

VTC Independent School

Unit 2 Century 2000, St Michael's Road, Sittingbourne ME10 3DZ

Inspection date

30 October 2019

Overall outcome

The school is unlikely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4

- The proprietor wants to provide education for pupils at risk of exclusion or in danger of leaving mainstream school without any qualifications. Pupils may be admitted with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The vision is to make the curriculum 'accessible and fun'. The proprietor wants the school to be ambitious for its pupils. He intends to base what pupils will study in the national curriculum but 'strip it back' to make it manageable for particular pupils.
- The proposal is that the school will specialise in engineering. There are schemes of work in place for this. This inspection focused on the non-specialist elements of the curriculum.
- Existing plans and schemes of work do not provide enough detail of what will be taught and when across the full proposed age range.
- The proprietor wants to focus mainly on pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11. The subjects pupils of this age will study are English, mathematics, science, engineering, photography, 'lifelong learning' and physical education (PE). Among other things, 'lifelong learning' will incorporate personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and human and social studies. In preparing to open the school, most of the work so far has been invested in making plans for these year groups. Preparations for these year groups are much further forward but are still not advanced enough.
- For Years 9 to 11, the mathematics and 'lifelong learning' schemes of work provide evidence that the relevant standards are likely to be met. For instance, the mathematics schemes of work take account of likely differences in pupils' aptitudes, including pupils with SEND.
- The schemes of work for the other subjects in the non-specialist curriculum have flaws and do not do this. For example, the PE scheme of work does not represent the offer of PE the proprietor intends to make using a local leisure centre. It only covers an identical seven-week programme for all year groups. The photography scheme of work is not detailed enough, consisting only of topic headings. By contrast, the English scheme of work is detailed and ambitious. However, plans do not cater for

pupils who start with low levels of literacy or pupils with SEND.

- The schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 are focused on a narrow range of subjects and lack detail.
- Plans for pupils that are post-compulsory school age are embryonic. The school will only offer places for pupils post-16 who need to retake previous qualifications or who have not yet attempted qualifications usually gained pre-16. The proprietor proposes that the school will design this provision for each individual. He intends to work in partnership with other providers if necessary. However, the basis for developing individual post-16 provision is underdeveloped. Valuable aspects of the curriculum, such as 'lifelong learning', do not extend post-16.
- Current arrangements for PE for pupils of all ages are unlikely to meet requirements. The proprietor intends to use a local leisure centre, offering pupils daily sessions after school. However, it is not clear how the proprietor will make at least one of these lessons compulsory. There are no other PE sessions as part of the timetabled school day.
- The PSHE education programme is likely to provide a valuable and rich range of teaching for pupils. It emphasises learning about equality. Pupils are likely to explore the meaning and importance of the protected characteristics identified by the 2010 Equality Act. The PSHE education programme is designed to be flexible to respond to pupils' needs. This is likely to support staff in dealing with relevant issues as they arise, both in the school and beyond.
- The proprietor has a secure understanding of the requirements for careers education and a clear strategy for meeting these. There are plans in place to use a range of providers with relevant expertise. The proprietor has begun establishing links with local schools to help ensure that the information offered to pupils of all ages is timely, accurate and helpful.
- The proprietor is only planning to employ qualified teachers. He intends to seek and employ teachers that are passionate about their subjects. The proprietor, in his dual role of 'director of learning' and headteacher, will jointly oversee the quality of teaching. The proprietor's plans prioritise teachers' ongoing professional development.
- The proprietor has sourced tools to assess pupils' capabilities. Assessments are likely to take place promptly on entry and regularly thereafter. The proprietor proposes to share assessment outcomes with parents and carers. The assessment policy makes provision for a system of grades in relation to course criteria. However, this is very focused on pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11. There is no clear framework for assessing younger pupils' progress against their curriculum.
- Some of the standards contained within this part are unlikely to be met.

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

Paragraph 5

- The 'lifelong learning' sessions are likely to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The proprietor's policies, plans and statements of intent set out a clear and consistent

commitment to promoting British values. The importance of this is insightfully and explicitly linked to part of the proposed work to safeguard pupils.

