

Organisation name	Abbey College, Malvern
Inspection date	14 November 2018
Current accreditation status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: monitor effect of change of provision

Recommendation

We recommend continued accreditation. The next inspection falls due in 2021; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

Changes to the summary statement

No changes need to be made to the summary statement.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited Abbey College in Malvern in September 2017 and in November 2018. 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 boarding school offers residential courses in general and academic English for adults and under 18s and for closed groups of under 18s and vacation courses for under 18s.

Strengths were noted in the areas of staff management, learning resources, teaching, and care of students.

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

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	1986
Last full inspection	2017
Subsequent spot check(s) (if applicable)	2018
Subsequent supplementary check(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent interim visit(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	GCSE and 'A' level courses, pre-university foundation courses.
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	Abbey College Prague, where medical foundation courses are offered.

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week: July
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	29	156
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	14	8
Typical age range	14–18	8–17
Typical length of stay	1–3 years	2 weeks
Predominant nationalities	Iranian, Russian	French
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	2	10
Total number of managers including academic	4	4
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	22	31

Premises profile	
Address of main site	253 Wells Road, Malvern WR14 4JF
Additional sites in use	N/a
Additional sites not in use	N/a
Sites inspected	The school is set just off a main road, in 70 acres of grounds on the edge of the Malvern Hills. The buildings originally housed a girls' boarding school established in the nineteenth century. The premises consist of a main building with administrative offices, student services, accommodation for students and staff, a library and ICT suite and student relaxation facilities. There is a separate main teaching block, a science block with three laboratories, staffrooms and a sick bay, an art studio, an assembly hall, a sports hall and five residential boarding houses. In the wooded grounds are tennis courts, football and sports pitches, an outdoor swimming pool and a sauna.

Introduction

Background

A new principal was appointed in September 2017. Although present at many of the meetings in the previous, full inspection, he had not yet formally taken up his post. A spot check was signalled to assess the impact of this change.

Preparation

The inspector contacted the school, agreed a range of possible dates, asked for and received some preparatory documentation, including an organogram, a self-evaluation form and a list of changes made since the full inspection.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 09.45 and left at 14.15. This was her first visit to the school. Interviews were held with the principal, the vice principal in charge of welfare and EFL, the registrar and the newly appointed marketing manager, together with her predecessor. A brief visit to the refurbished student rooms and classrooms was undertaken with the principal and welfare manager and a range of documentation was provided for scrutiny.

Findings

Significant changes since the last inspection

The main change to provision is the appointment of a new principal. Other members of the senior management team (the director/owner and bursar) remain in place, as do most of the other managers and many of the staff.

The provision itself remains unchanged, with the majority of year-round international students receiving English language support if needed, and otherwise studying a range of academic courses. Bespoke courses are arranged for closed groups at different times of the year, and in the summer, there are short courses (two weeks) for juniors (8–14).

Another change is the decision to use a different inspection and assessment organisation to assess the academic (non-EFL) provision.

Management

The principal has had meetings with all staff, ensured all have had appraisals with their line managers and had one himself with his line manager, the director/owner. (See M8) He has also instigated a formal feedback mechanism for all staff, made clear his open-door policy and his desire to improve the quality of provision offered. He is keen to integrate the welfare and academic, and sees the provision of a family-like atmosphere as helpful for students living a long way from home. He lives on the premises with his young family, takes his dog to work and encourages other staff members to live on-site with their families. He is developing a collaborative relationship with the primary school next door; their children sometimes use Abbey College facilities, while Abbey College students visit the primary school to give presentations. Staff commented positively on the principal's energy and enthusiasm.

A new position, vice principal welfare and EFL, has been created for the director of studies (DoS) in order to make the welfare component of his role more explicit.

Premises and resources

A programme of refurbishment has been undertaken following the last inspection, and an on-going schedule of repairs and refurbishment has been instigated. Problems with the swimming pool, identified in the last report, have

been addressed and it was reported to have been well used in the summer.

A sauna has been added to the facilities.

Welfare and student services

A decision has been made not to offer homestay provision, except as a short-term expedient for students who have infringed the rules and are excluded from their residential accommodation for a set period of time.

