

Advice note for pre-registration inspections of all types of academies and free schools/studio schools/university technical colleges (UTC)

School name	Harpenden Free School
DfE registration number	999/1259
Unique reference number (URN)	1259
Inspection number	403978
Inspection dates	7 August 2012
Reporting inspector	Deborah Sanders

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Context of the school

Harpenden Free School is to be located initially in a large converted barn previously used by a company of architects. It is situated in a very rural location, surrounded by an extensive golf course and a few residential properties approximately one mile from the Harpenden town. The school will be overseen by the Harpenden Free School Trust which has been formed by the coming together of three organisations, youth leadership charity Changemakers, Artisans Montessori Kindergarten and public services provider Isledon Partnership. The school is due to open on 17 September 2012. Following discussion with the inspector (see Recommendations below) the school has applied to admit up to 120 boys and girls in the age range four to 11 years. It will admit pupils in Reception and Year 1 in its first year and currently has 27 children, comprising 18 of Reception age and nine in Year 1, registered to be enrolled when it opens. The school will be non-selective and may include pupils who have disabilities and who have special educational needs. It is proposed that this initial site will be used for a two-year period after which time the school has plans to move to a refurbished Victorian school in the town centre of Harpenden. This inspection visit, including scrutiny of documentation and discussions with the headteacher designate, was conducted on the proposed initial school site.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

All the regulations are likely to be met but implementation could not be seen as the school is not yet operating. The school's aims and values, together with a very distinctive approach to learning which is influenced by the Montessori ethos, puts personal development and academic progress at the centre of its work. Pupils will be encouraged to keep their own personal development portfolios and will have regular opportunities to reflect and review on their school day. There is a commitment to creating a broad and diverse community that will extend beyond the school where pupils will be encouraged and supported to develop their own community projects. The school will also run a weekly assembly open to the local community. They will take the school out into the local community by actively engaging in local events such as Harpenden Carnival, St Albans Festival and the Hertfordshire County show. Pupils will have the opportunity to develop an appreciation of the school community, the local, national and worldwide communities and to learn how they can show responsibility and gratitude within them. Pupils will learn to appreciate and tolerate other cultures. The citizenship programme and outside visits will give pupils a good insight into the workings of English institutions and services. There are high expectations of pupil's behaviour, and the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies fully support and encourage an understanding of right and wrong.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

All but one of the regulations are likely to be met. Implementation could not be seen as the school is not yet operating. All the required policy documents have been produced including comprehensive policies for safeguarding, behaviour management, anti-bullying and first aid. The behaviour policy includes the sanctions to be applied in the event of pupils misbehaving. There are appropriate guidelines for how to deal with incidents of bullying should they arise. The school's safer recruitment policy is appropriate and the required checks on staff and governors are being made. However, training of all staff in child protection and for the designated person to undertake the required higher level training has not yet been arranged.

The school has suitable systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe while in school and off the site. There are fire risk assessments in place and the building has been checked by the fire safety officer. All staff have completed first aid training. Admission and attendance registers will be maintained electronically, with paper copies available. The school is committed to enabling equality of access to all aspects of school life and has arranged for additional ramps to be installed where there are steps to the outside play area. Given its access development plans, the school is likely to meet the requirements of the Equality Act (2010); the building will be fully accessible to pupils, parents and visitors.

In summary, in order to meet the requirements in full, the school should:

- ensure that the headteacher and all permanent staff who have direct contact with the children undertake training to a standard set by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (paragraph 7).

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

All the regulations are likely to be met. All checks on identity for staff together with checks on their qualifications and enhanced disclosures made on them by the Criminal Records Bureau are in place. The single central record is being correctly populated as these checks are completed. The Chair of the Governing Body (as proprietor) has had his checks undertaken through the DfE, as required. Checks on the governing body are complete and have been recorded.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

All but one of the regulations are likely to be met. The school is located in a 13th century barn conversion which is a listed building. It has been used as office space and has large windows with good natural light; it is well ventilated. There is open plan floor space which can be divided into smaller areas for teaching, or used as a large hall. See recommendations section below with respect to the numbers (120) to be accommodated. There is no major refurbishment required. The flooring is part carpet and part tiles, all of which is in a good state of repair and is provided with

underfloor heating. There are two mezzanine floors, one at each end of the barn, which have spiral staircases, these areas will be used for meetings and supervised activities; plans are in place to ensure that they are used safely. There are sufficient toilets for girls and boys and a separate disabled toilet that will also be used by staff. A designated area close to a washroom has been identified as a suitable facility for pupils who are feeling unwell. The dining area will be situated at one end of the large open space close to the kitchen. The school intends to provide some hot food two days a week if required; on other days the children will bring packed lunches that will be safely stored in a large fridge. The kitchen is to be re-fitted and as yet does not have a separate hand-wash basin. There is a suitable outdoor play space. The whole of the play space will be enclosed by a boundary fence ensuring that pupils will be safe while on site. All visitors will be requested to enter the school by one door which will be locked during school hours. Parents will be able to drop their children off and enter the school only during designated times. There are several parking spaces available for staff and enough for parents to drop off and collect children safely.

In summary, in order to meet the requirements in full, the school should

- ensure that the food preparation area has a hand-wash basin separate from the sink with hand drying and facilities and soap (paragraph 23(l)).

Provision of information

The provision is likely to meet all the regulations.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The provision meets all regulations.

Recommendation to the Department for Education

Registration

Is registration recommended **YES**

The school can be registered and allowed to open on receipt by DfE of evidence of improvement in relation to the following matters:

- ensure that the headteacher and all permanent staff who have direct contact with the children undertake training to a standard set by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (paragraph 7)

- ensure that the food preparation area has a hand-wash basin separate from the sink with hand drying and facilities and soap (paragraph 23(l)).

Recommended number of day pupils: 120

Recommended age range: 4 - 11

Recommended gender of pupils: Mixed

Recommended type of special educational needs: Not applicable.

Inspectors: please explain here any difference between the number of pupils the school applied to register and the number you have recommended:

The school had initially requested registration for 420 pupils but, as this temporary accommodation was not suitable for such a high number, it was agreed that 120 pupils would be accommodated in the present premises. This is the number the school would hope to have as their total intake for the next two years.