- There is time in the planned programme of teaching to explore in detail concepts such as individual liberty, the rule of law and democracy. If done well, this is likely to promote a deepening understanding of these concepts for pupils.
- There are plans to teach pupils about a range of world religions. The clearly stated aim is to promote understanding and tolerance, and challenge directly any negative views. The proprietor hopes that giving pupils the right knowledge will positively influence their behaviour, moral choices and social conduct.
- The proprietor proposes to develop pupils' learning about other cultures through the theme of food in the local community. He wants to develop pupils' understanding of different cultures and races within the community. Teaching will explore their heritage and how different people have come to exist together in Sittingbourne.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7

- The safeguarding policy does not pay enough regard to important guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The proprietor submitted a policy to the Department for Education in advance of the inspection, as required. He then presented a different and much-shorter policy on the day of the inspection. Neither meet requirements, either individually or as a combined safeguarding and child protection policy.
- The school does not have a safeguarding policy which sets out important details such as how the school will prevent and deal with peer-on-peer abuse. It does not have a safeguarding policy that is grounded in the school's particular context or that pays attention to the additional challenges when safeguarding pupils with SEND.
- The proprietor also intends to be involved initially in the daily running of the school. Procedures for allegations against him are not secure.

Paragraphs 9, 10

- As 'director for learning', the proprietor intends to lead behaviour management. Drawing on prior experience, he conveys a suitable understanding of behaviour management and the type of pupils the school plans to educate. The behaviour policy places a helpful emphasis on establishing a culture and climate which enable pupils to behave well. The policy sets out reasonable sanctions, including for bullying. While there is an aligned exclusion policy, the proprietor intends to only use exclusion as a last resort.
- The anti-bullying policy contains a bold statement of intent that bullying is against the ethos of the school and will not be tolerated. The policy and approach make clear how bullying will 'hinder the process of learning'. This policy takes clear account of pupils who may be particularly vulnerable to bullying, in particular linked with protected characteristics. There is a plausible strategy to prevent, identify and respond to possible bullying. The policy makes a strong commitment to working closely with pupils and parents as a central part of the strategy.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

- The health and safety policy commits to a range of procedures for keeping staff and pupils safe. There is also a suitable first-aid policy in place. The new receptionist is a qualified first aider and there are plans for more staff to be trained as they start. The proprietor's staffing plans mean that pupils are likely to be properly and safely supervised.
- The proprietor has ensured that a fire risk assessment has been carried out by an external consultant with the relevant expertise. The risk level was evaluated as low.
- An admissions register is in place. After space to record at least one emergency contact was added during this inspection, it is likely to meet requirements.
- While a book is in place for taking an attendance register, the proprietor does not know the legal requirements for recording pupils' attendance. The register does not contain any guidance to help with this, such as how many times per day attendance should be noted and what information must be recorded about any absences.
- There is a risk assessment policy and some externally commissioned risk assessments are in place. However, the policy and risk assessments are not well aligned. The risk assessments have not been carried out as suggested by the policy. This suggests that the policy is unlikely to be effectively implemented. The commissioned risk assessments are generic and not sufficiently grounded in the context of the proposed school.
- Not all of the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Paragraphs 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

- The proprietor does not know about all the required checks of the suitability of staff. He has commissioned external support which has helped ensure that most requirements of this part are likely to be met. For example, there is now a format in place to support the forming of a suitable single central record. However, at the time of the inspection, the proprietor did not know that prohibition from teaching is different from the barred list check. The proposed checklist of pre-employment procedures does not include the prohibition from teaching check.
- There are plans to commission external personnel support to help undertake the suitability checks. However, without knowledge and understanding of the full range of required checks, the proprietor is unlikely to be able to ensure that all requirements of this part are continually met.
- Some of the requirements contained within the standards of this part are unlikely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28

