

Organisation name	Oxford Spires International, Head Office Kidlington
Inspection date	8 October 2021
Inspection type	An interim inspection was conducted while the language centre's regular activities were suspended due to the impact of the global pandemic.

## Recommendation

We recommend that accreditation be extended over this period of temporary closure. The period of review may now be ended and accreditation continued until the re-inspection due can take place once activities resume across a number of centres; this is currently expected to be summer 2022.

## Changes to the summary statement

The need for improvement in *Academic management*, *Leisure opportunities* and *Safeguarding under 18s* can now be removed.

## Summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Oxford Spires Language School (now Oxford Spires International) in July 2019 and October 2021. 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](http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation) for details).

This private language school offers courses in general English for closed groups of under 18s (some residential) and vacation courses for under 18s.

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

## Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	2015
Last full inspection	July 2019
Subsequent spot check (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent supplementary check (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent interim visit (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	The group: 'Oxford Virtual Education Group' comprising: Virtual Learning UK (Ofsted) Active Camps (Ofsted)
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Current accredited status	Accreditation under review

## Premises profile

Address of main site	25 Bankside Court, Kidlington, Oxford OX5 1JE
Details of any additional sites normally used	Oxford International College Anglia Ruskin University Oxford Brookes University Cheltenham Ladies College Clifton College Summer Fields School St Edward's School Sibford School
Sites inspected	N/a

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week 2019: July
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	0	301

Minimum age	0	8
Typical age range	0	12–16
Typical length of stay	0	2 weeks
Predominant nationalities	0	Italian, Chinese, Russian, Egyptian, Spanish

## Introduction

### Characteristics of the organisation

Oxford Spires Language School (OSLS) was founded in 2013 and first inspected in 2015. OSLS is a limited company, operated in tandem with Oxford Active Limited which has run after-school clubs and summer camps for under 18s in Oxford since 1998. With the pandemic the shared administrative offices have moved from Woodstock to Kidlington. Summer vacation courses for juniors (8–17 years) are normally run at a number of host centre premises. Seasonal courses, usually school groups, are offered during the academic year and in holiday periods.

### Background

The inspection in July 2019 resulted in accreditation being placed under review because the section standard for safeguarding was not met and there were weaknesses in M3, M18, academic management and leisure opportunities.

The period of review was to have been ended by a full re-inspection in the summer of 2020. As a result of the pandemic, no courses have run since February 2020. This interim inspection was scheduled to provide an update while regular activities are currently suspended and very likely to remain so until 2022.

### Changes to the provision or key staff since the last inspection

A new director was appointed in September 2019 and has continued to work full time since the school closure, caused by the pandemic, in March 2020. The majority of the head office administrative staff were furloughed and then made redundant. The HR manager has continued to work part time. A TEFLQ teacher who first worked with the school in 2018 was promoted from within to take up the newly created post of academic operations manager in March 2021. He currently works one day a week and will be increasing his hours as preparation requirements increase in order to welcome students at a new centre in Bristol in Easter 2022. TEFLQ teachers who worked on the last course run in February 2020 will be the first staff to be recalled.

### Programme and persons involved

The inspector received relevant core documents in advance of the half-day inspection. She spoke remotely with the director and the academic operations manager and discussed among other things, the points to be addressed from the previous inspection, and plans for re-opening. The inspector examined core policy documents in all aspects of the provision. There was no video tour as the host school premises were being used by the owners and were not accessible to OSLS. The inspector also sampled documentation from the last course running (February 2020) before the pandemic closure.

## Findings based on the evidence seen in areas sampled

### Action taken in response to *Points to be addressed* on the previous inspection report

Oxford Spires has taken steps to address the majority of the points to be addressed in the July 2019 inspection report. In cases where the effectiveness of action taken cannot be confirmed without the need of a site visit when students and staff are present, the criteria are marked 'Partially assessed' and will require further evaluation at the next inspection.

### Management

M3 There is insufficient staff capacity to meet the needs and expectations of students and group leaders with, for example, multiple changes in staff deployment and last-minute changes to the rota on a daily basis.

**Partially assessed. Staffing ratios have been revised and a new off-site welfare officer/ centre administrator post has been created and new procedures have been specified describing how cover should be arranged.**

M4 Group leaders, staff and students reported not receiving important information in a timely fashion.

**Partially assessed. Social activity leaders (SALs) have been made responsible for updating group leaders daily. The tasks have been added to their daily checklist of duties and incorporated into the handbook. The effectiveness of the new system will need to be assessed when courses are in operation.**

M9 There is no established process for review of job descriptions and there is no reference to safeguarding on the managing director's job description.

**Addressed. The job descriptions are now updated annually and DSL duties have been added to those who have DSL and deputy DSL duties.**

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M11 Changes to staffing and logistical issues meant some staff inductions were rushed or incomplete.

