



**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF PRIVATE FURTHER  
EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COLLEGES**

**A2Z SCHOOL OF ENGLISH**

Full Name of College **A2Z School of English**

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Age Range 16+

Total Number of students 254

Numbers by age and type of study

16 – 18:	4
18+:	250
EFL only:	254

Inspection dates **14 – 16 August 2012**

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language colleges. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the college's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Border Agency to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and English language colleges.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Standards for private colleges;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations to colleges outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE**

- 1.1 A2Z School of English comprises of two private English language schools; one in Manchester and one in London. The Manchester centre was founded in 2006 and the London centre was opened in June 2012. The school is established as a limited company and has one director. Each school is led by its senior management team and governed by the director. There have been no major changes to the structure of the Manchester school in the recent past. The head office, which co-ordinates registration and marketing, is located close to the Manchester school.
- 1.2 The school aims to provide high quality education in a safe and stimulating environment and actively contribute to the social and educational aspects of students' lives. The school offers a range of English language programmes including general English, preparation courses for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), the First Certificate in English (FCE) and the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) examinations, as well as individual tuition. The lengths of courses vary from one week to one year, though the average course is twelve weeks in duration. Students under the age of 18 are integrated into the adult courses.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, there were 254 students attending across both centres, with the vast majority located at the Manchester centre. Students are mostly male and the vast majority are aged 18 years and over and from the European Union (EU). The remaining students are from Asia and the Far East, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Most non-EU students are on a student visitor visa and only a very small number are on a general student visa. English is an additional language (EAL) for all students. No student currently has been assessed as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.4 When an individual applies to join a course, the school checks their suitability through the use of an on-arrival online test and needs analysis. The majority of students are recruited directly by the school. The school offers homestays and a wide range of residential accommodation. Students are recruited throughout the year.

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGE

### 2.(a) Executive Summary

	Section of the Standards	Grade awarded 1-4
3.	The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievement	1 Exceeds expectations
4.	Students' welfare, including health and safety	3 Needs improvement
5.	The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	2 Meets expectations

- 2.1 The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievement exceeds expectations. Students are well educated in a friendly and supportive environment. Initial and diagnostic assessment is accurate and used effectively to ensure students are placed on the appropriate level of course. A well-developed range of programmes ensures that different needs are well met. Students are highly satisfied with their course and make very good progress given their starting points. The quality of teaching is very high. Classes are well planned and make excellent use of a range of activities to engage and maintain the interest of students. Teachers are enthusiastic and have very good subject knowledge. The extra-curricular provision is very good and provides students with opportunities to develop language skills in a social setting. Highly effective systems are in place to monitor progress and attainment.
- 2.2 Standards of welfare, health and safety need improvement. The school buildings are well maintained and provide a comfortable environment which effectively supports learning. Appropriate health and safety policies are in place but implemented inconsistently between centres. Measures taken to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards are not effective. Student registration is accurate and well managed; however, attendance monitoring procedures are inconsistent and need improvement. Procedures for reporting to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) are effective. The school's pastoral arrangements provide a good level of support and guidance in accordance with the school's aims. A strong ethos of support contributes to students' wider cultural experience and overall enjoyment. Students are well motivated, work well together and have excellent relationships with their teachers. Students' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires and in interviews with inspectors are very positive. The safeguarding arrangements for students under the age of 18 need improvement. Not all staff have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks nor are they trained in safeguarding.
- 2.3 The leadership and management of the school meet expectations and underpin the success of many aspects of the school. The proprietor provides effective leadership and has a clear vision for the future of the school. An effective management structure and well-defined policies and procedures support students in their learning and personal development. However, reliable arrangements for fire and health and

safety have not been established at the London centre. Oversight of the suitability of staff to work with students under 18 is inconsistent. Leaders and managers work together well and have a clear focus on quality assurance. A wide range of mechanisms are effectively used to monitor quality. Staff are adequately qualified and suitably experienced. Procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff are appropriate.

## 2.(b) Action points

### (i) Compliance with standards for Private Colleges

2.4 At the time of the inspection, the college did not meet all of the key standards for private further education colleges. **The college needs improvement** and therefore it was required to:

- Demonstrate that it has proper regard for and legal compliance with fire, first aid, health and safety and risk assessment for on and offsite activities.
- Ensure that the school maintains an accurate attendance register.
- Complete enhanced CRB checks and training in safeguarding for all staff working with students aged under 18.

### (ii) Recommendation for further improvement

2.5 In addition to the above action points, the college is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Improve the formal induction process to ensure all students understand key health and safety and safeguarding policies and procedures.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival**

- 3.1 The assessment of students prior to and on arrival exceeds expectations. Detailed entry criteria are set and used by the school and its agents to provide accurate and appropriate advice and guidance to prospective students. On arrival, effective testing and one-to-one interviews ensure students have the appropriate level of competence, initial language skills and capabilities for their selected programme. The process is accurate and students are satisfied with their course placements, which are appropriate for their needs. The continuous enrolment system is well managed and allows students to apply and join classes at any time.
- 3.2 Initial course reviews and tutorials clearly identify if the course is of an appropriate level for each student. Teachers use this information well to guide their planning. Detailed advice is given if students wish to change or move between classes.
- 3.3 Appropriate information, advice and guidance are made available through the school's brochure and through agents. The website is detailed, professional and includes accurate information about the curriculum on offer.

