



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

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

Full Name of College	The London School of English
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Principal	Mr Timothy Blake
Proprietor	Mr Timothy Blake
Age Range	18+
Total Number of students	234

Numbers by type of study	EFL only: 234
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Inspection dates	10-12 October 2011
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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 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 provision and outcomes;
- 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 The London School of English, which was founded in 1912, is a private English language school. It employs a total of 31 managers and support staff and runs examined courses, short courses and individual tuition. Its headquarters are in Holland Park Gardens, which it has occupied since 1969, and where courses focusing on business and professional English and other specialised areas take place. It also has premises in Westcroft Square offering general English, pre-academic preparation courses and examination programmes.
- 1.2 Its mission is stated to be “to help people communicate more effectively across borders and cultures, leading to personal and professional development, benefit for sponsors and employers, and greater international understanding.” It is a private limited company whose managing director acts as the school’s proprietor. The shareholders and directors are active in the day-to-day management of the business. There have been no major changes to the structure of the school in the recent past. The school has Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) status with the UK Border Agency (UKBA).
- 1.3 At the time of inspection there were 93 students in Holland Park Gardens and 141 in Westcroft Square supported by 46 trainers. There were no students under the age of 18. At Holland Park Gardens the average time a student is on a course is two to three weeks. At Westcroft Square the length of stay varies from two weeks to several months.
- 1.4 When individuals apply to join a course, the school checks that they are suitable for the course they have chosen through pre-arrival questionnaires, placement testing and interviews carried out on arrival.
- 1.5 The gender balance of the students is roughly equal but with a predominance of males attending courses at Holland Park Gardens. A wide range of nationalities and languages is represented. These include Swiss, Brazilian, Japanese, Russian, South Korean, Italian, German and French. Students under Tier 4 general student visas typically come from South Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Taiwan and Turkey. At the time of the inspection, just over a third of students were from EU/EEA countries, approximately half were on student visitor visas and a very small number were on a general student visa. No student currently has been assessed as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGE

2.(a) Executive Summary

- 2.1 The London School of English exceeds expectations. It delivers a very high level of educational provision to its students. The school offers a wide range of high quality courses that are extremely effective in supporting students' skills development and enabling them to progress in their future careers and further studies. The courses offered are specifically tailored to meet learners' individual needs. Course participation is very high and most students complete their programmes successfully. The curriculum is flexible and innovative although banks of learning materials are not monitored consistently across all courses. As a result, course materials and the delivery of some new courses are sometimes variable. The quality of teaching and learning at the school exceeds expectations. Learning activities are well planned and excellent use is made of resources to support and promote learning. Students are extremely well motivated. As a result there are outstanding success rates on many of the courses. However, there is still scope for improvements in the assessment of work.
- 2.2 The school provides an excellent environment for students and staff, with high quality facilities. These provide a comfortable environment which supports learning. The premises have recently received significant investment and extensive refurbishment, carried out to a very good standard and with health and safety factors taking a high profile. There is an excellent range of health and safety policies and procedures in place which are effectively implemented. Attendance is rigorously monitored and attendance and enrolment data are systematically recorded on the school's customised database. Pastoral support is excellent and students feel they are well supported in their studies and in their progression to further study. The programmes of learning as well as the leisure programme are thoughtfully targeted to their interests, needs and aspirations. Students reported that they generally receive excellent support, both inside and outside the classroom. They praised the friendly atmosphere of the school and feel happy to approach staff if they have a problem. Inspectors agree with their views.
- 2.3 The leadership and management of the school exceed expectations. The senior leadership team is closely involved in the running of the school and there is a caring approach to staff and students which permeates throughout the school from the top. There is an effective management structure which ensures that courses run effectively. Day-to-day responsibility of the curriculum is usefully shared between two course managers. Staff are well qualified and experienced and are supported by a strong focus on continuing personal development. Quality assurance is prioritised. There is a good range of effective mechanisms to monitor quality including a high level of very positive feedback from students at all stages of their school experience. However, the arrangements for carrying out pre-appointment checks on staff have not always been applied as rigorously as they should as sometimes staff have started work before the checks have been finalised.

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	1 Exceeds expectations
5.The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	1 Exceeds expectations

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with the Standards

2.4 At the time of the inspection, the school met all the key standards for private further education colleges and quality is high. The school **exceeds expectations for the quality of education.**

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure greater consistency in the quality of materials used in classrooms by monitoring course development and reviewing the bank of learning materials.
2. Improve the rate of return of pre-course questionnaires by prospective students.
3. Improve the assessment of written work so that it better prepares students for the level of assignment they will face at university.
4. Provide a systematic analysis of the assessment data collected over time to ensure that progress is as high as it can be.