**Addressed. In addition to the existing face-to-face inductions management have produced several comprehensive briefing sessions for different categories of staff that can be accessed electronically and remotely so that briefings for late-appointed staff can be carried out more efficiently. On-site staff arriving after course start up are teamed with a support buddy and have a tailored induction.**

M18 Emergency contact details were not available for a significant number of students, including an Israeli group in Oxford and a Chinese group in Cambridge.

**Addressed. The records sampled from the last course contained all the necessary information.**

M22 A number of photographs are uncaptioned.

**Addressed. The photographs in the gallery section of the website are all captioned. One or two others on the general pages have not yet been captioned.**

M24 Course ages are advertised for 13 to 17 year-olds. At Cambridge there were a number of 18-year-olds and at Oxford there were a number of 11 and 12-year-olds.

**Addressed. Student records sampled were within the advertised age range.**

### **Premises and resources**

P5 No facilities for the display of general information were available at Cambridge.

**Addressed. The provision of a display space and boards have been incorporated to the contracts with host schools.**

P6 There is no course office for the management team in the Cambridge centre and no dedicated staffroom where teachers and social activity staff can prepare.

**Addressed. The provision of a dedicated staffroom space has been incorporated into the ARU contract.**

P8 Methodology and reference resources for teachers are minimal at both centres and photocopying facilities at Cambridge are very difficult to access.

**Partially assessed. Photocopying facilities are now incorporated into the host school contract and there are budgeted plans in place to purchase additional resources.**

### **Teaching and learning**

T7 Teacher absence and staff changes have been to the detriment of student experience, for example, multiple staff changes to classes.

**Partially assessed. The school has introduced a higher staff to student ratio and has built in cover capacity to rotas. The effective implementation of the new practices can only be assessed when students are on site.**

T8 Insufficient guidance is provided to support teachers, for example groups of students studying for only one week. Insufficient attention is paid to pedagogic and organisational issues.

**Addressed. Additional guidance has been added to the staff handbook.**

T9 In Oxford the inspectors noted and the teachers reported an absence of effective academic support for teachers.

**Addressed. Additional ideas and support have been incorporated into the handbooks and the DoS will not be the first on call person when cover is required.**

T17 There were several instances where the class age range was not appropriate and there was a range of more than two to three years (12–16 years).

**Addressed. The ages on the class registers from the last courses in 2020 were appropriate.**

T24 Class profiles indicating the learning needs and interests of the students were not included in the lesson plans. There was little evidence of the cultural background of students and how to accommodate them being taken into account.

**Partially assessed. A new lesson plan template with a field for information on student needs and cultural background has been created.**

### **Welfare and student services**

W2 No evidence was seen of staff training in this area, and it does not form part of the routine pre-excursion briefing for activity leaders.

**Addressed. A new comprehensive emergency plan has been drawn up and is made available to staff via handbooks and incorporated into the induction programme.**

W3 More formalised procedures are needed to ensure that the few individual students enrolled are appropriately cared for.

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**Addressed. A new welfare officer post has been created for each site and they have responsibility for looking after students unaccompanied by a group leader.**

W4 The required information is only found in the student handbook. More needs to be done to inform and remind students about the importance of this area.

**Addressed. Daily assemblies have been incorporated into the weekly timetable and into the job descriptions of the staff who are responsible for running the assemblies.**

W18 In one homestay visited, three students were sharing the same room. This arrangement had not been specifically requested in writing.

**Addressed. A limit of two students per room has been established and homestay providers are made aware through documentation shared with them.**

W24 There was some feedback from students and group leaders that excursions have too much walking with not enough focus on specific sights or 'activities'.

**Addressed. The content of walking tour excursions has been reviewed and modified.**

W25 There was evidence that activity leaders were severely overstretched and that there was a lack of back-up in the staffing of activities to deal with any unexpected events. Supervision ratios were routinely at the bare minimum.

**Addressed. The staffing ratio policy has been revised. Resilience has been built into the rota system. For example, group leaders are not counted in the staff:student ratio and senior staff are not routinely deployed to lessons and activities. The effectiveness of the new systems will need to be monitored when courses are running.**

### **Safeguarding under 18s**

S1 The safeguarding policy needs expansion to include reference to two specific areas of risk: the use of facilities (e.g. university premises and residences) which are essentially open access or are shared with other organisations, and the fact that there may be students aged 18 in the groups of students from some agents.

**Addressed. The safeguarding policy has been updated and includes all the information required.**

S3 No parental consent forms had been received in respect of a group of students at Cambridge. The existing consent form does not cover the risks associated with homestay students using public transport to travel to and from the course centre

**Addressed. The pre-arrival information form has been revised and contains precise details of what parents and carers are consenting to on behalf of their children including airport and homestay travel arrangements.**

S4 No information was available about the leaders accompanying one group of students at Cambridge.

**Addressed. The records from the last course in February 2020 had all the required details for the accompanying group leaders.**

S5 No risk assessments had been carried out in relation to the use of shared premises.

