

Organisation name	Suzanne Sparrow Plymouth Language School
Inspection date	17 August 2016

BACKGROUND

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	1984
Last full inspection	May 2015
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	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: check course not running at inspection

Premises profile

Address of main site	72–74 North Road East, Plymouth, Devon PL4 6AL
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	72–74 North Road East, Plymouth, Devon PL4 6AL

Student and staff profile

	At inspection	In peak week July (w/c 11/07)
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	64	350
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	11	12
Typical age range	12–27	12–27
Typical length of stay	2–3 weeks	2–3 weeks
Predominant nationalities	French, Saudi	Spanish, French
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	9	16
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	10	10

INTRODUCTION

Background

Suzanne Sparrow Plymouth Language School offers courses year round in general English for adults and closed groups of juniors. From June to August it offers an open-enrolment course for juniors aged 12 to 17. This was not available for inspection in May 2015 so this spot check was arranged to inspect to assess the junior summer courses and check the accommodation arrangements for under 18s.

Preparation

The inspector was sent relevant documents in advance, looked at the website and telephoned the deputy principal to establish that junior courses would still be running in the week when he planned to visit. The school therefore knew in advance the week but not the day of the spot check.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 09.30 and left at 17.15. He interviewed the principal, the deputy principal, the director of studies, the two student support officers in charge of accommodation, and an activity leader. He spent a few minutes in each of the three junior course classes running but did not formally assess teaching. He also met a French group leader, the school's website designer and the chairman and founder of the school. He looked at a range of documents, including staff files and student feedback forms, and held meetings with the junior course teachers and a group of junior students.

FINDINGS

The school's provision is essentially the same as that offered in 2015. Since then, the founder and former principal has assumed the role of chairman of the company. Her daughter, who also still regularly teaches in the school, has succeeded her as principal. She and her management team are planning a review of the school's marketing strategy at the end of the summer. A flood at the start of the year caused damage to part of the premises, but these have now been repaired and redecorated.

The open enrolment Junior Summer Activity Course (junior course) runs from late June to late August in the main school premises. At peak in July, for three weeks the school used additional teaching facilities at Plymouth College, a co-educational independent school for pupils aged three to 18. However, these additional summer premises are not mentioned in publicity (M22). If they are used again in 2017 they should be spot checked.

The school's publicity consists of a brochure, revised since the 2015 inspection, and a website. This was being entirely re-designed during the course of the spot check, with the new version due to go live at the end of that week.

There were three junior classes running at the time of the spot check, with a total of 26 students enrolled. Their lessons were taking place in the same premises as the adult school. However, juniors and adults have separate student lounges, and a staggered timetable ensures that junior course students and adults do not mix. There is a collection of books and other materials suitable for teenagers available in the teachers' room. Two of the teachers teaching the junior classes were TEFLI, one with QTS, and the third had recently successfully completed a TEFLQ course. All three had experience of teaching teenagers. Although the inspector did not formally observe lessons, the classes seen were working on listening or general language practice relevant to the students' levels and the general course aims. The students were active and engaged. The inspector did however notice that class registers, both for the junior classes and the adult classes, do not include a column showing the students' ages. In junior classes in particular this information would be helpful to teachers when judging the appropriateness, for instance, of the content of materials or subjects for discussion. (In adult classes, any 16 or 17 year olds are identified by an asterisk.)

The inspector met a representative group of eight junior course students aged 13 to 17 from four countries. Six were enrolled for two weeks, one for three weeks and one for six weeks. All were staying in homestays, which they were happy with, and all but one were the only students in the homes. That one, a Saudi girl aged 14, was staying at her parents' request with her brother (15) and a French girl aged 14. All the students said their lessons were interesting or very interesting and that they liked their teachers. The two longer-stay students said some of the afternoon activities had been repeated but they and the other students spoken to said they enjoyed the leisure programme. They all said they understood the school rules and felt safe.

There had been three activity leaders at peak but only one remained at the time of this spot check. In her interview with the inspector the activity leader explained she had recently graduated and planned to become a teaching assistant after the summer before going on to do a PGCE and gain QTS. She supervises the juniors' afternoon activities between 13.30 and 16.30, when she returns them to school. Supervision ratios were very satisfactory: she was responsible for ten independently booked students while a group of 14 French students was accompanied by their own group leader. Two students, a brother and sister, had activities with their own family. The school's activity leader is not first aid trained but on activities she carries a first aid kit. She completes a register at the beginning and end of the activity. The register includes the students' homestay hosts' landline and mobile numbers but not the students' own mobile numbers. To access these, the activity leader would phone the school. The students are issued with the school's emergency number on wristbands which all juniors are given at induction, and with the activity leader's phone number.

