

Organisation name	The English Studio, London
Inspection date	19 November 2015

BACKGROUND

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	December 2003
Last full inspection	April 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	Teacher training courses are run by Tefl Lab, a separate limited company owned by the owners of the school. Online ELT courses are offered but have not yet run.
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: monitor effect of change of ownership

Premises profile

Address of main site	113 High Holborn, London WC1V 6J
Details of any additional sites in use at the time of the inspection	1 Catton Street, London WC1R 4AB: 14 classrooms 19 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NS: 7 classrooms 112 High Holborn, London WC1R 4AB: 6 classrooms
Details of any additional sites not in use at the time of the inspection	St Giles Language School, 154 Southampton Row, London WC1B 5JX: 5 classrooms Imperial College, London SW7 2AZ: 6 classrooms Birkbeck University, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX: 4 classrooms Monticello House, Anglo Educational Services, 45 Russell Square, London WC1B 4JP: 5 classrooms
Sites inspected	All the sites in use were visited.

Student and staff profile

	At inspection	In peak week (July)
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	640	906
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	16	10
Typical age range	22–27	22–26
Typical length of stay	15 weeks	8 weeks
Predominant nationalities	Spanish, Italian, Brazilian	Spanish, Italian, Brazilian
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	25	44
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	14	

INTRODUCTION

Background

The English Studio was established as a family-run business in 1997. It offers a range of courses at low cost: general English, examination preparation and IELTS, intensive English and business courses. The large majority of students on these courses are drawn from a local rather than an inbound market, and 80 per cent are direct bookings. The school also offers a summer school programme for students aged 10–17.

The school was inspected in April 2015 and awarded accreditation for a further four years. Notice of new ownership was received in June 2015 and a spot check was recommended to take place within six months to assess the effect of the change of ownership and to determine whether accreditation should continue.

Preparation

Two inspectors were appointed to carry out the spot check. One of the inspectors had assisted with the observation of teaching at the last inspection and the other inspector had carried out a spot check visit in 2012. The reporting inspector made contact with the new managing director (MD) to establish any dates when key people would not be present. The actual day of the spot check visit was not known by the school.

Programme and persons present

The inspectors arrived at 10.00 and left at 14.00. They had meetings with the new MD in the Bloomsbury Square building; the academic manager and the operations manager in the High Holborn building; five teachers and one of the academic management team in the Cattan Street building. The current and extensive refurbishment of the Bloomsbury Square premises was seen in progress.

FINDINGS

The sale of the school was finalised on 26 May 2015. It was purchased by the Kinlay Group, recently rebranded as the Real Experience Group, who are based in Ireland. The group is split into a number of related divisions which are fully or part-owned by them. Companies within the divisions organise group, school and adventure travel and online TEFL teacher training. The English Studio is the first acquisition of a language school within the Education division. Both the MD of the Education division and the new MD of The English Studio are very experienced EFL practitioners and managers. One of the two previous owners of the school, who was also the principal, was retained for three months to help with the transition and continues to be consulted as needed.

Staff were not informed about the sale until the day that it was finalised. For the following two weeks the new MDs were available every afternoon for staff to meet on an individual basis. Managers and staff reported that there had been initial anxieties and doubts but now staff appear to be optimistic and relaxed about the new ownership and the future of the school.

Staff management

All the senior managers in the school have remained the same. The structure of management and administration has had a few modifications, but is clear and arrangements are in place to ensure its continuity.

Channels of communication have been developed and formalised. There are weekly meetings of senior managers of all departments, these are carefully minuted and actions taken are recorded. The operations manager, with staff from the sales department, recently spent time with the accommodation agency used by the school in order to strengthen understanding of their work processes and communications with them.

From a sample of staff files of more recently recruited staff, there was generally evidence of sufficient investigations of qualifications and experience. Copies of references were missing from one file and not all copies of certificates were countersigned.

There have been no changes to staff contracts or terms and conditions of employment. An external company is now consulted on HR policies and procedures. The draft copy of a new staff handbook with many new policies is currently being circulated among staff for their comments.

Student administration

There has been a focus on developing and strengthening the sales and marketing within the school. A new website is due to be launched in the new year and a new database has been purchased. The bookings department has been divided into separate sales divisions, responsible for either international or local sales. The original bookings staff have been retained and they have received additional training and support.

Quality assurance

All the systems, processes and practices are under review and actions taken to improve these are being carried out with considered planning and sensitivity. Improving systems relating to student feedback is one area of focus and various procedures are now in place to make collection of feedback and recording of actions taken more effective. The procedures for dealing with complaints are also being reviewed to ensure these are followed up and recorded more rigorously.

Publicity

In order to address points raised following the previous inspection some, but not all, of the points have been addressed satisfactorily on the existing website, but the printed publicity has not yet been revised. The MD is aware of publicity concerns and these will be addressed in the new publicity due in the new year.

Premises and facilities

Complete refurbishment is well underway in the Bloomsbury Square building, including plans for a large student break-out room, which was not previously available. The main suite of senior managers' offices will now be re-located to the top floor of these premises. The Catton Street premises have been fully re-decorated and faster Wi-Fi has been installed. Computers intended, but no longer needed, for student use are being removed and these areas, as well as old office spaces in the High Holborn building, will be refurbished. The plan is to replace them with more student relaxation areas.

Academic management

There have been no changes in the academic department and the director and managers remain the same as at the time of the inspection. It is planned that one of the current academic management team will take on a new role of academic registrar and there will be a new appointment made for a deputy academic registrar.

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

M3 The deputy academic director is incorrectly described as the deputy director.

Addressed.

M13 The contact details of 30 students' next of kin were not available.

This was not checked during the spot check.