- There are two well-equipped classrooms. These will provide ample space for eight pupils each, as the proprietor proposes. One of the classrooms has a computing suite as an integral annex. The workshop is spacious and would accommodate a further eight pupils at a time, with appropriate supervision. The proprietor is keen to emphasise that he will not compromise the quality of education for a greater number of pupils.
- The premises also house a comfortable kitchen and rest area, where the proprietor proposes to provide breaks and meals for pupils.
- There is unlikely to be any problem with light or sound in classrooms.
- There are sufficient toilets with integral hand basins for pupils. There is a separate toilet allocated for staff. There is plentiful hot and cold running water which does not present a scalding risk. Drinking water is clearly labelled. External lighting is likely to provide for safe access.
- The first-aid room contains a sink and is near a toilet.
- There is a shower, although the proprietor plans to use off-site facilities for PE.
- The standards contained within these paragraphs are likely to be met.

Paragraph 29

- The outside space is limited. There is a shared car park with allocated space at the rear and a small public grassed area at the front. The grass is directly adjacent to a main road, with no barrier or protection. The proprietor does not intend to use this for pupils to play outside due to safety concerns. There are no other plans in place to provide outside space for pupils to play, as required by the standards.
- The standard in this paragraph is unlikely to be met, meaning that not all requirements of this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- The school is in the process of designing and launching a new website. The website includes the current safeguarding policy. However, because the policy itself does not meet requirements, the standard here is also unlikely to be met.
- Most information and policies that should be available on request are ready to be presented. These include policies for admissions, behaviour, bullying and exclusions. However, there is no information available about what the school offers for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proprietor is well informed about the sort of information the school is required to provide once the school is operating. He plans to send parents written information about their child's progress and attainment more often than required by the standards.
- Some of the requirements of this part are unlikely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- The complaints policy sets out clear and laudable intentions to create a climate where concerns can be voiced early and informally. The policy makes clear the confidential status of complaints records. However, the policy does not meet all requirements of this part.
- The complaints policy does not allow for a formal complaint to progress to a hearing before a panel if a parent remains unsatisfied. The policy only talks about involving a complaints panel at the first formal stage at the discretion of the headteacher. The associated requirements of a formal complaints panel are also not covered by the policy.
- As there are no arrangements to take a formal complaint further, it does not give clear timescales for this part of the process.
- The standard contained within this paragraph is unlikely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- The proprietor has an ambitious and positive vision for the type of school he wishes to create. He is determined to 'get it right' to provide the best possible experience for pupils. He wishes to recruit 'experts' with 'a passion' for teaching their subjects to vulnerable pupils who have previously not been enabled to succeed.
- Plans for the proposed school are more advanced than at the time of the first pre-registration inspection.
- The proprietor admits that he does not have all the knowledge and skills required to run the school single-handed. The proprietor is not able to demonstrate that all standards are likely to be met if the school is registered. Because standards relating to safeguarding are unlikely to be met, pupils' well-being is also unlikely to be assured. He intends to appoint a headteacher who will be responsible for the daily running of the school.
- The proprietor plans to serve underneath the headteacher as 'director for learning' initially as the school becomes established. Being both the employer and the subordinate of the headteacher has the potential to cause tensions. How the proprietor plans to counter this is not spelled out in crucial policies, such as those relating to complaints and safeguarding.
- There was no headteacher in place at the time of the inspection. Therefore, it was not possible to assess their likely capacity to ensure that the standards are continually met.
- The proprietor proposes that the school will have an advisory board. It will have local industry, business and training links, as well as members from an educational perspective. He has already secured the commitment of the relevant people. The role of the board will be to provide a 'wider community perspective'. It will be intended to advise how the pupils can be prepared for a purposeful life in this community and a meaningful contribution to it. It will not have a focus on the day-to-day running of the school or the independent school standards.
- The standard in this part is unlikely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor was unable to present an accessibility plan that meets requirements on the day of this inspection.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements, as set out in the annex of this report.