Homestay accommodation is arranged for juniors, as for adult students, by the two student support officers who also act as welfare officers. Their database, although rather cumbersome, identifies those hosts who have had the suitability checks and safeguarding training necessary to host under 18s.

The Care of under 18s criteria continue to be met. However, the otherwise comprehensive *Homestay Provider's Handbook* does not explicitly state that a responsible adult (known to and vetted by provider) will always be present overnight and normally be present when students under 16 are at home. (C7)

POINTS TO BE ADDRESSED

Only points reviewed during this spot check are included here. Any points outstanding will be checked at the next full inspection.

Points which must be addressed within 12 months

An action plan covering the points to be addressed within 12 months was presented to the inspector.

Management

M5 There is little evidence in teachers' files to demonstrate that references had been followed up before deployment.

Addressed. In the staff files sampled of teachers employed since the last inspection, references had been followed up.

Teaching and learning

T10 Insufficient guidance is provided by an academic manager to help teachers design courses for, and to manage, monolingual junior closed groups.

Addressed. The junior course (or "SAC - Summer Activity Course") is based on a six-week syllabus at four levels, and now supplemented by a new *Student Course Book* produced in house at four levels providing materials for tasks and activities, and space for recording new vocabulary and a two-week daily journal.

T12 Teachers of junior closed groups, especially those recently qualified, do not receive sufficient written or verbal guidance on course design.

Partially addressed. Specific written guidance on short course design was not seen, and no junior closed groups were running. However, the new four-level *Student Course Book* addresses this issue, although there is more work to be done.

Welfare and student services

W11 Not all of the homestays on the school's register have been revisited in the last two years.

Addressed. The homestay database showed that almost all the 'active' homestays, and all those in use, had been visited in the last two years.

W12 The homestay database does not currently contain easily accessible up-to-date information about homestays, including the records of visits, and whether or not gas safety checks and fire risk assessments have been conducted.

Partially addressed. The homestay database contains up-to-date information about records of visits, gas safety checks and fire risk assessments, but it is cumbersome. Accommodation staff are not able to access relevant information as quickly and easily as they could expect to.

Care of under 18s

C5 Suitability checks have not been conducted for all homestay providers who currently take under 18s.

Addressed. Suitability checks had been conducted on all the hosts sampled.

C8 The school does not have a 24-hour contact number for the parents or guardians of group students.

Partially addressed. In a few cases the school relies on agents holding those details rather than collecting them itself, and it was not certain that contact with agents at all times was assured.

Other points to be addressed

Management

M6 Some originals of certificates have not been seen, and so copies are not on file.

Addressed. All the files sampled contained verified copies of original certificates.

M13 For closed groups of under 18s, the school does not always have up-to-date records of next of kin contact details.

Not yet addressed. See comment C8 above.

M18 The initial questionnaire does not obtain feedback on academic issues.

Addressed. The initial questionnaire now asks about lessons.

M22 Some descriptions of the provision could be open to misinterpretation. For example, the classrooms are described as being 'well equipped' when only whiteboards are standard in every classroom.

Addressed. The description has been removed.

The publicity claims that 'long-term students receive a monthly tutorial to guide them with their studies, and ensure any welfare matters are dealt with'. Students do have a scheduled one-to-one welfare meeting, but academic tutorials take place within class time and are more informal and *ad hoc* in nature.

Addressed. The comment has been amended and now simply states they will receive a monthly tutorial.

M24 Maximum class size is not included in the brochure.

Addressed. It is now stated as 14.

M26 The publicity describes the homestay accommodation as 'English families' with an illustration of a family group of five people. This is potentially misleading as hosts are often couples or single people.

Addressed. The illustration has been removed.

M27 It is not made clear that the leisure programme can depend on student numbers and the time of year. Publicity suggests a fuller programme than that taking place at the time of the inspection visit.

Addressed. The description of the programme is more realistic.

M28 The description of staff qualifications and experience is not accurate; it does not apply to the full range of staff.

Addressed. The description has been revised.