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' suitability for the course they are undertaking, both prior to and on arrival, is thorough and appropriate. The information gained is used effectively by the trainers to differentiate the support required by individual students.
- 3.2 Advice and guidance given to students prior to arrival in the UK ensure that they are placed on the most appropriate programme. The initial assessment, via a pre-course questionnaire and, where necessary, telephone calls, provides the school with accurate information to identify the student's level of competence in English and support requirements. However, on the occasions when the pre-course questionnaire is not returned to the school its computerised booking system does not make it easy to issue reminders. For the examined courses, there is a mandatory pre-arrival examination entry test and use is also made of a written assignment. These assessments provide useful information for tutors.
- 3.3 The assessment system is used well by tutors. The school has a very good system for placing students on the right course for them once they arrive in the UK. On arrival, students take further tests and interviews to decide which class they should join. The systems work well and course placement is accurate. The school is responsive to the few instances when students feel that they need to change to another course or level. Advice and guidance are based on accurate information, so that response is swift. As a result there is a high retention of students on their original courses.

3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum

- 3.4 Course provision and the curriculum offered are excellent. Students are well educated in accordance with their objectives and the school's aims. They display very good levels of knowledge and skill commensurate with their length of stay on their course.
- 3.5 The school offers a wide range of courses of a high standard. A secure course review is undertaken annually with the involvement of students. Students' feedback is sought on a continual basis and is used to guide future course development. Relevant feedback is gained through highly effective systems. The school encourages flexibility and innovation and trainers have opportunities to put forward their ideas about the development of new courses. However, the resulting course development and the bank of learning materials are not monitored on a consistent basis across all of the course provision. As a result the quality of the course materials and the delivery of some new courses is sometimes variable.
- 3.6 The courses offered are highly suited to the students' needs. Many students attend customised one-to-one tutorial sessions, either as stand-alone provision or as an addition to group sessions. The courses support the development of the students' skills and assist them in pursuing their careers and future studies. Successful processes are in place to ensure that students progress smoothly from one course to another through the use of detailed handover notes. Very few students withdraw from courses and retention rates are high.
- 3.7 The structured courses are supplemented by networking opportunities, such as the business breakfast, where students on professional courses can network and practise their business language in a semi-authentic business setting.

- 3.8 Course content matches the information provided to students before they start their courses. The school has high quality promotional brochures and a particularly good website. These are comprehensive, clear and accurate, and contain all key facts about the courses that the school offers.

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

- 3.9 The quality of teaching is high. In the classes observed, nearly all of the teaching was good and occasionally excellent. None was unsatisfactory. As a result, students of all abilities demonstrate good progress.
- 3.10 Most lessons use well-planned activities, using well-presented learning materials. They are characterised by a very good rapport and engagement between trainers and students. Trainers are knowledgeable and experienced and have a very sound knowledge of linguistic systems. In these classes there is a very strong focus on pronunciation and oral production. Assessment in the best lessons is highly effective, frequent and formalised, and involves error correction and feedback on oral production leading to further practice. Overall, teaching and assessment enable learners to acquire knowledge about the language and to quickly develop their linguistic skills.
- 3.11 Programmes of learning are planned and designed to meet students' differing needs with respect to their learning objectives, prior attainment and ability. Learning activities are well planned and excellent use is made of resources to support and promote learning. Trainers devise appropriate schemes of work containing clear objectives which are shared with students. Good lesson planning and teaching that is matched to students' needs ensure that learners with higher levels of knowledge and attainment are suitably challenged and engaged in the classroom.
- 3.12 In the few less successful, though still satisfactory, lessons, teachers set tasks that are either too difficult for the level of the students' learning or not sufficiently engaging. This leads to a lack of participation by some students and the trainer paying unequal attention to them. In some lessons teaching does not adequately prepare students for the level of assignments they will face at university.
- 3.13 Teaching and learning resources are outstanding. Trainers have access to up-to-date course and supplementary books with accompanying CDs and DVDs. A very well-organised bank of computer-based activities and worksheets is constantly updated. These high level resources enable trainers to plan and deliver lessons which are varied in content and presentation, and which add to the interest and enjoyment of the classroom activities through meeting students' varied learning styles.
- 3.14 The assessment of students' progress, through both informal and formal channels, is timely, frequent and consistent. This serves to guide and support learners towards achievement of their learning goals. A variety of methods is used to monitor progress, including mock tests and short weekly catch-up meetings. Use is made of tutorial sessions, though written records of these are not always kept. At the end of a course, trainers complete a form on each student's progress with recommendations for future development, from which a report is made. Consequently, outcomes for learners are generally excellent. Students' files that were viewed were well kept and aided effective learning.
- 3.15 Although the school collects considerable amounts of data about the students' performance over time, the use made of it is limited, and a lack of suitable software

makes it difficult for teachers to systematically track progress, for example of particular groups.

