

VLC

St Margaret's Centre, 103 Whitnash Road, Whitnash, Leamington Spa
CV31 2HB

Inspection date

28 July 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 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h) and 2(2)(i)

- Leaders have ensured that there is a written curriculum policy in place. This is supported by a wide range of schemes of work and teaching plans. Leaders intend for the curriculum to be flexible in order to provide a personalised education for each pupil.
- Leaders are determined that this school will be a place of learning and achievement both academically and socially. Their mantra is to support pupils to learn how to learn so that they can be successful and have improved life chances. Leaders are committed to ensuring that pupils obtain GCSE qualifications, especially in English and mathematics.
- The curriculum has been carefully thought out so that it is likely to ensure progression in skill and knowledge acquisition. Much of it is based on the national curriculum. It provides pupils with the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects. These include English, mathematics, science, history, French and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Subjects such as art, music and physical education (PE) are also planned for and will be taught by subject specialists.
- Leaders plan to teach the three strands of science to GCSE level where appropriate. They have developed a link with a local secondary school so that pupils can use the science facilities to carry out practical work.
- Leaders propose that religious education will also be taught. The scheme of work introduces pupils to the main world religions as well as to different philosophies, such as humanism. Key questions such as 'where do people get their ideas of right and wrong?' are threaded through the scheme to help pupils consider different points of view.
- The planned timetable shows a commitment to the regular teaching of PSHE education. This is a wide-ranging programme. It includes aspects of human and social

education, life in modern Britain as well as teaching a range of life skills. Through this programme, pupils will learn about equality and diversity.

Paragraphs 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii) and 2(2)(e)(iii)

- Leaders have developed a comprehensive careers policy so that pupils can access appropriate advice and guidance. A careers and transitions specialist is employed specifically to support pupils in this area. Leaders are focused on raising aspirations and supporting pupils to access further training or employment.
- The PSHE education curriculum includes a focus on careers education in all year groups. Leaders hope that pupils will be able to complete work experience and have created a logbook for this purpose. It is proposed that links with a local college will be used to help pupils see the broad range of options available to them.

Paragraphs 3, 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i), and 3(j)

- Leaders have already recruited several experienced teachers and support staff. Leaders are keen to ensure that staff have good subject knowledge. Several key staff have first degrees in English, mathematics or science.
- Leaders intend that teachers will adapt the schemes of work to meet pupils' individual needs. It is likely that teachers will be supported to use a range of teaching methods and approaches to meet the needs of the pupils. Various resources have already been ordered to support the curriculum. Leaders state that they are committed to further developments once pupils' individual needs are known.
- The headteacher is a fully qualified and highly experienced teacher. She has high expectations and is determined to ensure the school provides each pupil with a high-quality learning experience. She has drawn up procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning over time. These include checking a wide range of evidence, such as a regular scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Leaders recognise the importance of continuing professional development and training for all staff. A schedule of regular meetings and training sessions has been devised with a clear focus on teaching and learning.

Paragraph 4

- Leaders have developed an assessment policy and framework. This includes a baseline assessment on entry to the school to determine pupils' academic and personal needs. There are plans for other formative and summative assessments throughout the year. The policy makes provision for these to be reported to parents.
- Leaders propose to follow the four-part cycle of assess, plan, do and review to set appropriate targets for each pupil, particularly for those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(v), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5(d)(ii) and 5(d)(iii)

- Leaders have drawn up a comprehensive scheme of work to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. It links with the PSHE education

programme and aligns closely with the school's values of care, hard work, respect, integrity, helping others and belonging.

- Developing pupils' self-esteem and confidence is one of the fundamental reasons why the trustees want to establish the school. They demonstrate a deep commitment to working with pupils who have previously struggled to access education successfully.
- Leaders intend to provide many and varied opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of British values, different faiths and traditions. For example, a series of weekly themes has been created for discussion at lunchtime while adults and pupils eat together.
- Leaders plan to help pupils understand how they can contribute to society. Through developing a sense of belonging, pupils will be encouraged to contribute to the school community.
- The school's policies make positive references to all the protected characteristics set out in legislation. A comprehensive visits and visitors policy explicitly states that pupils will not be exposed to partisan views.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7, 7(a) and 7(b)

- Safeguarding arrangements are strong because leaders have a good understanding of how to keep pupils safe. Both the trustees and the headteacher have extensive experience in this area. They understand how to record concerns and make referrals to external agencies.
- Leaders have a suitable safeguarding policy in place. It is up to date and meets all current statutory requirements. Leaders plan to review this annually.
- The policy indicates that pupils will learn how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE education curriculum.
- The headteacher is already trained as a designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Other senior leaders are due to complete their training in August. Safeguarding training is included in the induction package for all new staff. It includes areas such as sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism, and e-safety.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Paragraphs 9(a), 9(b), 9(c) and 10

- Leaders have developed two policies to support the management of behaviour. These include a relationships and praise policy, which sets out how pupils are supported to manage their own behaviour, and a maintaining a safe environment policy, which explains the duty of care members of staff have for each pupil.
- There is a suitable anti-bullying policy that defines the different forms of bullying. It explains how staff can identify and report concerns about bullying as well as how the school will respond to such issues. Underpinning this policy is the aim to support pupils and help them develop the skills to deal with any situation.

