

Organisation name	Preston Academy of English
Inspection date	10 May 2016

BACKGROUND
Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	October 2014
Last full inspection	October 2014
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	Test centre for external examinations, internships
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	Routine: newly accredited institution

Premises profile

Address of main site	44 Ormskirk Road, Preston PR1 2QPO
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	The school is situated in the centre of Preston close to public transport links and all the usual amenities. There are nine classrooms, administrative offices, a teachers' room and kitchen, a student common room, a test centre with its own reception and waiting area and an appropriately equipped and staffed crèche.

Student and staff profile

	At inspection	In peak week April
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	31	33
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	16	16
Typical age range	16–40	16–40
Typical length of stay	12–16 weeks	12–16 weeks
Predominant nationalities	Saudi Arabian	Saudi Arabian
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	10	9
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	7	7

INTRODUCTION

Background

The school opened in August 2012. It is a limited company with three equal shareholders, all family members. The course programmes remain the same and consist of general English and IELTS preparation courses at various levels. The school prides itself on being able to provide a flexible timetable to suit individual and group students. Ladies-only classes feature prominently in the school's work and the school provides a professionally-run crèche facility. As before, most of the students attending the school live and/or work locally. The school is still the only private language school in Preston.

Preparation

The inspector, who was the reporting inspector at the first inspection, was sent a copy of the report and correspondence relating to changes in the academic management. Publicity was reviewed on the website.

The school was contacted to check on staff availability and expected student numbers for the period available for the spot check. Prior to the spot check, emails were exchanged with the principal relating to staff qualifications and publicity.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 09.00 and left at 13.30. The principal was not in the school when the inspector arrived due to an unexpected and serious family crisis. His staff were, however, well able to assist with the inspection and provided a tour of the premises and access to requested documentation including staff files, student feedback, and Prevent and safeguarding policies.

The principal made a couple of short visits to the school during the morning so that any outstanding questions could be dealt with.

The academic manager had to provide cover at short notice and was, therefore, unavailable for most of the morning.

Interviews were held with the general manager, the finance manager, the welfare officer and her recently-recruited assistant, the academic manager and the administrative assistant. Two teachers were spoken to informally and a focus group was held with students during the morning break.

FINDINGS

Management

There have been major staff changes at the school since the last inspection. One of the directors of the school, who held the post of welfare manager, has left the school to pursue further academic studies. She remains on the board.

The academic management team of two in place at the time of the last inspection have both left the school for private reasons. A diploma-qualified academic manager, in post since 2014, was on sick leave at the time of the first inspection. She has now returned to the school although she is on maternity leave at present, but is expected to return to the school in early June. An additional academic manager was appointed in the summer of 2015. She was recruited from the school's teaching staff. She was appointed on the clear understanding that she was TEFLQ. This turns out not to be the case. She has a BA in TESOL. The course included observed teaching practice. She has extensive teaching experience both at home and abroad. She also received a month-long training by the senior academic manager, who is in regular contact with the school and able to provide support as needed. Following consultation with the Accreditation Unit, the rationale that was asked for and provided was accepted in the context of this spot check.

The administrative staff are all new to the school since the last inspection. It was clear that they have all settled in well. Individual areas of responsibility are clearly defined yet staff have good knowledge of the school as a whole and each other's work so are able to cover for each other. This was very well demonstrated during the spot check as all the inspector's requests and questions were fully dealt with. All staff work very well together and are clear on school procedures, which ensure that all student services are efficient and student centred. A new software programme in place facilitates access to student information, as was demonstrated by staff during the spot check.

The school has a consultant who visits regularly and provides advice on operating policies and related matters. She has recently started her own accommodation agency and assists with homestay placements. The school's own welfare officer telephones and visits the hosts when a placement has been made. Students who wish to stay in homestay accommodation are sent a couple of suggested addresses with comprehensive host profiles for them to choose from. The profiles include several pictures of the homes. This is a useful addition to the school's own list of hosts.

The school's website is in the process of being re-designed and is a work in progress, although it does have the correct course information for students wishing to enrol. Examination of completed sections of the website indicates that careful proof reading is still needed.

Resources and environment

There has been some re-organisation of the premises as student numbers have increased and additional staff have been appointed. The principal has offered some space to suitable external organisations which may also be of benefit to the school. Since the last inspection what was the new student room plus an adjacent classroom have become a test centre and reception area for two external organisations. The test centre is equipped with a large number of computers. The reception area has lockable lockers, snacks and drinks vending machines. A dedicated test invigilator is in place to look after the examination candidates and test procedures. The school has the use of the testing room as a much needed classroom until 13.30 each day.

What was previously the principal's office is now a classroom and he has moved to the administration office behind the main reception.