Safeguarding under 18s

There are now four members of staff who have received specialist safeguarding training. (Previously there were two.) Selected staff have also undertaken training in mental health in education. All staff members have undergone safeguarding training at the basic level.

Management

Strategic and quality management	Met
M1 There is a clear statement describing the goals and values of the organisation, which is made known to all staff.	Met
M2 The management has clear objectives for the future of the organisation and has realistic plans to achieve them.	Met
M3 There is a documented and clearly understood structure for the ELT operation. There are sufficient staff to manage and deliver the provision, and to ensure continuity at all times.	Strength
M4 There are effective channels of communication between all involved in the ELT operation, and between the ELT operation and any wider organisation of which it is a part.	Met
M5 The provider regularly obtains and records feedback from students on all the services offered. Feedback is circulated to relevant staff and appropriate action is taken and recorded.	Met
M6 The provider regularly seeks and records feedback from all staff on the services offered. Appropriate action is taken and recorded.	Met
M7 The provider reviews systems, processes and practices with a view to continuing improvement. Appropriate action is taken and recorded in an annual self-evaluation.	Met

Comments

M3 An organogram makes the structure of the organisation very clear and the number of managers and administrators is generous, ensuring good cover at all times. New administrative staff are given considerable support, which includes job shadowing. Evidence of the effectiveness of this was seen during the inspection.

M4 Communication appears to be very good, with all staff quickly and easily contacted by phone, a great deal of informal face-to-face and email communication, as well as a range of regular, minuted meetings. However, group leader feedback forms sampled indicated that there had been problems with communication in the summer.

M7 This criterion is met overall. A very thorough self-evaluation form provides evidence of systematic and thorough review, with a grading system, and a note of action needed with a timeline. However, it does not specifically evaluate performance against inspection criteria, although most points are, in fact, covered.

Staff management and development	Area of strength
M8 The provider implements appropriate human resources policies, which are made known to staff.	Met
M9 The provider specifies the duties of all staff working with ELT students, and regularly reviews these.	Met
M10 There are effective procedures for the recruitment and selection of all staff.	Met
M11 There are effective induction procedures for all staff.	Strength
M12 There are effective procedures for monitoring and appraising all staff, and for handling unsatisfactory performance or conduct. These procedures are made known to all staff.	Strength
M13 There are effective procedures to ensure the continuing professional development of all staff to meet the needs of the individual, the students and the organisation.	Strength

Comments

M11 A thorough induction procedure is run for both teaching and administrative staff, with comprehensive checklists and the opportunity to observe and shadow colleagues.

M12 All year-round staff, including the principal, receive annual appraisals. Teachers also receive detailed and

through feedback from their observations. Student feedback is passed on to all relevant staff.

M13 There is a good range of continuing professional development opportunities for all staff. This includes first aid, fire marshal, safeguarding and Prevent training, as well as training to develop specific examination courses being offered. Peer observation between teachers of EFL and those of other academic subjects also contributes to professional development.

Student administration	Met
M14 Staff are helpful and courteous to students and their representatives, and provide satisfactory levels of customer service.	Met
M15 Students or their representatives receive sufficient information and advice on their course choices before arrival and during their stay.	Strength
M16 Staff carry out enrolment, cancellation and refund procedures efficiently, fairly, and with appropriate sensitivity.	Not met
M17 There are effective systems in place to maintain accurate and up-to-date records of student enrolment, payment and course details. These records are accessible at all times to authorised staff.	Met
M18 There are effective systems to maintain up-to-date and accessible records of local contact details for students, and their designated emergency contacts.	Met
M19 There is a clear and effective policy on student attendance and punctuality that is known to all staff and students and is applied consistently.	Strength
M20 All staff and students are made aware of conditions and procedures under which a student may be asked to leave the course.	Met
M21 All students and, where appropriate, group leaders and parents/legal guardians, receive information in writing about how to make a complaint.	Met

Comments

M15 This criterion is well met. In addition to written information, students have a Skype interview with one, or both, of the vice principals, where course choices can be explained and the language level assessed.