Proposed school details

| | |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 147205 |
| DfE registration number | 886/6156 |
| Inspection number | 10126530 |

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

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|-----------------------------|--|
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School status | Independent school |
| Proprietor | Vocational Training Centre Ltd |
| Chair | Paul Thompson |
| Headteacher | Not appointed |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £14,900 |
| Telephone number | 01795 899 240 |
| Website | www.vtcindependentschool.co.uk |
| Email address | Paul@vocationaltrainingcentre.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 29 July 2019 |

Pupils

| | School's current position | School's proposal | Inspector's recommendation |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Age range of pupils | Not applicable | 11–18 | 11–18 |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | Not applicable | 36 | 24 |

- Based on the available spaces designated for teaching and learning and the proprietor's current plans for organisation and proposed group sizes, the school can reasonably accommodate up to 24 full-time pupils.
- Plans for a suitable quality of education are more advanced for pupils aged 13 to 16. However, Part 1 of the standards would still not be fully met for pupils of this age. Consequently, it is not relevant to recommend an altered age range of pupils from that which the school's application proposed.

Pupils

| | School's current position | School's proposal |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Gender of pupils | Not applicable | Mixed |
| Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age | Not applicable | Up to 36 |
| Number of part-time pupils | Not applicable | Up to 36 |
| Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities | Not applicable | Up to 36 |
| Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan | Not applicable | Up to 36 |
| Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan | Not applicable | Up to 36 |

Staff

| | School's current position | School's proposal |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff | Not applicable | 1 per every 4 pupils |
| Number of part-time teaching staff | Not applicable | 0 |

Information about this proposed school

- The school aims to cater for pupils aged 11 to 18 who are at risk of exclusion or have been excluded from school. While the school does not intend to provide wholly or mainly for pupils with SEND, it is likely to include pupils with a range of SEND. The school intends to cater for the following types of need:
 - cognitive and learning needs
 - specific learning difficulties
 - moderate learning difficulties
 - behavioural, emotional and social development needs or difficulty
 - communication and interaction needs

- speech, language and communication needs
- autism spectrum disorder.
- The chair is the sole director of Vocational Training Centre Ltd, which is named as the proprietor.
- The proprietor intends that the school will specialise in engineering. The premises include a large integral motor mechanics workshop.
- The proposed school is located in a former industrial unit on a small industrial park in Sittingbourne, Kent. The school has allocated parking but does not have its own grounds.
- The school proposes to use the nearby Swallows Leisure Centre for PE. No other off-site provision will be used.
- The school will have no religious character or ethos.
- Following the very recent departure of the former headteacher from the project, at the time of this inspection, the school did not have a headteacher.

Information about this inspection

- This was the second pre-registration inspection. The first was carried out 29 July 2019.
- The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, if the Department for Education decides to register it.
- Before and during the on-site visit, the inspector scrutinised a wide range of the school's documentation against the independent school standards and associated legislation and guidance.
- The proprietor took the inspector on a tour of the proposed premises.
- Throughout the on-site inspection, the inspector held discussions with the proprietor about all parts of the standards.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clive Dunn, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in subparagraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills; and
 - 2(2)(g) where the school has pupils above compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their needs.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admissions and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 18(2)(b) no such person carries out work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction.
- 19(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 19(2)(a) a person offered for supply by an employment business to the school only begins to work at the school if the proprietor has received-
 - 19(2)(a)(i) written notification from the employment business in relation to that person-
 - 19(2)(a)(i)(aa) that the checks referred to in paragraph 21(3)(a)(i) to (iv), (vii) and (b) have been made to the extent relevant to that person.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in subparagraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this subparagraph is-
 - 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff ('S'), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable-
 - 29(1)(b) pupils to play outside.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in subparagraph (3) is made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate; and
 - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in

paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.

- 32(3) The information specified in this subparagraph is-
 - 32(3)(b) particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with EHC plans and pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which-
 - 33(c) sets out clear time scales for the management of a complaint;
 - 33(f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with subparagraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
 - 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
 - 33(h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
 - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is-
 - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about;
 - 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
 - 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with subparagraph (e) and-
 - 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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