

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

School name	School of Science and Technology Maidstone
Department for Education (DfE) registration number	886/4019
Unique reference number (URN)	144716
Inspection number	10148514
Inspection dates	22/05/2020 to 03/06/2020
Reporting inspector	Niall Gallagher, Her Majesty's Inspector



Information about the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted at the request of the Secretary of State for Education. It was carried out under section 99(1) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.¹

In carrying out this type of inspection, inspectors assess the extent to which the school is likely to meet 'The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014' when it opens.²

The inspection was carried out during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As a result, we could not visit the school site or meet with the proposer in person. The inspector held telephone discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and a range of school leaders. The inspector also held a telephone discussion with the chief executive officer (CEO) and governors. The inspector reviewed the architects' plans for the permanent school site and viewed a virtual tour of the school. The inspector scrutinised information available on the school's website and reviewed a range of policies and procedures. Using the available information, the inspector is able to give sufficient assurance that the school is likely to meet the independent school standards.

Information about the registration

The school is seeking registration as a free school for:

Number of day pupils	1,300
Age range	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Type of special educational needs	Not applicable

Context of the school

The School of Science and Technology Maidstone will open in September 2020 in a new, purpose-built building. The school will be part of the Valley Invicta Academies Trust (VIAT). VIAT currently operates eight primary and secondary schools in Kent. The school plans to offer a specialist curriculum with a focus on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. The school will open to 180 Year 7 pupils in September 2020 in response to local demand for additional secondary school places.

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

² www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule/made. Part 1 to Schedule 1 is not reported against because it does not apply to academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs.

Advice to the Secretary of State for Education

Overall outcome	The school is likely to meet all the relevant independent school standards when it opens.
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Compliance with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part. Leaders have developed clear and detailed policies that seek to promote fundamental British values and develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Leaders have thought carefully about how the personal, social, health and economic curriculum will support the wider curriculum. This will be further enhanced by a thoughtful assembly programme. The school's code of conduct is built on respect. Leaders want pupils to demonstrate respect for themselves, for others and for the environment around them. Leaders have plans for the school to play an active part in the local community. For example, there are plans in place for pupils to work with the local council to keep the area clean and tidy. Leaders also have plans for pupils to contribute to the work of the trust by supporting younger pupils in neighbouring primary schools.

Leaders aim to promote democracy and the democratic process through 'loud' pupil voice. This will involve the establishment of a school council. Pupils will be involved in decision-making on a range of issues. For example, in the early days, pupils will be able to choose the names and colours of the school houses. Leaders will also seek pupils' views on how well they think they are learning.

Leaders plan to promote diversity and celebrate difference. Leaders have plans to celebrate religious festivals and have established international links with schools in China and Singapore. This aspect of the school's provision is likely to be strong.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part. The school will adopt a range of trust-wide policies that have been adapted to suit the new school. Safeguarding policies are clear, detailed and in line with the latest guidance from the Secretary of State. Leaders are clear about the local risks for pupils including county lines and gang violence. They have also carefully considered the current risks associated with COVID-19.

Leaders have a clear plan in place to ensure good conduct and behaviour. The behaviour and anti-bullying policies promote good behaviour. Leaders will adopt a thoughtful system of rewards and sanctions. Leaders are keen to celebrate positive behaviour and plan to do this through weekly bulletins, newsletters and achievement evenings. Leaders plan to take a proactive approach to anti-bullying through the promotion of respect and tolerance.

Leaders have thought carefully about the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. They have plans to support them well.

Leaders have plans to ensure that the school premises are safe and secure. They have considered fire safety as well as how pupils will be supervised before, during and after school. Suitable first-aid, health and safety and risk assessment policies and procedures are proposed.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards in this part. Leaders have adopted a template for the single central register that is used in other schools within the trust. The single central register shows that the required checks on adults who will work in the school are being made and recorded. Appropriate checks are also made on governors and trustees. This information is also recorded on the single central register. The information recorded includes the date on which the checks were made. Leaders have had safer recruitment training and are able to demonstrate convincingly that safer recruitment practices are being used when recruiting staff.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

The school is likely to meet all the standards in this part. The school building is purpose built. It is spacious and well proportioned. The school building benefits from extensive grounds. There are outside tennis courts and a purpose-built sports centre. The sports centre will be used periodically by other schools within the trust. The main school building is three storeys high. Each floor is accessible by a lift and has suitable toilets and drinking facilities. There is a medical room on the second floor. This is suitable and includes a sink and space for a bed. The medical room is next to a toilet with a shower. The classrooms are light and airy. They have been enhanced with panels suspended from the ceiling to ensure good acoustics. On the ground floor, there are fire exits to ensure that pupils, staff and visitors can evacuate the building quickly in the case of an emergency.

Part 6. Provision of information

The school is likely to meet the standards in this part. The school's website is well presented and easy to navigate. The website includes helpful information for parents including school policies and contact information. All of the information that should be made available to parents is available to them.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The school is likely to meet all the standards in this part. The complaints policy is thorough and fully compliant. It is based on a similar policy that is already used successfully in other schools within the trust. The policy is in writing and is available to parents from the school website. The policy sets out the different stages of the complaints procedure. It contains all of the required steps and sets out appropriate timescales for the efficient handling of complaints.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

This standards in this part are likely to be met. Leaders, including the CEO, trustees and the headteacher, have a wealth of experience running schools successfully. They have adopted many of the principles, practices and policies that are operating successfully in other schools within the trust. Leaders demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards and are likely to fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. Leaders have prioritised pupils' safety and have plans to actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

The school is likely to meet the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders plan to adopt a comprehensive equalities policy that is currently used in the other schools within the trust. The school has been designed with accessibility in mind. For example, there is a lift so that disabled pupils can access all parts of the school and there are accessible toilets on every floor. Leaders have plans to ensure that the curriculum and school building are suitably adapted for all pupils. They also have plans to ensure that information is available to parents in an accessible format.

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