#### **3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum**

- 3.4 The course provision and curriculum are highly effective in meeting the needs of students. Qualifications meet the requirements of the UKBA and offer suitable progression routes in line with the Common European Framework for the testing of English (CEF). The provision includes academic English, business English and conversation course options, as well as courses leading to examined qualifications.
- 3.5 The curriculum is well planned and programmes are suitably matched to the students' needs. Well-defined opportunities allow for progression from one level to the next. The vast majority of students successfully complete their programme and the number of withdrawals is very low.
- 3.6 The structured courses are supplemented by a comprehensive range of enrichment activities. High value is given to this programme as a way of both embedding and developing language skills and cultural understanding delivered within the classroom environment. The inspection findings support this view.

#### **3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning**

- 3.7 The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are highly effective. Teaching exceeds expectations, with nearly all sessions observed being good or outstanding. As a result, students make excellent progress according to their abilities and starting points.



- 3.8 Teachers are appropriately qualified, experienced and have a very good understanding and knowledge of linguistic systems. The high expectations of teachers ensure all students are consistently challenged and well supported to meet their learning goals. Teachers are highly skilled at keeping students on task even when they are working independently. Relationships at all levels are extremely productive, with teachers and students working collaboratively to enhance learning and progress. Effective focused questioning extends the learning of the most able students. The management of behaviour is excellent.
- 3.9 Where teaching is outstanding, it is characterised by detailed planning, with considerable care taken to match tasks to individual levels of ability. Lessons are delivered at a lively pace and include a variety of appropriate teaching methods, including effective questioning. Students' success is strongly promoted by teaching that responds to the needs of individuals. Paired and group work promotes cooperative learning and independence. Teachers have a clear knowledge of students' previous learning and are able to extend their vocabulary quickly.
- 3.10 Assessment is regular and thorough; accurately identifying strengths and weaknesses and highlighting areas for improvement. Marking is of a good quality. Feedback is positive, encouraging, accurate and up-to-date. The school is appropriately equipped with a good range of high quality learning resources.

### **3.(d) Attainment and progress**

- 3.11 Attainment and progress exceed expectations. Students quickly build confidence in their English language ability, demonstrating skills as confident, independent users of the language. The evidence from lesson observation, assignments and scrutiny of work shows that learners are able to acquire new knowledge and make very good progress in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- 3.12 The majority of students on the general English course take no examinations, but make good progress as measured against their stated needs and ambitions. However, the results for the small number of students who sit examinations are good. Attendance levels are high and punctuality is good.

## **4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises (in line with expectations of educational institutions)**

- 4.1 Health, safety and security of premises need improvement. A range of appropriate policies are in place but these are not effectively and consistently implemented across both centres. As a result, the necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards are not in place for the London centre.
- 4.2 Both centres are decorated and maintained to a high standard. Classrooms are spacious, light and well furnished. Toilet facilities are adequate in number and well maintained. At the Manchester centre, all necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. General and risk assessments have been carried out that are fit for purpose and identify relevant risks. Fire action notices are appropriately displayed and fire exits are well signposted. Adequate fire protection equipment is in place and regular maintenance checks are carried out. Regular fire drills are organised and are properly recorded. There are adequate numbers of trained first aiders as well as first aid kits and accident books. Appropriate provision is made for students who are ill or injured.
- 4.3 Arrangements at the London centre need improvement. The school has contracted with a health and safety consultant who has undertaken an audit and created an action plan to remedy any shortcomings. This report noted non-compliance with a number of regulatory requirements. At the time of the inspection limited progress had been made to rectify the issues raised in the report. Fire drill records were not made available. No fire wardens have been appointed or trained. Fire protection equipment is in place but has not been tested since 2010. No portable appliance testing (PAT) has taken place. First aid kits are sited in all classrooms but there are no trained first aiders on site. No risk assessments have been carried out and plans to deal with students who are ill or injured are underdeveloped.
- 4.4 Students at both centres report that they feel safe and secure, however at the London centre, students were unaware of the health and safety policy and emergency and first aid provision. The school has a physical disability policy which makes it clear what can and cannot be accommodated. Wheelchair users would have no access to any part of the school. There were no such applicants this year.

### **4.(b) Student registration and attendance records**

- 4.5 Arrangements for student registration meet expectations. Admission procedures are clear and effective. A central register is maintained and contains appropriate and accurate information for each application made to the school.
- 4.6 A clear policy on the maintenance of attendance records is in place but is implemented inconsistently between centres. Daily manual attendance registers are not always completed each day. Attendance monitoring procedures state that

attendance data is transferred from the manual register to an electronic format to enable regular monitoring. This is not systematically undertaken.