M16 Policies and procedures are clear, and staff are sympathetic to individual circumstances and can be flexible. However, an example was found where the school had agreed to refund all the fees, but there had been serious delays in returning the funds.

M19 All students are residential and 100 per cent attendance and punctuality is expected. Registers are taken for all lessons and any lateness followed up and logged on the school management system.

Publicity	Met
M22 All publicity and information is accurate, and gives rise to realistic expectations about the premises, location, and the extent and availability of the services and resources.	Met
M23 All publicity and information about the provider and the services it offers is in clear, accurate and accessible English.	Met
M24 Publicity gives clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on the courses.	Met
M25 Publicity includes clear, accurate and easy-to-find information on costs.	Met
M26 Publicity or other information made available before enrolment gives an accurate description of the level of care and support given to any students under 18.	Met
M27 Publicity gives an accurate description of any accommodation offered.	Met
M28 Descriptions of staff qualifications are accurate.	Met
M29 Claims to accreditation are in line with Scheme requirements.	Met

Comments

The main medium of publicity is the website, but brochures and social media are also used.

M23 This criterion is met overall, but the language in some sections could be simpler and use shorter sentences.

Action taken on points to be addressed

Management

M8 (2018:M12) The principal had not had a formal performance appraisal with the director.

Addressed. The principal has had a formal appraisal with his line manager, the director.

M18 (2018:M5) Action taken in response to feedback is not systematically recorded (it was not recorded in all cases).

Partially addressed. Feedback forms contain a section for action taken, but it is not dated and it is not clear whether the action has been taken, or is a note of something to be done.

M22 The main and summer school brochures and websites advertise the outdoor swimming pool but this was not in use during summer 2017. The summer school brochure shows only single beds but inspectors were told that the

majority of beds were doubled up in summer to make bunk beds. The website includes a 'pie-chart' showing students' nationalities for 'June 2015 to 2016 - All Courses'. This gives the impression that most students come from Europe. It is not clear that most students in the summer school come in groups from European countries but during the academic year almost all students are from outside Europe, mainly from Asia.

Partially addressed. The outdoor swimming pool has been repaired and is in use. The brochure shows rooms with bunk beds. Closed groups during the year mean that year-round classes are often mixed. However, it is still the case that year round, the majority of students are from a relatively small number of countries, and this is not what is conveyed by the 'pie-chart'.

M24 One 20-year-old student was enrolled on a foundation course; the brochure states 'Age 16-19' for the school's AS, A-level and Foundation courses. Publicity states that year round the minimum age is 14 but a 13 year-old student was enrolled at the time of the inspection (according to documentation submitted by the Principal).

Addressed. No students outside the advertised age ranges have been accepted in the last year.

M25 The approximate cost of course-related examination fees is not given on the 2017–18 'Fees List and Term Dates' sheet (although it was on a proof seen of the 2018–19 sheet) or on the website under 'Fees'. The approximate cost of compulsory coursebook purchases is not shown on the Fees List or on the website.

Addressed. These costs are now specified on the course fees sheet.

M29 The website and print publicity use an older version of the Accreditation Scheme marque.

Addressed. An up-to-date version is now used in both print and website publicity.

Premises and resources

R2 (2018: P1) Some classrooms and rooms in the boarding houses would benefit from redecoration.

Partially addressed. Some classrooms and boarding house rooms have been redecorated and there is an annual schedule of repairs and refurbishment. However, even those rooms which had recently been repainted were showing signs of wear and tear.

Welfare and student services

W1 The process for reviewing the range of risk assessments relating to premises is not clear.

Partially addressed. A new system is in the process of being implemented, but is not yet complete.

W9 See comment for R2 above.

Partially addressed. See R2 above.

W12 (2018: W11) There was no evidence that fire risk assessments for homestay providers had been checked.

Addressed. Evidence was provided for the three homestay providers currently being used (for students temporarily expelled from their boarding houses).

Conclusions

The basic structure and provision of the school remains unchanged, and most of the staff have been in place for many years. The new principal is working energetically to foster a cheerful, welcoming environment for students and to put in place procedures for achieving this.
