

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

School name	The Fusion Academy
Department for Education (DfE) registration number	855/7000
Unique reference number (URN)	147858
Inspection number	10148523
Inspection dates	29/06/2020 to 01/07/2020
Reporting inspector	John Lawson



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, the chief executive officer (CEO), the chair of trustees, the trust safeguarding leader and the special needs coordinator. The inspector viewed a virtual tour of the permanent school site, reviewed the architects' plans for the permanent site, 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	80 (24 on opening)
Age range	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Type of special educational needs	Communication and interaction needs

Context of the school

The Fusion Academy aims to meet the needs of young people with autism and with communication and interaction needs. All pupils will have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The proposed school will be part of a new multi-academy trust, the Open Thinking Partnership. The impact of COVID-19 has slowed the construction of the new site and premises. Leaders anticipate that the school site will be fully completed in September 2020. Pupils will attend a site at a nearby secondary school, which is part of the proposed trust, until October 2020.

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.

In its first year, the school will accept pupils in key stages 2 and 3. Leaders intend to increase the number of pupils each academic year, until the school eventually reaches capacity.

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 the requirements for this part. In discussions and the documents provided, leaders demonstrate their intent to promote a supportive and inclusive school culture. Policies set out clear aims and ambitions that relate to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and personal development that leaders intend will be linked closely to their specific needs. There are frequent references showing how leaders aim to promote pupils' age-appropriate understanding of protected characteristics. Leaders speak with conviction of how the school will promote equality of opportunity, meet the specific needs of the pupils to prepare them for life in wider society and achieve their aspirations.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The evidence suggests that the proposed school is likely to meet all the standards for this part. Amendments were made to some policies during the inspection to ensure that they are compliant with necessary guidance. The safeguarding policy meets requirements and includes sharp emphasis on safer recruitment. The emphasis that leaders place on understanding the additional vulnerabilities that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have is a strength. This includes a focus on e-safety. Initial and ongoing planned staff training includes approaches to behaviour management, which are detailed in the behaviour policy. Leaders plan that this will include personalised approaches that will be linked to pupils' EHCPs.

The health and safety policy meets requirements and is complemented by a comprehensive maintenance schedule of checks. Leaders provided a fire safety strategy. However, leaders currently do not have a completed fire risk assessment as the building is still being completed. Leaders anticipate that the fire risk assessment will be completed shortly. Leaders have arranged fire warden training for August 2020 for three members of staff. It is essential that these are completed so the school can meet the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Documents relating to risk assessment show that leaders are considering possible hazards for when the school opens. Their plans cover a wide range of school activities. Risk assessments are general at this stage. Nevertheless, leaders have clearly planned systems to put into place. They speak with clarity about how their policies and procedures will be applied.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards for this part. The single central register of recruitment checks meets requirements for different personnel, including for trustees and the CEO of the trust. Discussions with leaders show they

have expertise, experience and relevant training. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of recruitment requirements and describe with clarity the procedures and systems they intend to put into place. Some staff have only been very recently appointed. Leaders must ensure that all checks, once completed, are recorded in their recruitment files and the central record of recruitment checks.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

The premises are not completed. The inspector is only able to provide limited assurance about some aspects of the premises, such as the temperature of water, acoustics or signage. As far as can be ascertained, based on discussion with leaders, school plans and a virtual tour of the site, the proposed school is likely to meet the requirements for this part. Leaders have clear plans and oversight, and know what is required. The evidence suggests the proposed school will be spacious, well lit and have all appropriate facilities. The grounds are extensive and will offer additional opportunities for pupils, such as Forest School. The premises plans include hygiene, medical, withdrawal and sensory rooms. Leaders' plans show how the school is designed to support pupils with SEND.

Part 6. Provision of information

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards for this part. The current website includes some of the information the school is required to publish. Leaders' plans show they are aware of what needs to be published by the time the school opens.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The proposed school is likely to meet the requirements of this part. The complaints policy meets requirements, although some amendments were made during the inspection. The procedure is comprehensive and clearly outlines the procedures that parents can follow should they have a complaint. The policy details for parents and leaders the relevant stages of a complaint and timescales.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

The proposed school is likely to meet all the standards for this part. Leaders provide a clear rationale for opening the school. Senior leaders are appropriately qualified and have relevant experience. Leaders have well-thought-out plans for preparing to open and establish the school. They have identified relevant priorities and know what needs to be done and put into place. Leaders show ambition for the prospective pupils. They speak with conviction about how the school will meet their specific needs. They are committed to raising aspirations and preparing pupils for their future lives.

The evidence shows that the proposed school is likely to meet the safeguarding requirements and establish effective procedures. Leaders are aware of the specific additional vulnerabilities their pupils may well have.

Leaders have sound understanding of the independent school standards. However, this is sometimes not as sharp as it could be for some parts in order for the proposed school to meet the standards consistently, and so that trustees can hold leaders to account. Some documents and policies required changes that leaders were able to make during the inspection.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

The proposed school is likely to meet all the requirements for this part. The accessibility plan shows leaders' intended actions before and after the school opens. The plan includes a clear statement of aims and how the proposed school will ensure pupils' participation in the curriculum. It details how leaders aim to ensure pupils' access to the physical environment and make information available. The plan references relevant legislation, including the SEND code of practice. The plan provides a secure structure. Leaders aim to clarify specific details when the school opens and pupils are formally on roll.

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