- 4.7 Staff fully understand the requirements and procedures of the UKBA in relation to both enrolment of students on courses and their attendance. A highly effective system is in place to monitor their attendance and is used very effectively to inform the UKBA of those who do not comply with attendance requirements.
- 4.8 Proactive arrangements are in place for identifying and dealing with cases of absence and, as a result, attendance and retention rates are good. Expectations concerning student conduct, attendance and reporting are clearly and effectively communicated and reinforced. Clear policies and procedures are in place for the collection and refund of student fees and deposits. The policy is fair and applied consistently.

#### **4.(c) Pastoral support for students**

- 4.9 Pastoral support meets expectations. Students are positive about the care and guidance that they receive. Excellent relationships exist between staff and students and amongst the students themselves. Students are very clear about who to see and where to go if they have a concern. Regular tutorials include opportunities to raise academic and personal issues and to receive feedback. As a result, teachers know their students well and are responsive to their needs. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students indicate that they are happy and that they would recommend the school to friends.
- 4.10 The complaints procedure is set out in the student handbook and anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies and procedures are in place. The policies are clear but are not always highlighted during induction. As a result, a small number of students reported that they were unaware of all the key policies.
- 4.11 Careers advice ensures that students are well prepared for further study and highly effective progression advice is provided by academic managers.

#### **4.(d) Child protection/safeguarding**

- 4.12 Safeguarding policies and procedures need improvement. While managers are aware of the importance of establishing effective safeguarding arrangements, such arrangements are not in place. A designated safeguarding officer has not been appointed and staff have not completed safeguarding training.
- 4.13 Arrangements for carrying out appropriate checks on staff are not in place. Enhanced CRB checks have not been carried out on all those who teach students who are under 18 or for managers and administrators who have regular contact with all students.

#### **4.(e) Residential accommodation**

- 4.14 Arrangements for homestay accommodation are effective and meet expectations. A rigorous approach to host family placements is taken, with students effectively matched to homestay families according to their needs and requirements. As a result, students report that their accommodation is of a good quality and that the experience enhances their time at the school. Inspection findings support this view.
- 4.15 Host families have appropriate checks in place for the safeguarding of students under the age of 18.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) Ownership and oversight**

- 5.1 Leadership and management of the school meet expectations overall, although aspects of oversight at the London centre need improvement. Governance and oversight of the school are effective and the strategic direction of the organisation is clear. The focus of governance and leadership is forward looking and the proprietor is highly effective in communicating this to managers and teachers. As a result, appropriate plans for expansion are in place, which focus on the quality of education. The school's work is supported appropriately by well-defined financial structures.
- 5.2 The proprietor takes a very active role and has a clear insight into day-to-day operations. Senior managers are well supported in carrying out their roles. Responsibility for admissions, curriculum planning and student support is devolved but monitored effectively through regular reporting systems including staff meetings. However, a small number of key policies and procedures relating to the welfare of students, including health and safety and safeguarding, are not monitored effectively.

### **5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities**

- 5.3 Management structures and responsibilities meet expectations. Overall, leadership and management are of good quality. The aims of the school are met well. The management structure operates smoothly and successfully, with defined roles and responsibilities and adequate lines of communication. Leaders are effective in providing educational direction which helps to ensure the good quality of the students' education. The senior management team works well together to ensure that required improvements are made.
- 5.4 The school is successful in securing appropriately qualified staff. An appropriate system of staff review is in place. Staff have not received appropriate child protection or safeguarding training. An excellent programme of professional development ensures that staff are appropriately trained for their roles.

### **5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback**

- 5.5 Quality assurance, including student feedback, meets expectations. Accurate data is generated through quality assurance processes, and this is analysed to identify improvements and to plan development. As a result, self-evaluation is well developed and accurate.
- 5.6 Quality assurance arrangements are effective and appropriate, and take account of the views of students on a regular basis, both formally and informally. This information is used effectively and appropriate actions are initiated in a timely manner to bring about effective change. Teaching is regularly observed by senior

staff members, and effective feedback for performance improvement given, which reflects the school's aims and educational direction.

- 5.7 Students believe the school is well managed and is a good place to study. This is consistent with the judgements made during inspection.
- 5.8 An appropriate complaints procedure is in place which allows for external arbitration and is operated effectively. Very few complaints have been recorded.

#### **5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks**

- 5.9 Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks meet expectations. All required recruitment checks have been carried out and recorded. Teachers are experienced practitioners and appropriately qualified in their subject areas. The process to validate references and qualifications is effective and the audit trail is clear, with due regard to statutory requirements. A central record is maintained and monitored by senior staff. Enhanced CRB checks have not been carried out on all those who teach students under the age of 18 or for managers and administrators who have regular contact with all students.

#### **5.(e) Provision of information**

- 5.10 The website provides comprehensive and detailed information in line with requirements. The school was highly responsive in providing information for the inspection in a timely manner.

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with members of the governing board and attended registration sessions. The responses of staff and students to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

### Inspectors

Dr Nigel Chambers	Lead Inspector
Mr Martin Eayrs	Team Inspector
Mr Dave Malachi	Team Inspector
Ms Sheila Morris	Team Inspector
Ms Christine Powell	Team Inspector