

VTC Independent School

Unit 2, St Michaels Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3DZ

Inspection dates

10 March 2020

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4

- Working with a new headteacher, the proprietor has ensured that plans and proposals have been significantly developed and refined since the previous pre-registration inspection.
- The proprietor wants to open a school that will provide education for pupils at risk of exclusion, or in danger of leaving mainstream school without any qualifications. His vision is to make the curriculum 'accessible and fun'. He intends to base what pupils will study on the national curriculum, but to '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.
- The proposed curriculum is likely to offer the required breadth to pupils. The subjects the school intends to offer are: English, engineering, mathematics, biology, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, geography, physical education (PE) and art.
- Schemes of work are more detailed and complete than at the time of the previous inspection. Understandably, the headteacher wishes to give specialist teachers the flexibility to further develop and adapt plans for each subject when they are appointed. This process will be important for the effective implementation of the curriculum policy in order for the associated standards to be met once the school is operating.
- Leaders recognise that raising pupils' literacy levels is likely to be a fundamental priority. Leaders anticipate that pupils' literacy capabilities on entry will often not be as advanced as they should or could be, partly due to the likelihood that pupils will have missed sometimes significant periods of school. The curriculum policy commits to

making suitable provision to help pupils compensate for previous deficits in phonics, reading and writing.

- It is highly likely that many pupils who attend will be identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are also astutely aware that other pupils may have SEND that have previously been missed. The headteacher intends that staff will use recognised initial assessments when pupils start in order to identify any issues and commission specialist assessments where necessary. In particular, leaders report that they have contacts for speech and language assessment and therapy. The school intends to offer therapy, including speech and language therapy, either externally commissioned or using suitably trained staff.
- The proprietor has purchased a widely recognised scheme to support the delivery of the PSHE curriculum. Plans for PSHE education incorporate aspects of religious education and citizenship. Schemes of work indicate careful regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 in considering what pupils should be taught.
- Leaders are ambitious in their desire to ensure that the school's careers advice and guidance offer exceeds the minimum requirements of the independent school standards and matches good practice in the maintained sector. Plausible plans are in place for how pupils will be offered the impartial careers advice to which they are entitled.
- Post-16, the school proposes to offer students opportunities to re-take or complete qualifications in English and mathematics at either GCSE or functional skills levels. In addition, the offer will include further qualifications in the specialist field of engineering, as well as employability, financial education and PSHE education. A main motivation for the proprietor is to ensure that students do not end up not in education, employment or training.
- As at the time of the previous inspection, the proprietor continues to be adamant that he will exclusively employ qualified teachers. He is determined that teachers should be passionate about their subjects. Taking account of the specialisms of the proprietor and headteacher, an early priority will wisely be the recruitment of an English or literacy specialist.
- Leaders convey a definite commitment to prioritising the continuing professional development of staff they appoint. The headteacher intends to ensure that a proportionate focus is placed on strengthening subject or curriculum expertise, including in phonics. Leaders also intend to provide relevant training in specific aspects of SEND.
- The headteacher proposes to tailor arrangements for assessing pupils' capabilities and progress according to the subject and course. There is a reasonable structure in place for reporting this to parents and carers. Where subjects are not leading to a GCSE or functional qualification, the school proposes to use other accredited awards wherever possible.
- If the proprietor ensures that all proposed arrangements are implemented effectively, the standards contained within this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraph 5

- As found at the time of the previous inspection, the school's arrangements for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are likely to meet requirements. Policies, plans and statements of intent continue to set out a clear and consistent commitment to promoting British values.
- The proposed PSHE education curriculum includes opportunities to explore in detail concepts such as individual liberty, the rule of law and democracy. There is an assembly schedule in place which shows content about a range of potential national and world events, aimed at broadening pupils' knowledge and understanding beyond their immediate experience.
- The school's clearly stated aim is to promote understanding and tolerance according to the protected characteristics, 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. He is keen to develop a close relationship with police in the local area to promote positive interaction, communication and links with young people.
- Clear protocols and guidelines are in place to help prevent the promotion of partisan views by either staff or visiting speakers.
- The headteacher proposes to audit the promotion of British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to ensure that this threads through all aspects of the school's work as intended. His aim is that this process will also raise staff awareness of their own actual and potential contribution to the school's teaching in these areas.
- If leaders implement their plans effectively, the standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7

- The proprietor has produced a new safeguarding policy since the previous inspection that pays close attention to relevant statutory guidance. It identifies the designated safeguarding lead and is published on the school's new website.
- The designated safeguarding lead has been recently trained to an appropriate level. Leaders convey a secure understanding of a positive culture around safeguarding and how to create this. The headteacher has worked in the locality for a long time and is aware of some of the particular contextual risks that pupils may face.
- Leaders understand the principles of effective record keeping with a view to building a complete picture of the safety and welfare of each pupil. They know where to go for additional help or advice with particular safeguarding concerns.
- Procedures for dealing with any concerns about staff, including the proprietor or headteacher, are in line with statutory guidance and set out clearly in the school's policy.