- 3.16 Marking is generally of a good standard, although it does not always provide sufficiently detailed feedback to prepare students for the level of written assignments they will face if they go on to university.

3.(d) Progress and attainment

- 3.17 Progress and attainment are excellent. Students are able to apply their learning, to demonstrate skills as confident, independent users of the language and to take responsibility for their progress and attainment. They commented on the fast progress they make in a short period of time and on the increased confidence they feel in using the English language. High quality teaching enables students to take part in discussion and role play using language and pronunciation only recently acquired. They demonstrate a very good level of fluency when speaking about complex topics.
- 3.18 Success rates, including in external examinations, are high as a result of the excellent systems of support that are in operation at the school.

4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises

- 4.1 Health and safety policy and procedures are of good quality, and the premises are secure. Both sets of premises occupied by the school provide an excellent learning environment for students. The premises at Holland Park Gardens have particularly good facilities including a restaurant serving high quality food. The school has invested extensively in both premises whilst refurbishment projects have been carried out to a very high standard.
- 4.2 The arrangements to ensure that students, staff and visitors to the school are safe and secure whilst on the premises are good. Very good attention is given to health and safety matters, as in the recent appointment of a full-time facilities manager. All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards, and to ensure a comfortable and safe environment for students. There is an appropriate health and safety policy and up-to-date general and fire risk assessments. There are adequate numbers of fire marshals and first aiders, as well as first-aid kits and accident books. There are fire action notices on display throughout both premises and the fire exits are well signed and free of obstructions. Fire protection equipment is appropriately sited and regularly maintained.
- 4.3 Health and safety matters are discussed as they arise, and prompt action taken where necessary. Appropriate checks have been carried out of the areas used for the preparation of food. Although there is good provision for the use of computers for students' private study, the chairs provided are not height-adjustable.
- 4.4 The school makes appropriate provision for students, staff and visitors with disabilities. For example, application forms contain a question regarding special needs, and students are asked about any possible problems on the first day. For students who have visual impairment, learning materials are produced in large font size.

4.(b) Student registration and attendance records

- 4.5 The student registration and attendance records are well kept. The school has very good and appropriate procedures in place to monitor attendance, which is recorded through the use of pre-printed daily registers. Attendance is recorded both before and after breaks. Attendance data is inputted daily to the school's database so that appropriate reports on attendance can be produced. These are used to monitor the attendance of those on general student visas as they highlight the overall attendance percentages as well as the total missed contacts that have taken place consecutively. There are fair and clear procedures for the collection and refund of fees; these are described in detail on the school's website.
- 4.6 There is a good standard of knowledge about UKBA requirements throughout the school with regard to both the enrolment of students on courses and their attendance, and these are rigorously adhered to. Overall responsibility for monitoring attendance is centralised, as is contact with UKBA. The school has accurate records of enrolment which are recorded on its customised database.

4.(c) Pastoral support for students

- 4.7 The arrangements for the pastoral support of students are very good. Designated staff at both premises have responsibilities that involve providing pastoral support to

students and they take these responsibilities very seriously. For example, the school has a system of advisers for Japanese, Korean and Arabic speaking students. These advisers make themselves available to meet and talk to the students in their own language. They provide support and help students to feel at home. Provision for careers advice is strong. There is a dedicated member of staff who liaises with universities and is available to provide personalised counselling and support for students who are intending to move on to further studies. This includes familiarisation visits to universities. Tutorial support for the long-stay students who study at the school for more than 16 weeks is good. The tutor meets students eight to ten weeks into their course and helps them with study skills and any personal problems.

- 4.8 Relationships between students and staff, and amongst students themselves, are excellent. There is an 'open door' policy to promote good communication with staff. Students' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive with regard to the support they receive from the school's staff and the fact that they can easily raise any personal problems. Nearly all would recommend the school to others. There were no significant concerns. Inspectors share this view of the school.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) Ownership and oversight

- 5.1 The governance, leadership and management of the school are of high quality. The managing director, who is the main proprietor of the school, has been involved with the school for over 40 years. He is closely involved in the day-to-day leadership of the school at an appropriate level. The focus of the governance and leadership is on the quality assurance processes and is aspirational and future oriented.
- 5.2 Governance ensures that there is excellent oversight of the school's operations, including the standards being reached, and is closely involved in financial planning, for example the refurbishment of the buildings. It also regularly reviews the students' feedback to ensure that the school is delivering high levels of customer satisfaction. The self-evaluation report is insightful and demonstrates an openness and honesty in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the school, which indicates a first-class approach to continuous improvement.
- 5.3 The governance arrangements ensure that responsibilities for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety are met successfully. The ethos of care and support for students and for the staff of the school is outstanding and permeates throughout the school, starting from the top. Staff praised the open and flexible ethos of the school. The school positively promotes integration and tolerance. Students report that they discuss cultural and religious differences in their tutorial sessions, which promotes good inter-cultural understanding. This is reflected in the responses to the students' questionnaire where a significant majority agreed that teachers treat all students fairly. The school has appropriate policies and procedures in place to prevent bullying and harassment.
- 5.4 The school has appropriate legal permissions including appropriate D1 use for the premises, a valid CLA license and relevant insurance cover.

