



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

THAMES COLLEGE BERKSHIRE

Full Name of College	Thames College Berkshire
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Principal	Mr Abdul Mirza
Proprietors	Mr Abdul Baseer
Age Range	18+
Total Number of students	88
Numbers by Age and type of study	18+: 88 EFL only: 36 FE only: 52
Inspection dates	21 - 23 November 2011

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 Thames College Berkshire is a privately owned institution for further and higher education situated in Reading. The college was established by the current proprietor in 2010. Teaching commenced in April 2011. The college is governed by the proprietor of the company. There have been no major changes to the structure of the college in the recent past.
- 1.2 The college is approved by the Accreditation Service for International Colleges (ASIC) and holds an A grade rating from the UK Border Agency (UKBA). The college offers a limited range of courses in the areas of business studies, management, tourism and hospitality; ranging from level 4 to 7. A range of English language courses are also offered.
- 1.3 The stated mission of the college is to provide affordable and quality educational opportunities to individuals that give them career success and make them employable in today's competitive market internationally.
- 1.4 A total of 88 students attend the college, 84 male and 4 female. Most students are from Pakistan with a first language of Urdu, while a few are from India, with a first language of Hindi. Students are recruited three times a year, in February, May and August. Recruitment is mainly focused on overseas learners. English is an additional language for all students. No student currently has been assessed as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.5 When individuals apply to join a course, the college checks that they are suitable for the course they have chosen through pre-arrival questionnaires and interviews.
- 1.6 The college caters for students aged 18 years and over. The majority of students are over the age of 20. The college does not provide accommodation directly, but offers students assistance in finding suitable accommodation through the college welfare office.

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	2 Meets expectations
4.	Students' welfare, including health and safety	2 Meets expectations
5.	The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	2 Meets expectations

- 2.1 The college successfully meets its stated aims. It offers a well defined range of business studies, management, tourism and hospitality courses that meet the needs of its students, although provision for extra-curricular activities is somewhat limited. The overall quality of the students' learning and achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory but limited teaching approaches sometimes hinder progress. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Students have a good attitude to learning and willingly participate in lessons. Most develop good basic skills, with those from abroad doing particularly well in establishing their language. Assessment of the students' work and progress is inconsistent and not always underpinned by secure systems to ensure timely progress. Diagnostic assessment could be used more effectively to inform individual learning plans and plan for individual language support.
- 2.2 Standards of welfare, health and safety meet requirements. Staff have a reasonable understanding of the needs of the students. The college's pastoral structure provides effective support and guidance for the students in accordance with the college's aims. Students are lively and well motivated. They work well together and have excellent relationships with their teachers. Students' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires were very positive about the college, showing particular appreciation of learning in a friendly, safe and supportive environment. In interviews, students spoke highly of the care provided by their teachers and the high standards of support provided by the college as a whole.
- 2.3 Governance is secure, and supports the college's aims well. Effective oversight is combined with realistic financial support so that the welfare, health and safety of students are secure. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good policies are introduced at all levels, and implemented and monitored appropriately. The college maintains a good level of communication with students, who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the education provided in pre-inspection questionnaires and interviews. Whilst the management of most aspects of the college is secure, systems to ensure consistent assessment and the monitoring of student progress are still developing. The college development plan and self-evaluation lacks sufficient detail.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with standards for Private Colleges

- 2.4 At the time of the inspection, the college met all the key requirements of the standards for private further education colleges and quality is good. **The college meets expectations for the quality of education.**

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.5 The college is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Produce a detailed college development plan with specific quality improvement actions and clear criteria for success.
2. Improve assessment arrangements so that students receive clear guidance on improvement for all work and ensure that assessment information is collected, analysed and shared between teachers.
3. Ensure that diagnostic assessment informs individual learning plans and highlights any additional support needs.

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

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

- 3.1 Students are suitably assessed both prior to and on arrival. Detailed entry criteria are set and the college has processes in place for providing accurate and appropriate advice and guidance to prospective students. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students indicate satisfaction with the advice that they receive, which is judged to be accurate.
- 3.2 Students receive appropriate advice and guidance prior to arrival in the UK. The use of initial assessment, via a pre-course questionnaire and telephone interview, ensure that they are placed on the most appropriate programme. On arrival, students take further tests to ensure course placement is accurate. The college is responsive to instances when students feel that they need to change to another course or level. The number of withdrawals or transfers between programmes is satisfactory.