Paragraphs 9 and 10

- The proposed behaviour policy conveys a convincing understanding of the types of pupils who are likely to attend, as well as the intended climate and ethos to support successful behaviour management. As such, the policy aims to be flexible and 'centred on rewarding positive behaviour and building positive relationships'. Its fundamental underpinning principles include clearly communicating expectations, providing strong role models and taking a positive and predictable approach. The policy provides for a range of reasonable rewards and sanctions.
- The anti-bullying policy and strategy undertake to take steps to promote a positive and inclusive culture. Leaders intend to explore bullying and associated themes through the curriculum. The policy also makes clear that they will take alleged or actual bullying seriously and deal quickly and effectively with such incidents. The policy summarises that preventing and tackling bullying is 'everyone's responsibility'.

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

- The registers and procedures for recording and responding to pupils' absences and attendance are likely to meet requirements if diligently and accurately followed and kept.
- A revised risk assessment policy now reflects the risk assessment processes followed when setting up the school. A wide range of risk assessments has already been completed in anticipation of the school becoming operational, including for the workshop and for walking to the park for recreation.
- A number of the requirements of this part remain likely to be met as they were at the previous inspection, as set out below.
 - 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 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 that, if properly maintained, is likely to meet requirements.
- If the proposed policies and procedures are implemented effectively, the requirements of the paragraphs within this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21

- The policy and procedures for safer recruitment have been implemented effectively in terms of staff appointed so far, or with regard to those involved in setting up the school.
- A suitable format is in place for recording statutory and advisable safer recruitment checks on a single central record. Space is allocated for recording relevant checks for

staff, supply teachers, contractors and volunteers, as necessary. Existing advisory board members have had the relevant screening.

- The standards contained within this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29

- Since the previous pre-registration inspection, the proprietor has proposed new arrangements for providing outdoor space for recreation. He proposes that the school will make use of a local park which includes a large grassed area and is only a short walk away from the premises. There is a suitable risk assessment in place for this purpose.
- There are two well-equipped classrooms that will accommodate up to 12 pupils each. In addition, the workshop is spacious and one of the classrooms has a computing suite as an integral annex. The proprietor is keen to emphasise that he will not compromise the quality of education for a greater quantity of pupil numbers. With careful timetabling, there is space to accommodate the proposed number of pupils.
- As found during the previous inspection, the other requirements of this part continue to be likely to be met, as explained below.
 - The premises 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 that 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 in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- The school has now launched its website. It contains the required policies and information, including that which must either be published or available on request. Particulars of provision for pupils with SEND is threaded through a range of the available policies and documents.
- The proprietor is well informed about the sort of information the school is required to provide once the school is operating.
- This standard is likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- A detailed complaints policy is available on the school's website. This policy has been thoroughly revised since the previous inspection, but it retains the obvious desire to create a climate where concerns can be voiced early and informally.
- Should a concern or complaint not be resolved easily, the policy makes clear the subsequent steps and procedures for the complaint to be taken further. Throughout, the policy makes clear the complainant's rights and the timeframes by which the school will aim to investigate and respond to any issues raised.
- The standard contained within this paragraph is likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- With the support of the new headteacher, the proprietor has provided evidence that the independent school standards contained within the other parts are likely to be met.
- The proprietor is now able to demonstrate that leaders have systematically checked all requirements. The proprietor and headteacher convey sufficient knowledge and understanding of the standards, and the commitment, to suggest that it is likely that the standards would be continuously met if the school were operating.
- The headteacher has current, relevant and successful experience of senior leadership in similar independent provision with a track record of meeting the standards. He conveys suitable knowledge and understanding of statutory processes for pupils with SEND, including those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- The proprietor has already secured the involvement of external advisers to form an advisory board. These people offer a diverse range of relevant experience and expertise. However, these arrangements are at a very early stage. For example, advisers have not met formally as a board and there are no written terms of reference in place.
- If leaders implement their proposed plans and policies consistently and effectively, this standard is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has ensured that there is an accessibility plan in place that covers all the required elements of improving access to the curriculum, information and the physical environment.
- The plan details ongoing steps the proprietor has already taken in preparations and plans for the school, as well as planned action in the forthcoming months to improve accessibility.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	147205
DfE registration number	886/6156
Inspection number	10145423

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.

Type of school	Secondary alternative provision
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Vocational Training Centre Ltd
Chair	Paul Thompson
Headteacher	Nicholas Rogers
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 standard inspection	30 October 2019

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	13–18	13–18
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	32	32

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 32
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	Up to 32 if pupils are dual registered
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	Up to 32
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	Up to 32
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	Up to 32

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 13 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 a director of Vocational Training 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 and other facilities for PE. No other off-site provision will be used.
- The school will have no religious character or ethos.
- The headteacher has been appointed since the previous pre-registration inspection. At present, he is part time for one day a week, although his time allocation is intended to increase incrementally as the school opens and the roll increases.

Information about this inspection

- This was the third pre-registration inspection. The first was carried out 29 July 2019 and the second on 30 October 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 (DfE) 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.
- Throughout the on-site inspection, the inspector held detailed discussions with the proprietor and headteacher about all parts of the standards. He also toured the premises and visited the local park intended for use as outdoor space.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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