

Organisation name	The NW Academy of English, Derry, N Ireland
Inspection date	30 November 2016

BACKGROUND
Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	2006
Last full inspection	June 2014
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	Work placements; externally validated pre-service teacher training courses
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	None
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	None

Current accreditation status and reason for spot check

Current accredited status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Signalled: inspect new premises

Premises profile

Address of main site	37 Great James Street, Derry, Northern Ireland BT48 7DF
Details of any additional sites in use at the time of the inspection	None
Details of any additional sites not in use at the time of the inspection	None
Sites inspected	<p>The NW Academy of English is based in a large, modern building in a street in a historic part of Derry, close to the city centre and to transport links. The building is a purpose-built Irish language, cultural and enterprise centre, and the school operates in parts of the building, and shares certain facilities.</p> <p>The building has four floors and a roof garden. On the ground floor there is a large open-plan reception, staffed by the school, and a café open to the school's students and staff, as well as to members of the public and/or people attending events in the cultural centre. The school has a total of nine classrooms spread over the four floors, office space for management and administration, a student lounge, an IT suite for students, and a staffroom/resources room. The school also has access to a very large hall/theatre and there are breakout areas throughout the building. There are lifts to every floor and toilets on the fourth floor; there is also a disabled toilet on the ground floor.</p> <p>Junior courses are run in a large, three-storey house next door to the main building. There are four classrooms in total, as well as a staff kitchen, and toilets.</p>

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week August
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	0	93
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	N/a	11
Typical age range	N/a	11–16
Typical length of stay	N/a	2 weeks
Predominant nationalities	N/a	Italian, Polish
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	N/a	7
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	4	6

INTRODUCTION

Background

This was a spot check to inspect the new premises of the NW Academy of English, Derry, following its move from the previous premises in Northland Road, Derry, about 30 minutes away. The move took place at the beginning of February 2016.

The NW Academy of English runs courses in general English, business English, IELTS and external general English examination preparation for adults (16+), and summer and winter school programmes for closed groups of juniors (10+). Tailor-made programmes including one-to-one tuition are also offered.

Preparation

The spot check was carried out by one inspector who had not been to the school before. The inspector contacted the director of studies (DoS) to check whether there were any dates that would be unsuitable and, since flights had to be booked and to ensure that key staff would be present, a date for the spot check was agreed and a draft timetable drawn up to make best use of time. The Accreditation Unit sent the inspector the 2016 printed brochure and other relevant documents. The inspector checked the school's website before the visit.

Programme and persons present

The inspector arrived at 09.45 and left at 12.30. She had meetings with the managing director, the DoS, a teacher, the operations director and a member of the school's safeguarding team. She was given a tour of the new premises and checked related documentation. There were no students enrolled at the time of the spot check, although an IELTS course was scheduled to start the following month. A brief round up was given to the DoS and the operations director.

FINDINGS

Changes to premises

The school had been in its previous premises for seven years but increasing student numbers, together with the fact that the premises were no longer in wholly satisfactory condition, meant a move to new premises was much needed.

The new building is 15 years old and is of very striking design, having won architectural awards for its modern-industrial style and open-plan character. The school is renting classrooms on a five-year agreement and the inspector was told of the very good relations with the staff running the host Irish cultural centre.

As well as classrooms, the school now also has access to a large 200-seat hall/theatre, which is used for inductions, testing and social activities. There is an IT suite for students to use, with three desktop computers and screens, language learning software, and 16 tablets. Staff have been trained in the use of the tablets at a local computer store. There are two bookcases with graded readers and DVDs for students to borrow, and comfortable seating.

The junior courses are held in a large house next to the main building so that juniors can be supervised and always separate from the adult students. See Care of under 18s below.

Risk assessments and health and safety matters for the main premises and the adjoining house are complete and well documented.

The staff told the inspector that working conditions in the new premises are excellent, the move was handled well and they are very happy there. The premises are warm in winter, and offer better Wi-Fi and more technology than in the previous premises. Students can also enjoy weekly live Irish music and other cultural events run by the cultural centre, which give them the opportunity to meet local people.

The website has been updated to take account of the new premises and the information given about the buildings, facilities and services is accurate. There are as yet no pictures that convey how attractive the new premises are.

Teaching and learning

This section was not specifically inspected. However, the inspector was told about the active continuing professional development programme that the school runs, including events run in liaison with a local technical college in Derry and Belfast. The DoS and one of the permanent teachers had recently attended a teachers' conference.

Observations are carried out quarterly and there was evidence on file of constructive feedback notes and action planning. Teachers receive training to use the interactive whiteboards (IWBs) which are in every classroom.

