

Advice note for a pre-registration inspection of a free school

School name	Stour Valley Community School
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Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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Context of the school

Stour Valley Community School is situated in the village of Clare, near Sudbury in Suffolk. It serves the village of Clare and surrounding villages in a rural area. It occupies a large site, adjoined on one side by gardens of residential properties. A large community playing field, sports pavilion and police station are on another side. Although the school plans to educate up to 540 students aged 11 to 16 years, the 169 boys and girls to be admitted in September 2011 will be in Years 7 to 9 only. Students are mainly White British and there are none who speak English as an additional language. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The majority of students will come to school by bus.

The school intends to open as a free school on 1 September 2011. The predecessor school was a middle school that is being officially closed by the local authority on 31 August. However, the building was released to the trustees when students left on 22 July. Following an unsuccessful campaign by parents and members of the local community to keep the school open as a secondary school, the trustees, led by the Chair of the Parish Council, presented the Department with a business plan to create a secondary free school on the site, and this was accepted. Since then, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been recruited. Some staff are new, others have been taken on from the predecessor school. There is an extensive building programme, underway at the time of the inspection, which is due for completion in July 2012. During the visit, a portion of the school was being made ready for students' arrival in September. The school will 'grow into' Years 10 and 11 with this cohort.

The school's mission is to be 'by the community, for the community and in the community'. It aims to provide a secure, stimulating and inclusive centre of academic excellence at which students from all backgrounds and faiths are equally valued. The school will not have any specialism. It plans to work closely with local colleges to provide vocational education for students who wish to follow this pathway.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school is likely to meet all regulations although implementation could not be seen on this visit. Programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE), including citizenship and careers education, are to be taught within tutor time, which occupies 25 minutes of each school day. The PSHE programme includes sex and relationships education, drugs and alcohol awareness, and enterprise education. Schemes of work are being developed using Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) units so that all the required elements will be taught. The behaviour policy makes clear the arrangements for rewards and sanctions, as well as expectations of attendance and punctuality, being prepared for lessons and learning, and of doing homework. Students will have opportunities to take responsibility as peer supporters

and prefects, to contribute to the school and local communities, and to learn about how society works. Religious education will be taught according to the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus during lessons of one hour each week. There is to be a programme of celebration of festivals, and raising awareness of cultural diversity is to be an integral and important part of the curriculum, given the mainly mono-cultural profile of students.

There is to be a strong focus on the place of students within the school, local and wider communities. For instance, the programme of additional activities, which is to run in the last period of the day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week, is to include sessions run by local people, such as the owner of a local fishery. The programme includes sporting and cultural activities. There will also be visits, such as to the theatre and art galleries.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school is likely to meet all regulations although implementation could not be seen on this visit. Policies on how to safeguard students, including anti-bullying, behaviour, safer recruitment and child protection contain all the required guidance. The designated person for child protection has suitable and current training in multi-agency procedures and both she and the headteacher have completed safer recruitment training. An induction period for all staff, including cleaners, administrative and catering staff is to be held before the school opens and this will cover child protection basic awareness as well as procedures for the general welfare, health and safety of pupils. Separate training for governors is planned. Rotas for supervision cover arrivals and departures on buses and show well-considered placement of staff around the school site at break and lunchtimes.

There is a comprehensive health and safety policy which sets out when and how checks will be carried out and who is responsible for carrying out these. Contractors are in the process of being appointed, for instance for checking the water supply. A fire safety consultant from Essex Fire and Safety has already been appointed and the recent fire risk assessment shows a good level of fire safety. Nonetheless, and because of the ongoing internal refurbishments, a further risk assessment is to be carried out once the refurbishment of spaces to be used from September 2011 is completed. This will be done before students are admitted at the end of August. There are suitable arrangements for recording sanctions, admissions and attendance. The school has a plan showing how it will increase access for those with disabilities.

The school can demonstrate that it follows the required procedures when recruiting staff, including correctly recording the checks carried out. Similarly it has suitable procedures for checking those who will work in the school but are contracted by other employers.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

All regulations are likely to be met. Those staff who worked in the predecessor school have had fresh checks made on their identity, qualifications and suitability to

work with children, including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. The trustees and governors have been subject to enhanced CRB checks too. All checks have been entered on a well-maintained single central record. Although the school does not plan to use supply teachers, as it has employed cover supervisors, there are suitable procedures for checking these, together with volunteers and members of the local community who are to be involved in additional activities.

Premises and accommodation of schools

The school is likely to meet all but one of the regulations. The two-storied school building was built in the 1950s and added to in the 1980s. It is a structurally sound building. Most of the windows are new and double-glazed: those that are not are to be replaced as part of the refurbishment. New lighting and a heating boiler are included in the work being done. Carpeting and some flooring is to be replaced and there will be a full programme of internal decoration, new furniture and information and communication technology equipment.

In addition to the refurbishment, there is to be some new building and all is set to be completed by July 2012. The premises will be extended to include more facilities for: science; design and technology, including textiles and food technology, and graphics; and music. There is also to be a performing arts room, an activity area and a special educational needs and/or disabilities suite. Fitted furniture in laboratories is being changed so that it is a suitable height for older students. A community centre, not owned by the predecessor school, is being incorporated as part of the refurbished building. It will be used by the public in the evenings and will be locked down from the rest of the school.

Following completion of the work being carried out this summer, there is to be a deep clean of the part of the building being used by students before they are admitted. Building work will continue to parts not used by students. However, it is likely that in September 2011 there will be sufficient accommodation, refurbished to a high standard, to enable students to learn safely and securely.

There are suitable facilities for indoor physical education, including showers. Outdoor facilities are good. They include tennis courts and a large field, which is enclosed by fencing. This has been breached in parts and these holes are to be repaired before the school opens. There is also a gate in the fence of one of the adjoining houses. The school realises that this needs to be made secure but wishes to approach the matter carefully and sensitively in order to maintain good relationships with its neighbours. It is not likely that this will be dealt with by the time the school opens in September 2011. Security arrangements at the main entrance to the building are being strengthened as part of ongoing building work.

There is also a securely enclosed outdoor swimming pool. This is not going to be used for at least three years, because of budgetary constraints. There are three houses on the school site. Two are to be used by site staff and one is to be mothballed for the time being.

In summary:

- the perimeter fencing around the school must be secured so that occupiers of adjoining residential properties do not have access to the school field (paragraph 23(d)).

Provision of information

The provision of information is likely to meet all the regulations.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The procedures for handling complaints meet all regulations.

Recommendation to the Department for Education

Registration

Is registration recommended? **YES**

For number of day pupils: 540

For number of boarders: 0

For age range: 11–16

For gender of pupils: Mixed

YES, the school can be registered for the above and allowed to open on receipt of evidence of improvement of:

- the arrangements for the grounds: securing the perimeter fencing around the school so that occupiers of adjoining residential properties do not have access to the school field (paragraph 23(d)).