Resources and environment

R2 There are some areas, particularly in the lower ground floor, where there is evidence of damp and where some redecoration is required.

Addressed. Redecoration took place following the January 2016 flood.

R3 The size of many of the rooms does not allow for movement or flexibility of layout.

Partially addressed. One classroom has been equipped with seminar chairs and, when resources allow, this process will be extended to other suitable rooms.

R12 There is little evidence that the teaching and learning resources for use on the junior closed group courses have been satisfactorily reviewed and developed.

Addressed. The inspector saw some evidence of junior course learning resources having been reviewed and developed since the 2015 inspection.

Teaching and learning

T11 Insufficient care is being taken by the academic management team to monitor and guide inexperienced teachers in their planning of lessons and in the formulation of learning objectives.

Partially addressed. During the non-peak period, teachers are required to submit a scheme of work for the week or short course to the director of studies for monitoring. However, this is not a requirement during the summer course and so too much responsibility for their course design could still be left to teachers.

T13 The course design of the junior closed group courses has not been satisfactorily reviewed.

Addressed. The new in-house *Student Course Book* has addressed this issue.

T14 Students on junior closed groups are not given a written course outline; nor are the overall learning objectives made sufficiently clear.

Partially addressed. The DoS has developed a *Course Objectives and Outcomes sheet* for inclusion in the new in-house *Student Course Book*. However, this is not accessible to lower-level students.

T15 In the junior closed group courses in particular, there was no evidence of study and learning strategies that support independent learning and enable students to benefit from their overall programme and continue their learning after the course.

Not yet addressed.

T16 Most courses, in particular those for the junior closed groups, do not include strategies which ensure that students can develop their language skills outside the classroom and benefit linguistically from their stay in the UK.

Not yet addressed.

Welfare and student services

W4 The language used in the policies and procedures for dealing with abusive behaviour is not simple enough to be understood by many students and parents.

Addressed. A clear graphic accessible poster has been produced.

W7 Some of the information provided to students is too lengthy and some of the language used is too complex for students to understand.

Not yet addressed.

W17 Hosts do not receive written details about students, including any dietary requirements and/or medical conditions.

Addressed. Hosts receive brief written details when they pick up their students on arrival.

W24 No written guidelines are available for students regarding the implications of living in bed-sits or flats.

Partially addressed. The school has a sheet for students *Advice on renting a property* but it needs further development to make it more accessible and directly relevant to students' needs.

Care of under 18s

C2 Simplified and shorter versions of the safeguarding policy are not provided to group leaders and homestay hosts.

Addressed. A simplified version of the school's safeguarding policy has been produced.

C3 The level of care of under 18 year olds who may enrol on adult courses is not made clear in publicity.

Addressed. The level of care for under 18s is described satisfactorily on the new website.

Points to be addressed arising from this visit

M22 Publicity did not make clear that the school used additional teaching facilities at peak time in summer.

T11 During the summer junior course, teachers are not required to produce a weekly scheme of work for monitoring by the director of studies.

T14 The DoS has developed a *Course Objectives and Outcomes sheet* for inclusion in the new in-house *Student Course Book*. However, this is not accessible to lower-level students.

C8 In a few cases the school does not have a direct contact number for parents or guardians. It relies on agents holding those details rather than collecting them itself, and it was not certain that contact with agents at all times was assured.

W12 Accommodation staff are not able to access relevant information on the homestay database as quickly and easily as they could expect to.

W24 The school has a sheet for students *Advice on renting a property* but it needs further development to make it more accessible and directly relevant to students' needs.

C7 Written instructions to hosts do not explicitly state that a responsible adult (known to and vetted by provider) will always be present overnight and normally be present when students under 16 are at home.

CONCLUSIONS

The provision of junior summer courses, which were not inspected at the main inspection, meets the requirements of the Scheme. The accommodation arrangements for under 18s are satisfactory. Adequate guidance on course design is now provided to teachers.

RECOMMENDATION

The next inspection falls due in 2019; there are no grounds for bringing this forward. However, if the school uses additional premises again in its peak period, these should be spot checked.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Changes to summary statement

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

Summary statement

Original

The British Council inspected and accredited Suzanne Sparrow Language School in May 2015. 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 and professional English for adults (17+), closed groups of under 18s and adults (17+) and vacation courses for under 18s.

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

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

Revised

The British Council inspected and accredited Suzanne Sparrow Language School in May 2015. 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).

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