Welfare and student services

As in the previous premises, there are good measures in place in the new premises to ensure the safety and security of the students. The reception is staffed by the school, rather than the cultural centre, and so reception staff get to know the students well. Visitors are required to sign in and out, and staff and visitors wear lanyards. Adult and junior students wear different colour lanyards, with their ID and the school's emergency telephone number on them.

Fire drills are carried out once a year in December/January and are organised by the cultural centre. The school needs to carry out their own drill(s) in summer when student numbers are at peak, rather than only in months when student numbers are likely to be low, and this was noted for action by the DoS and operations director. First aid provision is entirely appropriate.

There is a welfare noticeboard in every classroom with names of staff available should students have any problems. A quiet room is available for prayer if required. Students receive a handbook full of helpful information, including useful and realistic hints about staying safe. Although not a legal requirement in the Northern Ireland context, the school has set up measures, and staff have done training, in relation to the Prevent strategy since it is viewed as a constructive initiative.

Accommodation

As the school has not moved far from its previous premises, the homestay provision continues to be the same. Self-catering residential accommodation for adult students is available in the city centre. There was good awareness among the school staff the inspector talked to of the safety measures that need to be in place, and checked regularly, in homestays.

Care of under 18s

This section was not specifically inspected. However, the inspector noted that all staff and homestay hosts are required to complete an online safeguarding course, and the designated safeguarding staff have all received training to the appropriate level. All adults normally resident in the homestays undergo suitability checks before students aged under 18 are placed there.

The adjoining house provides very suitable premises for junior courses. Supervision arrangements there were discussed and are appropriate. Two members of staff are always in the building to supervise the arrival and departure of the students, as well as supervising them at break times. Students have access to drinking water. For the summer courses two of the classrooms are equipped with IWBs, and one classroom with a screen and projector. Tablets are also available for class use.

There is a very useful handbook for juniors, which is written in accessible language and makes very appropriate use of visuals.

Premises and facilities

Criteria	Not met	Met	Strength	See comments	N/a
R1 Adequate space	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
R2 Condition of premises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
R3 Classrooms and learning areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
R4 Student relaxation areas and food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
R5 Signage and display	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
R6 Staffroom(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

R1 The premises are of a high standard. The classrooms, hall/theatre, student lounge, breakout areas and café are all very spacious. Office and storage space for managerial and administrative staff is good. The building is light and quiet and its open-plan design facilitates communication between students and staff.

R2 The premises are smart and maintained to a very high standard of cleanliness and decoration.

R3 All the classrooms are large and comfortably seat the school's maximum class size. The rooms are of different shapes and all have flexible furniture, which can easily be moved to allow for different types of classroom interaction. The rooms are quiet, and suitably warm in winter, and provide students with a very comfortable learning environment.

R4 There is a comfortable student lounge. The café on the ground floor provides a welcoming environment, with friendly staff, and serves a very good range of fresh, traditional Irish food at very reasonable prices.

R5 Signage is clear and there are sufficient, well-placed noticeboards, and a television screen providing information for students.

R6 There is a staffroom of a good size for the number of staff at peak in the school, with a kitchen where tea/coffee is provided. Teaching resources are well organised and easily accessible, together with a photocopier.

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

M20 The complaints procedure is firmly in house and students could be directed to outside bodies in case of unresolved matters.

Not addressed.

M21 The website is currently being re-designed and in its present state does not describe the school and its services entirely accurately.

Addressed. The new website presents the school and its services accurately.

M22 Occasionally publicity suffers from somewhat extravagant claims.

Addressed. Any such claims have been removed from the publicity materials.

M24 There are a few inconsistencies in the publicity. Maximum class size is stated in some publicity as 16 and in others as 15. Minimum age is given as 8+ in some publicity and as 12+ in others.

Addressed. Information relating to maximum class size and minimum age is clear.

M29 The Accreditation Scheme marque currently in use should be changed to the version that includes 'for the teaching of English'.

Addressed. The correct version is used in the current publicity.

A number of points to be addressed within six months from the last inspection report were addressed satisfactorily by submission of evidence to the Accreditation Unit, and are not, therefore, repeated here.

Points to be addressed arising from this visit

W1 Fire drills are carried out only once a year in December/January when student numbers are likely to be low.

CONCLUSIONS

The new premises are of a very high standard and provide a very spacious, attractive, comfortable and professional learning environment for students and staff. Sharing premises with an Irish cultural centre brings advantages in relation to the students' experience while studying in Derry, and staff of both organisations work closely together.

RECOMMENDATION

The next inspection falls due in 2018; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Changes to summary statement

An area of strength can be added for premises and facilities and the web address updated.

Summary statement

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This private language school offers courses in general and professional English for adults (18+) and under-18s and for closed groups of under-18s.

Strengths were noted in the areas of staff management, care of students and leisure opportunities.

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

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