M14 The school timetable does not include breaks between the morning, midday and afternoon sessions, so it is impossible for sessions to start precisely on time. Teachers reported that students frequently arrive at least five minutes late to classes. The inspectors also noted several instances of students arriving just within the 20-minute lateness rule.

Addressed. An additional five-minute break has been added between the sessions.

M21 There were a few instances in publicity of incorrect English and some colloquial expressions which would be difficult for non-native speakers to understand.

Partially addressed. Some of these expressions are still present, for example 'yummy craft'.

M22 The use of the word 'campus' to describe the school buildings is misleading and gives rise to expectations of much larger premises and facilities than are the case. The description of resources is inaccurate. There is an example of hyperbole which would be difficult to substantiate: 'Our teachers are English language experts'.

Partially addressed. 'Our teachers are English language experts' has been removed. However 'campus' is still used to describe school buildings and publicity still states 'classrooms have IWBs', but not all classrooms do.

M26 Publicity states inaccurately that 'our homestays are managed by agencies that are accredited by the British Council or ourselves'.

Partially addressed. Correctly stated as 'agencies registered with the British Council' on the website, but remains incorrectly stated in the printed brochure.

M27 Publicity does not make it clear that leisure activities, such as guided walks, are outsourced to an agency.

Not yet addressed.

M28 There is an inaccurate description of teachers' qualifications on the website: '...all have a recognised qualification in teaching English' which was not true of all the teachers at the time of the inspection.

Not yet addressed. The words 'qualified' and 'experienced' are used to describe teachers, but one teacher did not hold a TEFL qualification that met Scheme requirements and not all teachers have previous experience.

M29 There is some ambiguity over the status of online courses. The website implies that they are accredited. The print publicity does not make it clear that all online courses are not accredited.

Not yet addressed.

Resources and environment

R2 The Bloomsbury premises are in need of re-decoration and the carpets are very worn.

Addressed.

Teaching and learning

T2 Two teachers did not hold a TEFL qualification that met Scheme requirements.

Partially addressed. One teacher did not hold a TEFL qualification that met Scheme requirements.

T23 Some teachers provided inaccurate models of spoken English and provided inaccurate explanations of grammar and lexis.

T24 Some examples were seen of excessive teacher talk and over-loud voice projection.

T25 Some teachers in the skills classes experienced difficulty in integrating new or late students into class.

T27 In some classes management of the classroom environment was hampered by the arrangement of the furniture and lack of space.

T28 Opportunities for error correction were missed.

T29 In some cases activities which involved student involvement and participation in a task were insufficiently monitored.

T23–T29 not checked as teaching was not observed during the spot check.

Welfare and student services

None.

Care of under 18s

None.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the change in ownership, the management structure of the school remains clear and largely unchanged, with the addition of the new MD. An overall review is resulting in various changes and modifications and there is an extensive programme of refurbishment and redecoration underway. Effective channels of communication have helped to ensure that managers and staff view these changes and the future of the school under its new ownership with optimism. Some points from the last inspection regarding publicity have not yet been fully addressed, but the MD intends to address any outstanding points in the revised printed publicity and new website due in the new year.

RECOMMENDATION

The next inspection falls due in 2019; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Changes to summary statement

No changes need to be made to the summary statement.

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The British Council inspected and accredited The English Studio in April 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 large private language school offers courses in general English for adults (16+) and for closed groups of under 18s and vacation courses for under 18s.

The inspection report noted a need for improvement in publicity.

Strengths were noted in the areas of staff management, quality assurance, academic management and care of students.

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

Points to be addressed outstanding from the previous inspection(s) or arising from this visit

Management

M6 Copies of references were missing from one staff file and not all copies of certificates were counter-signed.

M13 The contact details of 30 students' next of kin were not available.

M21 There were a few instances in publicity of incorrect English and some colloquial expressions which would be difficult for non-native speakers to understand.

Some of these expressions are still present, for example 'yummy craft'.

M22 The use of the word 'campus' to describe the school buildings is misleading and gives rise to expectations of much larger premises and facilities than are the case. The description of resources is inaccurate. There is an example of hyperbole which would be difficult to substantiate: 'Our teachers are English language experts'.

'Our teachers are English language experts' has been removed. However 'campus' is still used to describe school buildings and publicity still states 'classrooms have IWBs', but not all classrooms do.

'The English Studio is an independently-owned English language school in London and not part of a chain or large corporation. That means if you have a problem you can speak with the owners directly and get the help you need immediately.' This is no longer the case.

M26 Publicity states inaccurately that 'our homestays are managed by agencies that are accredited by the British Council or ourselves'.

Correctly stated as 'agencies registered with the British Council' on the website, but remains incorrectly stated in the printed brochure.

M27 Publicity does not make it clear that leisure activities, such as guided walks, are outsourced to an agency.

M28 There is an inaccurate description of teachers' qualifications on the website: '...all have a recognised qualification in teaching English' which was not true of all the teachers at the time of the inspection.

The words 'qualified' and 'experienced' are used to describe teachers, but one teacher did not hold a TEFL qualification that met Scheme requirements and not all teachers have previous experience.

M29 There is some ambiguity over the status of online courses. The website implies that they are accredited. The print publicity does not make it clear that all online courses are not accredited.

Resources and environment

None.

Teaching and learning

T2 Two teachers did not hold a TEFL qualification that met Scheme requirements.

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T27 In some classes management of the classroom environment was hampered by the arrangement of the furniture and lack of space.

T28 Opportunities for error correction were missed.

T29 In some cases activities which involved student involvement and participation in a task were insufficiently monitored.

Teaching was not observed during the spot check.

Welfare and student services

None.

Care of under 18s

None.