3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum

- 3.3 The course provision and curriculum ensure that students are suitably educated in accordance with their objectives and the college's aims. Programmes of study offer appropriate progression routes into employment or further study and meet the requirements of UKBA.
- 3.4 Qualifications are appropriately matched to student needs. Students are happy with the provision offered and are able to link their current studies to their future aspirations. However, course reviews are not currently undertaken and whilst student feedback is sought, it is not on a continual basis or effectively used to guide future course development.
- 3.5 Courses are accurately detailed in the prospectus and advertised on the college website. Student retention is satisfactory.

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

- 3.6 Overall, teaching is satisfactory and students' progress adequate. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Students spoke highly of the teaching, responding very positively in interviews and pre-inspection questionnaires. Attendance and punctuality in business classes is good but attendance in English language classes is low.
- 3.7 Teachers know their students well and generally understand their learning requirements. The relationships and rapport they have with the students are excellent. Teachers' support for their students and positive encouragement promote good levels of achievement. Their subject knowledge is used effectively to stimulate and answer questions from the students, which often provokes further discussion and debate. Most lessons are well paced but do not always use a variety of tasks and resources. The use of presentation software is central to many lessons and at times limits student participation and progress.
- 3.8 Where progress is good, lessons are well planned and structured, with engaging and appropriately challenging tasks designed to extend students and make them think creatively and critically. Such lessons reveal the teachers' passion for their subjects,

have a good pace and motivate students to learn. Tasks are effectively matched to the needs of the students, and stimulate independent thought. Suitable open-ended tasks and encouragement to carry out individual research enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and extend themselves academically. High expectations of good conduct are invariably met.

- 3.9 In other lessons, ineffective planning and excessive direction by the teacher led to a limited range of learning tasks, closed questions and slow pace, all of which restricted the students' involvement. As a result, their learning was limited and progress slowed. Staff did not use the interactive whiteboard at their disposal to maximum effect.
- 3.10 Assessment systems are in place but their use is inconsistent. While teachers use questions well to assess students' understanding, and oral feedback is used effectively, the methods used to mark students' work vary significantly between teachers. At its best, marking is satisfactory, providing helpful comments to guide future improvement. However, too often the quality of correction, annotation and comment varies significantly.
- 3.11 Teachers' planning catered for a range of abilities in many lessons and help was given to students to develop business language skills. Personal development plans are still in the development stage.

3.(d) Progress and attainment

- 3.12 Students receive an acceptable education which reflects the aims of the college. They display suitable levels of knowledge, understanding and skill, given that many are learning in a language that is not their own.
- 3.13 To date, students have not taken any examinations, so it is not possible to comment on performance against national or international averages. However, the evidence from lesson observation, scrutiny of work, and discussions with the students shows that the overall standards being reached are broadly satisfactory. For example, students with English as an additional language (EAL) develop skills of reading and writing adequately.
- 3.14 Most students have high expectations of themselves and respond well to their studies. They work well independently and co-operatively in groups, with good levels of concentration. Their attitudes to learning are supported by hard work and a culture of respect for each other and their teachers. Students do not get enough advice and guidance on how to organise their work. This leads to limited development of study skills, with poor note taking being seen.

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 The arrangements for health, safety and security of the premises are adequate. The college has invested well in the premises and refurbishment of the teaching areas has been carried out to a good standard. It provides a secure learning environment.
- 4.2 The safety of students is a priority of the college. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are thoroughly organised, effective and comprehensively documented. Fire and safety audits and regular evacuations are undertaken and recorded. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and have received appropriate training. Students receive detailed and comprehensive health, safety and security information as part of their induction.
- 4.3 Effective measures are in place to guard against bullying. A clear disciplinary system deals with poor behaviour. Behaviour in lessons and around the college is excellent.
- 4.4 The college has an appropriate number of staff trained in first aid and secure arrangements exist for students who feel unwell. Due to the age of the building, disability access is limited to the ground floor.

