24 In most general English lessons, the learning needs of students were unclear and lesson content was too challenging or not clearly relevant to the needs of the whole class. In some classes students were invited to suggest lesson content, which tended to favour the stronger and more confident students.
Addressed. The systems introduced by the school and outlined above under the criteria related to Academic management and Course design and implementation, in particular the CEFR-adapted syllabus, the needs analyses and the tutorials, should ensure that students' needs are clearer, and not dominated by those of the more forthcoming students, and that lessons are pitched at the right level of challenge.
T25 In a minority of lessons, a logically staged lesson plan led students through a series of coherent activities. In some classes there was no evidence of learning outcomes being shared with students and lessons based on students' questions lacked focus or a systematic approach to dealing with language.
Addressed. Learning outcomes are now identified for each lesson and are available to students in advance of the class (see T14). The perceived learning outcomes form part of the feedback for the observed lessons. In each classroom there is now a permanent section of the whiteboard designated for the learning outcome of the lesson.
T26 Some examples of effective eliciting, prompting, nomination and single word drilling were observed. There was some use of contextualisation and personalisation to introduce new language. Lessons were largely teacher centred and there was little effective interaction between or among students and little controlled or freer oral practice of language. The stronger students tended to dominate and, with one exception, there was no structured approach to support the needs of the weaker students.
Addressed. Two INSET sessions had been held on 'Demand high' teaching, the initial one as a prompt for reflection, the second after teachers had had a chance to experiment for themselves in their classrooms, which led to further discussion. This was preceded by two sessions led by the principal on what constitutes good practice. Interaction patterns feature on the observation template. Both needs analyses and the tutorials should also contribute to supporting the needs of the weaker students, by closer monitoring, and the greater connectedness of the new systems. The identification of the skills outcome for each lesson should also help to focus the teacher's planning on, for example, fluency practice.
T27 There was some effective use of the whiteboard such as the use of zoning and colour, although this was not universal. A good example was observed of the use of a mobile phone to record students' oral practice. Some photocopied worksheets were given but the use of materials and resources for teaching was minimal and there was little opportunity for students to make a systematic record of learning.

Addressed. INSET sessions had been held on the use of authentic materials, and use of the whiteboard. The provision of a written record of the work covered features in the observation template.

T28 In exam preparation classes, students were given praise and encouragement and some very useful practical advice was given on how to improve examination techniques. In the general English classes, there was little use of constructive feedback in the majority of lesson segments observed, with missed opportunities for student-centred error correction activities.

Addressed. Feedback was a feature of the 'Demand high' INSET sessions, and error correction of the good practice sessions.

T29 Most lesson segments did not include tasks which allowed students to see how well they were performing through meaningful tasks and there was no evident link to previous study. Concept checking was limited and teachers tended to give explanations rather than helping students discover meaning from context or planned practice activities. Students were given imprecise instructions for writing sentences containing specific structures or words rather than being given tasks to use them communicatively or creatively.

Addressed. Again, the use of tasks was tackled in 'Demand high', and concept checking in good practice sessions. Instruction giving is a feature of the observation template. The planning process is now more specific, more systematic, and better monitored.

T30 Overall, students had a good rapport with their teachers, some interesting topics were covered and there was a purposeful atmosphere in the more structured lesson segments. There were many missed opportunities for student interaction and the weaker segments lacked a natural context for the language which would have made the content clearer and more engaging. In some segments the materials were graded too high and weaker students were not able to become fully involved in the activities.

Partially addressed. All these areas had been covered in staff development sessions. However, given the recurrent theme of weaker students not being fully catered for, the inclusion of differentiation on the observation template for teachers under 'Main aims for students' might encourage teachers to consider at the planning stage how all student needs could be accommodated.

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

M8 There is some inconsistency in the feedback given by the two managers as they each use different templates for this process.

Addressed. See T11 above.

M9 CPD training materials are not stored for reference.

Addressed. These are now stored on a web-based application, and in hard-copy form in a folder in the teachers' room, so any teaching staff who were unable to attend have access to them.

M15 Conditions and procedures under which a student may be asked to leave the course are not consistently detailed in information for staff and students.

Addressed. These are now clearly set out in both the student and the teacher handbooks. However, no graduated pathway is proposed, such as an initial written warning, or any time scale.

M18 Initial student feedback is not documented.

Addressed. A new starter feedback form with a few simple questions is emailed to new students.

M20 There are no systematic procedures for recording complaints and action taken.

Addressed. A spreadsheet is now maintained with a record of complaints.

M21 Some of the language in the policies in the student handbook would benefit from further grading.

Addressed. The student handbook has been revised with linguistic accessibility in mind.

M22 Photographs used in the publicity are not captioned.

Not addressed. The prospectus and the website have not been reprinted/revised since the last inspection, but are about to be. The managers had not quite understood the reasons for this point, but the DoS hoped that he would be able to intervene in the production process and add captions in time for the new print run.

M27 The information states that students go on trips together as a school, but this is not the case.

Addressed. This has been changed in the forthcoming publicity.

Resources and environment

R3 Flexibility of layout in classrooms is limited due to the dominance of the boardroom tables in the classrooms.

Not yet addressed.

R6 Teachers' access to resources and belongings during class time is restricted when the teachers' room is being used as a classroom.

Not yet addressed. The school is still looking for new premises, but has so far not been successful in finding any with the necessary educational use.

Points to be addressed arising from this visit

T23 Given the weakness identified in relation to the teaching of pronunciation, it might be politic to include pronunciation explicitly on the observation template for the teacher and the observer.

T30 Given the recurrent theme of weaker students not being fully catered for, the inclusion of differentiation on the observation template for teachers under 'Main aims for students' might encourage teachers to consider at the planning stage how all student needs could be accommodated.

M15 Conditions and procedures under which a student may be asked to leave the course are clearly set out in both the student and the teacher handbooks. However, no graduated pathway is proposed, such as an initial written warning, or any time scale.

CONCLUSIONS

The school has responded positively to the challenge posed by the points to be addressed, and has viewed finding solutions to the issues outlined as an opportunity. As a result, all the relevant criteria in course design have been addressed and some imaginative solutions have been found. A number of new systems have been devised, so that needs analyses, tutorials, course design and lesson planning, observations and professional development now form a more integrated and coherent whole. It remains to be seen at the next full inspection what impact this has had on the quality of the teaching.

In the Management area, the majority of the points have been addressed, though it is not yet clear whether the captions have been added to the most recent publicity. As the school managers are still trying to acquire new premises, points under Resources and materials have not been resolved.

RECOMMENDATION

The next inspection falls due in 2020; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Changes to summary statement

The need for improvement in the area of course design can now be removed.

Summary statement

Original

The British Council inspected and accredited Kheiron School of English in September 2016. 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 courses in general English for adults (16+).

The inspection report noted a need for improvement in the areas of course design and teaching.

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

Amended

The British Council inspected and accredited Kheiron School of English in September 2016. 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 courses in general English for adults (16+).

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

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