- Leaders have developed a record form to enable them to track the nature and frequency of any behaviour incident. They intend to analyse these regularly in order to take any action necessary to prevent a reoccurrence.
- Leaders have a wealth of experience in managing behaviour. They have a strong vision for how staff are likely to support pupils to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 16(a) and 16(b)

- Leaders have a detailed and fully comprehensive health and safety policy. They work with an external specialist to audit the premises on an annual basis. Leaders are quick to address any issues. They ensure that all relevant checks are undertaken and that the premises are maintained to a good standard. This policy and practice are likely to ensure that pupils are kept safe and well.
- Fire risk assessments have been carried out and evacuation procedures are in place. Leaders shared the fire logbook, which details the fire drills and equipment checks that have already taken place. They have held discussions with the fire service to ensure that they are taking every available precaution. Leaders have taken appropriate action to ensure that the proposed school is likely to meet the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- A first-aid policy is in place and leaders intend to train all members of staff in basic first-aid procedures. This is planned for the autumn term.
- A written risk assessment policy is in place. Leaders shared a range of risk assessments that have already been carried out, such as for cookery lessons and visiting the local shop. Leaders have a clear understanding of hazard identification and the implementation of control measures.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Paragraphs 14 and 15

- The school ethos is one of belonging, and leaders want to help pupils feel part of the school community from the outset. The intention is that pupils are always with an adult. Staffing ratios and proposed timetables appear to support this.
- Leaders have set up an admissions register to record the details of any pupils who attend the school. They understand how to set up attendance registers and of the requirements to record any absence using the official Department for Education (DfE) codes.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(i)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(c), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b),

21(4), 21(5), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a) and 21(7)(b)

- The single central record (SCR) is already in place. The required checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and young people have been undertaken on the staff already appointed. This includes the headteacher, deputy headteacher, several teachers and support staff.
- Members of the board of trustees are included on the SCR. Leaders are awaiting the outcomes of section 128 checks on trustees and governors.
- Leaders follow the procedures laid down in their safer recruitment policy when recruiting staff. They have a similar policy in place for the recruitment of additional trustees. Leaders have extensive experience in recruiting staff. They demonstrate a secure understanding of how to do this safely, including checking gaps in employment history and seeking at least two referees for each candidate.
- The school does not intend to operate with supply teachers. However, leaders are aware of the procedures they should follow in the event of employing agency staff.
- Leaders are clear about their responsibility in carrying out checks on volunteers and external consultants who may work with the school. They plan to include them on the SCR.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 25, 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a) and 28(2)(b)

- The proposed school is situated in a church centre. It is used by the church outside school hours. Currently the building is used to offer alternative provision. Access to the building is controlled and all visitors can be checked.
- There is ample space across the whole building, providing various rooms of different sizes. Leaders are clear about how these will be used to meet pupils' needs in the most effective way. It also includes an office and toilets for staff and pupils. The staff toilet also serves as a disabled toilet. There is a well-equipped main kitchen and a smaller kitchenette where leaders propose drinks and toast can be made each morning.
- There are appropriate toilet facilities, which are well maintained. There is running hot and cold hot water. Leaders check the hot water regularly and keep a record of the temperature. They are in the process of having thermostatic mixing valves fitted to reduce the risk of scalding.
- Drinking water is readily available and labelled accordingly.
- Leaders have suitable plans in place for the installation of a shower.

Paragraphs 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(1)(c) and 24(2)

- A room has been designated as a medical room. It is a suitable space and has a bed and first-aid kit. It is next to a toilet facility. Leaders have ordered a mobile sink unit so that the room has a washing facility. Leaders say that the room may be used for other purposes depending on need, although this will not be for teaching.

Paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 27(a) and 27(b)

- Accommodation throughout the building is of a good standard and meets all the requirements for the health, safety and welfare of pupils. This includes suitable acoustics and lighting. Some rooms are carpeted, while others have wooden floors or tiles. All teaching rooms have a good source of natural light. There is ample and effective external and interior lighting.

Paragraphs 29(1), 29(1)(a) and 29(1)(b)

- The pupils will have access to outside space for both PE and for play. One area has a soft-fall surface and provision for a small football game or basketball. It is surrounded by a secure fence.
- An additional secure outside space provides a quiet area for pupils to sit and chat or eat lunch outside on fine days. Parts of the space are shaded by trees.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f), 32(1)(g), 32(1)(h), 32(1)(i), 32(1)(j), 32(2)(a), 32(2)(b)(ii), 32(2)(d), 32(3)(a), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(c), 32(3)(d), 32(3)(e), 32(3)(f) and 32(3)(g)