**Partially addressed. Premises risk assessments have been discussed by the management and in the event of OSLS students sharing premises at Oxford International College a premises risk assessment will be completed.**

S6 In Oxford it was noted that there was some confusion about the curfew requirements for homestay students because of contradictory information in the generic guidance issued to hosts by the accommodation agency, and the specific requirements of this provider

**Addressed. The documentation sent to parents and homestay providers now contains the same curfew information.**

S8 No information for contacting parents or guardians was available in relation to one group studying at Cambridge.

**Addressed. The records checked from the last course (February 2020) had all the required information.**

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### **Strategic and quality management**

Requirement: There is a clear statement describing the goals and values of the organisation; management has clear objectives for the future of the organisation and has realistic plans to achieve them; and action is taken and recorded in an annual self-evaluation.

#### Comments

A mission statement (M1) is clearly displayed on the website and in staff handbooks and a comprehensive organisation plan (M2) has been drawn up to enable the re-opening of the school as Covid restrictions and bookings allow. The plans include the appointment of two new staff: an operations manager and an administration manager by the end of December 2021, and the updating of safeguarding qualifications for the DSL and deputy DSLs.

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**Publicity**

Requirement: Information about the range of services provided is accurate and appropriate.

**Comments**

The publicity is easy to follow and contains the majority of the information required although it is not made clear that there are no courses currently running. The description of the scale of the online learning options available is misleading and this does not give rise to realistic expectations about the extent of services available (M22).

**Comments on other management issues**

The school is already reaping the benefits of the newly appointed (September 2019) director who has extensive senior management experience in UK summer school provision. He and the new academic operations manager have already made significant improvements to the school systems and procedures. They have used the self-evaluation document to assess the effectiveness of the school operations. There are clearly identified priorities that are scheduled to be completed in the coming months. HR policies have been reviewed.

**Premises**

Requirement: The premises provide an appropriate environment for students and staff.

**Comments**

The school has maintained its contacts with its seasonal host centres and will use them again when the school re-opens. Provisional arrangements have been made for a new centre in Bristol.

**Academic resources**

Requirement: There is an appropriate and accessible range of teaching and learning materials.

**Comments**

In addition to the developments mentioned in P8 there are plans to develop the range of resources available via the organisation's shared files and base programmes on coursebooks that include e-learning support materials.

**Academic management**

Requirement: There is an academic manager or management team with an appropriate professional profile and experience for courses to resume with sufficient and appropriate support available to all teachers.

**Comments**

In 2019 all the criteria in this section were met and OSLS plans to continue with a TEFLQ DoS and senior teacher at larger centres to ensure sufficient support for teachers.

**Overview: academic staff qualifications**

Qualification status	At inspection	2019
Diploma-level ELT/TESOL qualification (TEFLQ)	1	2
Certificate-level ELT/TESOL qualification (TEFLI)	0	12
Holding specialist qualifications only (specify)	0	0
YL initiated	0	0
Qualified teacher status only (QTS)	0	0
Rationale(s) required for teachers without appropriate ELT/TESOL qualifications	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>

These figures include the academic manager(s)

**Comments**

All the staff working on the February 2020 TEFL course were TEFLQ and they will be the first staff to be recalled.

**Comments on other academic issues**

N/a.

**Pastoral care**

Requirement: Students are given pastoral care appropriate to their age, background and circumstances.

**Comments**

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A new post of welfare officer has been created for each off-site centre. The job description clearly details the welfare and first aid responsibilities. Updated policies are now available on the website. The student handbook has been refreshed and provides accessible information appropriate to students' needs.

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### **Accommodation**

Requirement: Any accommodation systems will work to the benefit of students.

#### **Comments**

The school offers residential accommodation at all centres and homestay is available at selected schools. It is school practice to accommodate students in separate male and female houses where provision allows or by designated floors where this is not feasible. Management has continued to maintain contact with host organisations and local homestay coordinators.

The previous off-site residential accommodation at ARU is no longer in use and students will be accommodated in residences on campus.

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### **Comments on other welfare issues**

A specific policy on how to handle Covid has been created including cleaning schedules. Details on how to manage the situation should a staff member, student or homestay provider test positive have yet to be developed.

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### **Safeguarding under 18s**

Requirement: There is appropriate provision for the safeguarding of students under the age of 18.

#### **Comments**

Update training for the DSL and deputy DSLs has been scheduled and seasonal staff do online training before arrival with additional training at induction. The recruitment policy specifies the need for up-to-date DBS checks and references. Contact with the HR manager has been maintained in preparation for re-opening.

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### **Conclusion**

The provider has systematically addressed the points to be addressed from the previous report and made good use of the additional management time created by the absence of students during the pandemic. Links with host centres have been maintained and a pilot opening of a new centre at Easter 2022 will enable new processes and procedures to be tested using experienced staff previously employed. The effectiveness of the implementation of the new measures will need to be confirmed during the next inspection.

The conclusion of this inspection is that the provider has ensured that the school generally complies with Scheme requirements and is ready to resume business when conditions permit.

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