5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities

- 5.5 The leadership and management of the school are effective in achieving the aims of the school and in the discharge of their delegated responsibilities. A shared sense of purpose and commitment to delivering a high level of student satisfaction is evident within the management team. Management structures are clear, with well-defined roles and responsibilities within the senior management team and clear and effective communication channels. The managing director is supported by a director of courses who is, in turn, supported by two course managers at each of the school's two centres. There is also a director of sales and marketing. Overall financial oversight is effectively exercised by the finance director. Appropriate financial authority is delegated to the course managers to enable them to run the two centres. The senior management team meets regularly for open discussion of issues with agreed follow-up actions that are delegated appropriately.
- 5.6 Educational direction is provided by the director of courses through the two course managers. This is highly effective, as evidenced by the quality of the programmes provided to students and the standard of the progress they make. Discussions on ways to improve the quality of the education happen regularly on an informal basis though there is no regular formal forum for the discussion of educational and quality assurance matters by all the staff.

- 5.7 The detailed development plan includes key priorities for 2011 as well as detailed objectives for the key departments of the school. The self-evaluation carried out by the school prior to the inspection demonstrated an openness and honesty in identifying both the strengths and areas for development.
- 5.8 The management of the school is successful in securing, supporting, developing and motivating sufficient high quality and appropriately qualified staff and ensuring that they are suitably trained for their roles. Staff report that they receive very good levels of support from the senior management team. Trainers are well qualified and receive good quality professional development both within and outside the school. Very good support is available for trainers who want to pursue further qualifications or attend relevant external development activities. The staff appraisal system operates well.

5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback

- 5.9 The quality assurance arrangements successfully support improvement. The processes of assessment, feedback and course development are well-organised, professional, open and transparent, and are continuing to develop. The school's leadership style, which is highly supportive and open, plays a key role in improvement.
- 5.10 Senior managers promote very high standards of quality and promote a positive and supportive culture. Secure mechanisms are in place to ensure that quality programmes are delivered to students. Teaching is monitored effectively through observation and daily conversations with trainers. Teaching observations are also carried out by peers on request. The feedback provided as a result of lesson observations is not always sufficiently prioritised which can result in too much being recorded and fed back to trainers. The outcomes from observations are linked well to staff appraisal.
- 5.11 A high level of feedback is sought from students at all stages of their experience at the school and this is used to improve provision. The result of their feedback about teaching is communicated to the trainers. The end-of-course feedback is collated centrally by the client services manager and is discussed at the management meeting. The school is considering how it could obtain feedback from students once they have finished their course and had time to reflect on their improvement in English in the workplace.
- 5.12 The school has a policy for handling complaints, although at present, this lacks clarity with regard to the exact steps to be taken and the order of actions within the process. Students' responses to the confidential questionnaire prior to inspection were very positive. They were particularly positive about the interesting and challenging nature of the work, the good relationships between staff and students, and amongst the students themselves, and the leadership and management of the school. No significant concerns were raised. Inspectors support students' views of the school.

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

- 5.13 Staff recruitment procedures, including matters of checking quality and suitability, are robust. The selection process is comprehensive. Trainers are only considered if they have a relevant English language teaching qualification, a previous professional background and relevant teaching experience. The profile of trainers' qualifications is very good and there is a highly supportive culture towards their continuing

professional development so that their qualifications remain up-to-date. The induction programme for academic staff covers relevant areas for their work.

- 5.14 Effective systems are in place for the recruitment of management and administrative staff. Appropriate employment contracts are in place, suitable induction is provided and appraisal procedures are appropriate. Suitability checks are carried out effectively for proprietors, staff, volunteers and supply staff. All required checks are carried out by the time a formal contract of work is issued though this is sometimes after staff have started work at the school. All staff sign a declaration that they are fit to work with people under the age of 18.

5.(e) Provision of Information

- 5.15 Provision of information to both students and others is good. The school provides all required information to students and prospective students. It has excellent brochures which are comprehensive and clearly written, and which explicitly state all key facts about the courses. The website is engaging, contains relevant information and is of a very high quality. It uses simple and clear language.

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 the proprietor, 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

Miss Diana Morriss	Lead Inspector
Dr Diane Phillips	Team inspector
Ms Nicole la Hausse de Lalouviere	Team inspector
Ms Julie Griffiths	Team inspector