

# **BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT**

## **RANDOM SPOT CHECK INSPECTION (Short Course Provider)**

**PROVIDER:** Varsity International

**ADDRESS:** Compass House  
Farmoor Court  
Farmoor  
Oxford  
OX2 9LU

**HEAD OF PROVIDER:** Mr Ben Prior

**DATE OF INSPECTION:** 17 October 2018

**ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE:** Continued accreditation 31 January 2019

## **PART A – INTRODUCTION**

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### **1. Background to the provider**

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Varsity International (VI/the Provider) is the trading name of Varsity Language Schools Limited, which is a limited company that was incorporated in 2012. Varsity Language Schools Limited is one of three companies, which form the Active Education Group Limited (the Group). The Chief Executive of the Provider is also the Chief Executive of the Group and established all its constituent companies.

While the Chief Executive continues to oversee the operation of the Provider, he has increasingly delegated the day-to-day responsibilities to the Operations Director. The Operations Director is supported by an academic manager, a camp manager and seasonal administrative and teaching staff, who are employed under a contract for the duration of the summer schools.

The Provider started offering courses in 2015 and now offers residential summer courses for international participants. These consist of a core component of English language teaching accompanied by sporting and other activities.

The Provider aims to enable international children to learn English together with English children, including children from other camps run by the Group.

The main administrative offices for the Group are based in Farmoor, on the outskirts of Oxford, in a two-storey modern building on a commercial business site. However, the Provider now has sole occupancy of an overspill administrative office, which is located close to the main premises in a single storey barn conversion. This spot check took place at the overspill premises.

### **2. Brief description of the current provision**

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Varsity International offers residential summer courses for international participants, aged between 8 and 14, at the premises of Cothill House, which is a family-run preparatory boarding school in Oxfordshire. A home-stay option is also offered. The course period runs for six weeks, from early July to late August. However, participants can choose the exact length of their stay. Some attend for just two weeks, which is the minimum period.

The programme includes a core component of English language teaching together with an extensive programme of varied activities. The activities include sports, art and adventure, including quad biking and archery. In 2018, a survival week was run as a pilot. This included activities such as bush craft skills, shelter building and fire lighting. The participants attending this survival week had to have a minimum of upper intermediate or advanced English language skills so that they could quickly understand any instructions given to them by the Provider's staff. The activities element of the programme offered by the Provider allows the Provider's international participants to mix with English speaking United Kingdom (UK) based participants. These UK participants are attending other day camps organised by the Group, some of which are marketed under different brands. These day camps do not form part of BAC's accreditation.

In addition, the Provider offers a fluent English speaker programme, which is aimed at participants from English speaking countries. This programme consists of activities only. It has a duration of six weeks although participants can come for a period of two weeks and can mix and match the activities to meet their needs.

Participants come from a wide range of countries, including Spain, other European Union countries, Kazakhstan and Malaysia. In the summer of 2018, the majority of participants were in the age range of 10 to 12 years and there were slightly more female participants. There were no participants present at the time of this spot check.

### **3. Inspection process**

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The inspection was carried out over half a day by one inspector. A meeting took place with the Operations Director and various documentation was scrutinised. The overspill administrative office was also inspected. The Provider co-operated very well with the inspector and all necessary documentation was made readily available.

### **4. Inspection history**

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Stage 2 inspection:	25 March 2015
Stage 3 inspection:	21-22 July 2015
Interim inspection:	6 July 2016

## **PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE**

*The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.*

### **1. Significant changes since the last inspection**

The previous academic manager left in January 2018. A new full-time academic manager is now in post. In addition, an academic consultant was employed in the period prior to the summer of 2018. The consultant was employed to ensure that the English language teaching was sufficiently rigorous and followed best practice. The consultant was also employed to ensure that there was no adverse impact as a result of the change of academic manager. The Managing Director (MD) is leaving the Provider at the end of October and the Operations Director will take over the MD role. The Operations Director has already been carrying out that role as the MD has been focusing on sales.

The courses were targeted at participants from 10 to 16 years of age. The age range is now lower at 8 to 14 years. This change was made as a result of demand and feedback from the Provider's agents. The nature of the courses and activities are thought to be better suited to younger participants.

In 2018, a new survival course was introduced, due to demand. It was run as a pilot and was successful. The participants enjoyed it and it is now included in the course brochure.

The courses were run at LVS Oxford School, which is a special needs school located on the outskirts of Oxford. The courses are now run at Cothill House school, which is a family-run preparatory boarding school also based just outside Oxford. This change was made because Cothill House school is on a bigger site than the other school and, therefore, it has more outdoors space, which is good for the participants' experience.

### **2. Response to actions points in last report**

There were no action points in the last report.

### **3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report**

There were no recommended areas for improvement in the last report.

### **4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements**

#### **4.1 Management, Staffing and Administration (spot check)**

**The standards are judged to be:**

Met     Partially Met     Not Met

**Comments**

The Provider is well managed. The Chief Executive has good experience of operating sports and activity-based vacation programmes for children using hired premises. Other staff are also well qualified and experienced to ensure the effective running of the summer courses.