- Leaders continue to update the school's website, ensuring that information relates to the proposed school and not the previous alternative education provision. Leaders are fully aware of the requirements of what the school should publish on its website. They also know to provide information in an alternative format upon request if it is not on the website.
- The website is easy to navigate. Information for parents includes the admission policy and process as well as pupil induction booklets. The school's values and ethos statement, complaints policy and information relating to behaviour and exclusions are readily available.
- The safeguarding section of the website contains a wealth of useful information for parents. It includes the child protection and safeguarding policy as well as an e-safety policy and how the school will manage allegations. It names the DSLs and external agencies parents can contact for advice.
- Leaders have appropriate documents in place ready to share pupils' progress with their parents. They discussed with the inspector how these will be supported by termly updates for parents. The headteacher described what information they will publish on the website when reporting the school's academic performance.
- The contact details for the school and the board of trustees are available on the website. Leaders are keen to ensure transparency and openness in the way that the school is run.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 33(d), 33(e), 33(f), 33(g), 33(h), 33(i), 33(i)(i), 33(i)(ii), 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii) and 33(k)

- The complaints procedure is comprehensive and easy for parents to follow should they ever need to raise a complaint. Appropriate timelines and the right for parents to be accompanied at any panel hearing are included. Leaders stress that they hope to address any complaints informally in the first instance.
- Leaders understand their responsibility to keep written records of any complaints and the action taken to deal with them.
- The complaints policy is available on the school's website.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)

- Leaders have a wealth of educational experience. The trustees and the headteacher have run several alternative educational provision centres successfully for a number of years. They intended to register all of these but recognised during the inspection that only one site was suitable for registration as an independent school at this time. They demonstrate a secure understanding of the independent school standards.
- Leaders have a deep commitment to improving the life chances of pupils who have previously struggled to be successful at school. They have considered carefully the needs of prospective pupils and have a clear vision for how the school can meet them. Pupils' well-being and academic achievements are a priority for the trustees and the headteacher. Leaders are likely to fulfil their responsibilities to actively promote the well-being of pupils.
- Trustees are clear about how they will have oversight of the school's work and hold leaders to account. Systems are already in place to support this work. Trustees are in the process of going through a rigorous recruitment process in order to add additional members to the board.
- Leaders have ensured that these standards are likely to be met.
- All of the independent standards are likely to be met when the school opens.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have developed an appropriate accessibility plan for the proposed school. They are clear about how the physical environment, the curriculum, and the sharing of information can be enhanced for pupils with disabilities. The requirements of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are likely to be met.

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	148032
DfE registration number	937/6028
Inspection number	10155370

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	Independent school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	VLC
Chair	Rev. Brian Nash
Headteacher	Amanda Woodward
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19,500 to £23,850
Telephone number	07340820763
Website	http://www.lvlc.org.uk
Email address	amanda.woodward@lvlc.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Provider already operating

Number of pupils of compulsory school age	N/A
Number of pupils of compulsory school age who have an education, health and care plan, or who are looked after by a local authority	N/A
Total hours operating as a school per week	N/A
Total hours of teaching provided per week	N/A

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	N/A	9 to 16	9 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	N/A	40	40

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	N/A	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	N/A	20
Number of part-time pupils	N/A	20
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	N/A	Not yet determined
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	N/A	Not yet determined
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	N/A	Not yet determined

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	N/A	3
Number of part-time teaching staff	N/A	14
Number of staff in the welfare provision	N/A	0

Information about this proposed school

- VLC will be an independent school for up to 40 boys and girls aged between nine and 16 years. The school aims to open in September 2020. The school will offer both full-time and part-time places.
- The trustees currently run two alternative education provisions for 11 to 16 year olds, one of which is based on the proposed school site. This provision will be incorporated into the independent school when it opens.
- The proposed school aims to offer a small, calm centre with a focus on therapeutic care, restorative behaviour management and high academic standards. Many pupils are likely to have missed substantial amounts of schooling and have significant gaps in their learning.
- The trustees propose to provide for some pupils with an EHC plan. These pupils are likely to have a range of needs, including cognitive, specific and moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health needs, speech, language and communication needs and autism spectrum disorder.
- Although the school is operated by a Christian charity, it will not have a specific religious ethos. The ethos statement for the school states, 'VLC seeks to be a place where all pupils and staff are welcomed, valued and treated with respect. VLC does not seek to proselytise.'
- The school does not intend to make use of any off-site alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic of 2020. All of the inspection was undertaken on site, adhering to appropriate social distancing requirements. It was recognised that the pandemic had resulted in a delay to some aspects of the provision being ready at the point of inspection.
- This is the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- During the inspection, the trustees and headteacher asked the inspector to consider only the main school site in Leamington Spa for registration and not the proposed sites in Rugby or Stratford-upon-Avon. They also asked for the age range to be reconsidered. They proposed that the school admits pupils from the age of nine and not five, as on the application form. I agreed to this proposal.
- During the inspection, I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including that associated with the curriculum, behaviour and safeguarding. I visited the proposed site of the school in Leamington and had a tour of the premises. Discussions were held with two trustees and the headteacher. I also met a teacher and had discussions with one of the school's business managers.
- I took account of arrangements for pupils' welfare and safeguarding. The inspection work included reviews of the safeguarding policy, the school's checks on the suitability of staff, the health and safety policy and fire risk assessment.

Inspection team

Nicola Harwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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