

Advice note for a pre-registration inspection of an academy/free school/studio school/university technical college (UTC)

School name	Marchbank Free School
DfE registration number	841
Unique reference number (URN)	1422
Inspection number	422316
Inspection dates	26 July 2013
Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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Information about the inspection

This inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.¹

Context of the school

Marchbank free school is to be located in Mowden Hall which is a large Victorian house built as part of a country estate. Recently the Department for Education has used the building as it is situated in close proximity to their main suite of offices in Darlington. It has been established to provide for primary aged pupils who have, or are in the process of gaining, a statement of special education needs for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BESD). Pupils will come from Darlington and the nearby areas. The sponsor for the free school is The Education Village Academy Trust that operates four academies at the Education Village campus about three miles from Mowden Hall. The free school aims to work in partnership with parents and the local authority to provide a specialised and holistic education so that pupils who cannot easily manage in mainstream schools can develop in a healthy and balanced manner. The free school will ultimately admit up to 30 pupils of primary age but the establishment of the school will be staged in accordance with the completion of building and renovation work. It will open with 17 pupils aged 7 to 11 years who are registered for enrolment on opening in September 2013 by using one wing of the building that is almost ready for occupancy. Almost all of the staff employed for the free school are currently working at one of the Education Village academies and many of the pupils enrolling for September 2013 will come to this special school from one of the academies.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The free school is likely to meet all of the regulations but implementation could not be seen. The particular needs of the pupils are supported by the policies being established. For example, it is planned that the curriculum should be thoroughly engaging so that pupils experience success in learning, thus encouraging positive personal development during their time at the school. The behaviour management policy indicates an emphasis on encouraging pupils to take some responsibility for their own behaviour through, for example, restorative practices. They will contribute to the local community through gardening and allotment programmes, taking part in school coffee mornings for local residents and establishing links with a local primary school for competitive sports.

A programme of trips and visits will enhance the citizenship curriculum to ensure that pupils find out about the public institutions and services of England including the

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/99

workings of civil and criminal law. The personal, social and health education courses will make use of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials to encourage pupils to live and work in tolerance and harmony with others of different faiths and cultures. Through off-site education and by having a planned programme of visitors into school pupils will come into contact with people from different cultures and religions and learn how others work and live. The proprietorial body has already implemented policies in its academies relating to equal opportunities and these will be used at Marchbank. They indicate that political and religious extremism will not be tolerated. The admissions policy will promote equality and the rights of all regardless of disability, ethnic background, language, culture, faith and gender.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

All but one of the regulations are likely to be met. The required policies and procedures are all in place including safeguarding, the management of behaviour, anti-bullying, safe recruitment and first aid. The headteacher and one other member of staff have considerable experience in child protection work through their previous work at The Education Village Academy. They have undertaken recent training to ensure their suitability as designated persons for safeguarding. All staff appointed have undertaken training in first aid and all will receive refresher training before the school opens in the basic awareness of safeguarding and child protection, first aid and fire safety so that the requirements are likely to be met. Suitable policies for health and safety, including fire safety and the associated risk assessments are in place. However, the school is yet to receive a visit from the local fire authority to finally confirm that the arrangements for fire safety are appropriate. A risk assessment for the premises is in place. Admissions and attendance registers will be kept electronically, backed up and printed as required.

In order to meet the regulations in full the free school should:

- obtain a report from the local fire authority and ensure that it is provided to the Department for Education (paragraph 13).

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

All regulations are likely to be met. Almost all of the new staff are transferring to the free school from the academy schools of The Education Village. The proprietorial body has undertaken the required checks to ensure the suitability of the staff. The headteacher has undertaken training in safer recruitment and has implemented the Education Village Trust safe recruitment policy to ensure that all of the required checks will be undertaken on staff appointed in the future including any from an agency. All required checks have been carried out on the trustees who form the proprietorial body of the school. A suitable single central register of checks has been established and completed to date. The school does not intend to employ supply staff but understands the range and nature of checks to be made should the situation change.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The free school is likely to meet all of the regulations. The part of the school to be used from September is ready to be occupied except for decoration work that is being completed to a satisfactory standard work. The contractor will hand over the building in completed stages throughout the next year. Detailed plans for the premises and accommodation were scrutinised and all parts were visited. The inspector spoke at length with the headteacher and the contractor's site manager about the project. The Education Funding Agency, the Department's delivery agent, is managing the building project and the Department will wish to monitor progress directly with the agency.

The premises and accommodation are suitable for the proposed primary curriculum. The building is largely made up of good-sized rooms that will serve as classrooms and offices with plenty of space for the proposed number of pupils to be registered. There are sufficient toilets for staff, students and visitors with a regulated hot water supply and suitable medical facilities have been provided. Plenty of outside play space is available including for physical education and games. The school intends to eventually make use of adjoining woodland as a forest school and in order to do this it will employ the services of teaching staff already working for the Education Village Trust academies who are qualified and have experience in operating in this way. Initially, hot food will not be prepared on site and an arrangement will be made with a nearby school for the preparation of dinners. Where drinking water is provided these facilities are labelled.

Provision of information

The provision is likely to meet all the regulations.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The provision is likely to meet all the regulations.

Recommendation to the Department for Education

Registration

- **YES. The school can be registered and allowed to open on receipt by DfE of evidence of improvement in relation to the following matters:**
 - the Department for Education must receive a satisfactory report from the relevant fire authority (paragraph 13).

If registration is recommended, please state:

Recommended number of day pupils: 30

Recommended number of boarders: 0

Recommended age range: 4-11 years

Recommended gender of pupils: Mixed

Recommended type of special educational needs: BESD.

Note: The Department should obtain confirmation from the school before it opens that the planned building works have been completed as the school expands.