4.(b) Student registration and attendance records

- 4.5 There are sufficient arrangements for student registration and attendance recording. Admission procedures are detailed and effective. A central register is accurately maintained and contains information for each application made to the college. Whilst students are registered in each lesson and the data analysed, a small number of students have low levels of attendance. The college is attempting to improve attendance rates and puts a high level of importance on this matter, so that students are contacted promptly about unexplained absences. Students are made aware that regular absence may seriously disrupt educational progress and may be reported to UKBA. Most of the students arrive at lessons on time.
- 4.6 A secure system is in place to monitor attendance and course completion rates and is effectively used to inform UKBA of students who do not comply with attendance requirements. Overall responsibility for monitoring attendance is centralised, as is contact with UKBA.
- 4.7 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

- 4.8 Pastoral support for students is satisfactory. The support offered to all students makes a strong and positive contribution to the college's aim of creating a safe, caring and supportive environment in which individuals feel valued and able to grow in confidence.
- 4.9 Staff are approachable, friendly and fair. The relationships between students and staff, and amongst the students themselves, are excellent. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students show that they are happy in the college and appreciate the adult manner in which they are treated.

- 4.10 The college's procedures for promoting good behaviour and guarding against harassment and bullying are secure and clearly understood. No evidence of bullying or unacceptable behaviour was found. Students feel that good behaviour is well promoted and inspection findings support this view.
- 4.11 Effective careers advice ensures that students are well prepared for further study choices and life beyond college.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) Ownership and oversight

- 5.1 Ownership and oversight meet requirements. The proprietor supports the senior management team well; providing the stimulus and resources to develop a modern, forward-looking college, in line with the students' needs and the college's aims. There is a clear focus on strategy and future priorities, together with appropriate oversight in the areas in which the proprietor has legal responsibility. Responsibilities and lines of accountability are well defined and understood.
- 5.2 The proprietor has a clear insight into the working of the college and exerts tight and prudent financial control. Resources are targeted effectively to meet current needs and plan for future educational priorities and provision. The college building is maintained well.
- 5.3 The proprietor is aware of the need to ensure regulatory compliance and undertakes this role well. However, he recognises the need to strengthen existing systems to ensure that welfare and other key policies are monitored effectively. In particular, to take steps to ensure that systems linked to assessment and the monitoring of student progress are secure. Oversight of the college development plan and self-evaluation needs to be developed.

5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities

- 5.4 Overall, leadership and management are effective and meet the aims of the college well. There is a clear vision for the future of the college; to improve academic standards and develop the breadth of educational provision. This vision is driven by energy, commitment and enthusiasm. Senior managers effectively communicate their priorities and expectations to staff, ensuring that the college has a strong sense of purpose.
- 5.5 Overall, the college is well run. People in senior positions operate an 'open door' policy and are easily accessible. Lines of communication are good. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with staff show that they are happy and supportive of the college. The college recognises the need to strengthen and refine aspects of its management systems to provide more efficient oversight of pastoral and academic practices. For example, while academic management is satisfactory in curriculum planning, it is less so in ensuring consistency in assessment.
- 5.6 The self-evaluation report covers a number of significant areas for development. Whilst this is a useful overview, it lacks sufficient detail such as named persons, success criteria, and target dates, to effectively evaluate the current performance of the college and accurately plan for improvement.
- 5.7 The college is successful in securing well-qualified staff. Staff are inducted well and receive effective support, including an introduction to college policies and practices. The college has effective arrangements for checking the suitability of staff. A system of staff review has been introduced but is still in the early stages of its cycle. Teachers have satisfactory access to training, have received appropriate child protection training, and are aware of health and safety requirements.

5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback

- 5.8 Quality assurance arrangements within the college are satisfactory, though systems for monitoring are still in the development stage. For example, assessment of students work is inconsistent and varies significantly between teachers. As a result senior managers are not fully aware of the progress of students and cannot fully evaluate the performance of courses.
- 5.9 Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the college. Students judged lessons to be interesting, challenging and well managed.
- 5.10 A suitable complaints policy is in place which is operated effectively. This has not needed to be invoked. All students confirmed that they were aware of the complaints policy.

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

- 5.11 Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks are effective. The college has an efficient staff recruitment policy that secures well-qualified staff. All required recruitment checks have been carried out and recorded. A central record is maintained and monitored by the proprietor.

5.(e) Provision of information

- 5.12 The quality of information available on the college website is good. Accurate details of the courses offered by the college are provided. Policies and arrangement for admissions, discipline, exclusions, health and safety and welfare provision are clearly detailed.
- 5.13 Contact details for the proprietor and principal, together with the college's complaints procedure, are provided.

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 proprietors 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
Miss Fiona Hyndman	Team Inspector