

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

School name	Thames Valley School
DfE registration number	n/a
Unique reference number (URN)	1494
Inspection number	422405
Inspection dates	10 June 2013
Reporting inspector	Sarah McDermott

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
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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

The proposed Thames Valley School is to be located on the site of a former local authority comprehensive school in Tilehurst on the outskirts of Reading. This free school is sponsored by the National Autistic Society (NAS), has no religious affiliation and is due to open on 3 September 2013. It will cater for young people with statements of special educational needs for autism, including Asperger syndrome, who live in Berkshire and the neighbouring counties. The school has applied to be registered to admit up to 50 boys and girls in the age range 4 to 16 years. Sixteen pupils between the ages of 6 to 13 years are registered ready for enrolment to start in the autumn term. The school's vision states: 'We want a world where each child with autism is seen as an individual and where educational provision is tailored to meet their needs and give them the best possible start in life. The vision of the NAS is for a world where all people living with autism get to lead the life they choose'.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school is likely to meet all the regulations, but implementation could not be seen. The school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies set out a framework within which pupils will be encouraged to develop an understanding of right and wrong and the consequences of personal decisions. They are well tailored to the needs of pupils with autism. The policy entitled 'Understanding own diagnosis – what autism means to me' plans to promote self-knowledge and self-confidence to prepare pupils for life outside school. Curriculum planning shows that the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well embedded, with opportunities for pupils to learn the importance of being active, responsible citizens who are valued in their community. Themes include analysing different sources of information from different viewpoints and studying a range of religions and cultures in the locality.

Extended learning will take the form of after-school clubs or attending other groups in local schools or the community. This will include taking part in a local community volunteer project. The curriculum plans to introduce pupils to the civil and criminal law and the role of public institutions. It aims to promote respect for the fundamental British values of democracy and rule of law. Planned themes include: 'How do rules and laws affect me', 'Local democracy for young citizens' and 'My

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

community and me'. The proprietors have ensured that the planned curriculum, including provision for pupils' personal development, is free from partisan political or religious views and that, where any political views are discussed, a balanced view is always presented.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Documentary evidence indicates that the vast majority of regulations are likely to be met. All the required policy documents have been produced, including comprehensive policies for safeguarding, behaviour management, anti-bullying, first aid and administration of medicines. The principles of safer recruitment are being applied effectively to the current recruitment process. The designated person for child protection has been trained to the required level and is a fully qualified trainer herself. She has training firmly organised for all staff before the school opens. First aid requirements are met. Suitable policies have been prepared for all required aspects of health and safety and for fire safety but fire safety risk assessments have not yet been completed and a report from the fire authority has not been arranged.

The school's plan for staff deployment shows a keen awareness of the needs for close supervision of pupils with autism. The E-Safety policy promotes the safe use of the internet by pupils and includes a 'pupil acceptable use policy agreement'. Admission and attendance registers will be maintained electronically and their formats meet requirements. The school's access plan makes a commitment to providing equality of access for disabled pupils and includes a plan to increase accessibility over three years.

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

- comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by producing a fire risk assessment and arranging a report from the fire authority (paragraph 13).

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The school's planning for the completion of all required checks on the suitability of staff and implementation to date indicate that all regulations are likely to be met. To date, all required checks have been completed for the proprietors and for staff appointed. These are recorded on a suitable single central register. Checks are completed and entries on the register updated as new staff are appointed. Criminal record checks have been properly requested for all governors. The school is aware of its responsibilities should supply staff be appointed in the future or volunteers taken on.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school is likely to meet all the regulations. The school is to be located on the site of a former local authority school in Tilehurst. The old school is currently in the process of being demolished so the new building could not be inspected yet. Detailed plans for the premises and accommodation were scrutinised and a discussion held with the foundation's representative and the site manager. Initially only 16 pupils will be admitted between the ages of 6 and 13. The premises are suitable for the relevant curriculum to be provided for these pupils in September 2013 and will be extended as more pupils are admitted in following years. Plans indicate that classrooms are of adequate size and sufficient in number for the planned September intake.

The building has been designed with the welfare of pupils with autism very much in mind. The school has sufficient washrooms with plans for each to have colour-coded doors to help autistic pupils. The proprietors have ensured that water from all taps is potable and labelled as such. Drinking water is available outside the washrooms. Plans include a suitable medical room and also a special needs hygiene room. The building complies with all necessary standards to allow it to be used as a school for autistic pupils. The school proposes to use the adjacent leisure centre for physical education. Inspection shows that the centre has safe and appropriate changing and showering facilities. Plans for the site show that it will be securely fenced with adequate play and recreation areas. Plans indicate 'autistic-friendly' planting with no thorns or dropping buds and seeds.

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

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:

- comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by producing a fire risk assessment and arranging a report from the fire authority (paragraph 13).