The teachers' room was thought to be a little small for the numbers of teachers using the room at the first inspection. The teachers' room has been turned into a classroom and an even smaller room adjacent to the kitchen is the new teachers' room. The inspector was informed that the teachers are very happy to use empty classrooms for lesson preparations. The academic managers used to have their work space in the teachers' room but now have a separate office.

One of the larger classrooms has been converted to a comfortable student common room. This area doubles as a prayer room with different times set for men and women.

One part of the building is used by an IT training company. Their lease is about to run out and the principal is considering taking their lease over in order to be able to expand the school.

Teaching and learning

The academic manager had to provide cover for a sick teacher on the morning of the spot check, which meant that the interviews with her were of necessity quite short.

The academic manager holds monthly teachers' meetings which include a training component. She has carried out short 'buzz' observations of all the teachers.

One teacher did not hold an EFL qualification that met Scheme requirements. A rationale was provided and accepted in the context of this inspection.

Lesson observations were not carried out during this spot check.

Welfare and student services

Security has been stepped up with school exits being fitted with self-locking doors. CCTV cameras have been installed to cover the test centre rooms.

Three students were staying in accommodation arranged by the school. No homestay visits were made on this occasion.

Care of under 18s

There were no under 18s in the school, but all documentation, systems and procedures are in place should a young person enrol. Minimum age is advertised as 16+ but it is very rare for an under 18 to enrol.

All staff have undergone Prevent training appropriate to their work in the school. The school has applied to have a 'dummy run' BIS (Business Innovation and Skills) inspection. This was going to take place shortly after the spot check. Preparations for this visit, including all documentation, are well in hand. The school's welfare officer and her newly-recruited assistant are the designated Prevent lead officer and support respectively. They cover their duties on a job share basis.

POINTS TO BE ADDRESSED

Points to be addressed from the previous inspection report with comments (in bold) to indicate how far these have been addressed.

Management

M14 Absences are followed up but school staff are not very strict as some students demonstrated a somewhat cavalier attitude to both punctuality and attendance.

Partially addressed. Students sign in on arrival. The attendance is checked and absent students are

telephoned by school staff. Enrolled students have been informed that from early June students arriving fifteen minutes late will not be admitted to class but will have to wait until the next break.

M18 Students are asked to complete a feedback form relating to their accommodation in the first week. No other initial feedback is sought formally. The language on the end of course questionnaire is too difficult for lower level students. Any negative feedback and action taken is not formally recorded although discussed at meetings.

Addressed.

Resources and environment

R6 The teachers' room is not really large enough to provide appropriate working space for all the teachers.

Not yet addressed. The teachers' room has been changed and is now even smaller. It is, however, adjacent to the kitchen, which has additional seating space.

R8 There are practically no practitioner books available for teachers. There is a need for more teacher resources in the area of teaching 1:1.

Addressed. The stock of practitioner books and other book resources have increased a great deal.

Teaching and learning

T12 The syllabus, based on the CEFR can-do statements, do not include links to grammar/vocabulary areas to cover, suggested activities, lesson planning tips or links to available resources.

Partially addressed. The syllabus has been updated and now includes activity ideas, suggested resources and links to grammar and vocabulary. Not all levels have been completed as yet.

T15 Study and learning strategies are not made explicit in the syllabus document.

Not checked.

T28 Some opportunities for immediate correction were missed, particularly where help with pronunciation mistakes would have been beneficial.

Not checked. There were no lesson observations on this occasion.

Welfare and student services

W1 The entrance from the street to a newly acquired classroom on the ground floor did not offer adequate security.

Addressed. The test rooms are protected by CCTV and the rooms that open straight on to the pavements are now self-locking on exit to ensure no unwanted entries.

W4 The abusive behaviour policy is expressed in language that would not be accessible to most students at the school and the procedures for dealing with it are not made clear.

Partially addressed. The procedures, which could still be further simplified, are strategically posted throughout the building.

W6 Information is restricted to arrival at Manchester airport and no details are given regarding other points of entry or costs of onward travel to the Preston.

Not checked.

W7 The language used in the handbook is not accessible to most of the current students.

Partially addressed. The student handbook has been simplified and much reduced in size. It contains a good deal of very useful information albeit still in quite complex language.

Points to be addressed arising from this visit

M21 The website is in need of careful proof reading.

CONCLUSIONS

The school continues to be well run by a dedicated principal who is well supported by a loyal and hard-working staff. Effective management procedures are becoming well established. Investment in resources, albeit low scale at present, is done with care and is appropriate to the current needs of the school.

RECOMMENDATION

The next inspection falls due in 2018. There are no grounds for bringing this forward.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Changes to summary statement

No changes need to be made to the summary statement.

Summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Preston Academy of English in October 2014. 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 courses in general English for adults.

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