There are clear channels of communication between the Chief Executive and the Operations Director. They have regular meetings and also communicate effectively by telephone and e-mails. As a result, there is a good mutual understanding of the Provider's priorities. They discuss the courses, staff performance and ways in which improvements can be made. These discussions result in an operational plan, which enables the timely recruitment of seasonal staff to ensure that future courses are adequately resourced.

Student data, for administrative purposes, is well recorded and maintained using an appropriate spreadsheet.

There is a clear staff recruitment policy, which follows guidelines for safe recruitment. All appropriate recruitment checks are carried out, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), right to work in the UK, references and the verification of qualifications. These are recorded on an appropriate customer relationship management system. Non-teaching staff receive clear and appropriate information. An appropriate induction ensures that they understand what is expected of them, their responsibilities and also how their performance will be monitored on an on-going basis.

Relevant arrangements are made to ensure that the participants are suitable for their course and have an appropriate level of oral English language skill so that they benefit fully. The Provider has its own online English language test. Parents and participants can upload a video, which involves the parents asking questions, that are devised by the Provider, to the prospective student in order to test the student's understanding and spoken English skills.

A very clear policy and procedure relating to student registration, attendance monitoring and how absences are followed up, ensures that staff are clear about their responsibilities in this regard. The document also includes a clear statement about the expectation of full attendance. This information is communicated to the participants and their parents through the welcome pack. The method used to ensure that the policy is regularly reviewed and up-dated represents best practice in version control and the management of the policy to ensure it remains relevant. Daily registers are maintained to provide an accurate record of individual participants' rates of attendance.

Useful and regular feedback is obtained from parents and agents and the participants provide oral feedback on a continuous basis. This is discussed and used to make improvements. A more formalised approach to obtaining feedback at specific stages in the programme, particularly from the participants, would enhance the Provider's ability to make good use of the feedback during the course.

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#### 4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

**Comments**

Programme management is effective. A very clear policy and procedure relating to the residential academic programme includes detailed and clear guidance on staff training, including teaching observations, English language placement testing, syllabus development, lesson planning and the learning resources that the participants receive during the course. The policy and procedure are communicated to the staff prior to the start of the course and at induction. These detailed guidelines ensure that the courses run in a consistent manner to the benefit of the participants.

Teachers undertake training from the Provider so that they are clear about what is required of them. The training takes the form of online familiarising training which is completed in advance of the course, the provision of training days when the teachers arrive on-site and a residential camp induction day. On-going communication takes place between the teachers so that they know what has been taught to a student to ensure continuity. Meetings take place to allow the teachers to provide feedback and share best practice.

The participants' progress is assessed on an on-going basis so that they can be moved up or down a level in terms of their English language skills to ensure they maximise their progress. They receive a report, at the end of the courses, about how they have interacted with the other participants, how their English has improved and what they can do to continue their progress after the course. On arrival, participants undertake a test of their written and verbal English language skills to ensure they are placed at the appropriate level. This test is not repeated, for the longer-term participants, at the end of the course to enable a more systematic judgment of their progress throughout the course to be made.

The teachers have access to a bank of good and engaging online resources to use in their teaching. Teachers can develop their own resources, providing the resources meet the criteria set by the Provider.

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#### 4.3 Participant Welfare (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The staff cover relevant student welfare matters as part of their initial training so that they are able to deal with any pastoral support issues that may arise.

The participants receive a welcome pack prior to arrival. The pack contains useful information regarding studying with the Provider and living in the UK. It also includes information relating to expected standards of conduct. Participants are asked to provide details of any allergies and any medical issues are covered during the booking process. There is a clear accident policy with procedures for dealing with minor and major injuries. As a result, there is a good focus, throughout the course, on the participants' health and well-being.

There are suitable policies and procedures in place to avoid bullying and negative behaviour and to promote equal opportunities for both staff and participants.

Suitable arrangements are in place to safeguard the participants. These include an appropriate policy, which references the relevant legislation. There is a designated safeguarding lead, who is a safeguarding trainer for the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. He has trained the other staff to an appropriate level. The Operations Director has also been suitably trained and is now booked on a level of course, which is suitable for a designated safeguarding lead. This external course takes place in December 2018. The internal training includes appropriate information about preventing radicalisation and extremism and a suitable risk assessment has been carried out. As a result, the staff are aware of what to do should they have any concerns about the safety of the participants.

The home-stay hosts and family are subject to appropriate DBS checks. The home-stays are inspected by the Provider to ensure they are of a suitable quality standard.

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#### 4.4 Premises and Facilities (spot check)

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**The standards are judged to be:**  Met  Partially Met  Not Met

**Comments**

The administration premises, where this inspection took place, are suitable for the Provider and include a good-sized office, meeting room and kitchen area. Appropriate health and safety matters are covered with staff in meetings and with the participants as part of the induction.

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#### 4.5 Compliance Declaration

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**Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.**  Yes  No

**PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS**

**STRENGTHS**

The Provider is very well managed by suitably experienced staff.

Very clear operational policies and procedures ensure that the summer courses are effectively run and the participants are well supported.

**ACTIONS REQUIRED**

None	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
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**RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)***

The Provider is recommended to obtain student feedback pro-actively, at specific stages in the programme, to ensure that any immediate changes required can be made.

The Provider is recommended to consider introducing a test, for the longer-term participants, at the end of the course, to enable a good judgment of their progress to be made.

**COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE**

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