

# Sandwell Learning Centre

Main Road, Alvescot, Bampton, Oxfordshire OX18 2PY

**Inspection date**

25 November 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 and 2*

- The proposed school's curriculum will be rooted in the national curriculum, but tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils in each phase of the school. Leaders intend that pupils will enjoy a bespoke curriculum offer that enables them to explore and develop their own personal interests while building on their differing starting points across a broad range of subjects.
- The written curriculum policy provides a foundation for staff to plan learning that meets the needs of all pupils at the school. The policy and accompanying schemes of work will be further reviewed and refined once the school opens and the specific needs of individual pupils, most of whom will have education, health and care plans, are known.
- Curriculum planning and a range of timetabled activities will provide for pupils' pastoral care and personal, social and health education. These include supporting pupils to understand and fully embrace the concept of British values, including tolerance and respect for their peers and others.
- The curriculum is designed to provide pupils with impartial careers advice and guidance. Leaders are clearly focused on developing high aspirations in pupils. This includes younger pupils, who will also have access to aspects of careers guidance to help them achieve their full potential as they move through the school.

#### *Paragraphs 3 and 4*

- The proprietor has already appointed most of the staff required by the proposed school. Specialist teaching and support staff will enable pupils to develop their knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects, including in vocational strands such as equestrian studies and bushcraft.
- Leaders place high importance on developing pupils' self-motivation and resilience. They want pupils to understand that it is alright to get things wrong, but also plan to give them the support to improve and learn from the mistakes they make.

- Leaders have a clear vision of the values that will underpin the school's culture. They will ensure that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Equality will be actively promoted through the wider curriculum and a wide range of special activities and events designed to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The school's assessment procedures set out carefully how teachers will assess pupils' learning over time. Appropriate academic baseline checks will be carried out as pupils enter the school, including assessments of their phonics and reading skills.
- Systems to gather information about pupils' social and emotional development are also comprehensive. School leaders and those in positions of governance will use this information to monitor pupils' outcomes closely over time.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

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

### *Paragraph 5*

- Leaders intend to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively through the taught curriculum, and by establishing a culture of tolerance and respect across the school.
- This will be a small and close-knit community. Leaders expect everyone to play their part. All staff are expected to act as role models to help pupils develop positive attitudes and to contribute confidently to the school community and wider society.
- Teaching and support staff have the appropriate qualifications and experience to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They understand that the development of pupils' social and emotional needs will need to be given a high priority if pupils are to thrive during their time at the school.
- The school day is designed to provide pupils with periods to reflect and work positively within a team. It is built on a unique concept linked to motor sports. Pupils will benefit from sessions at the start of the day to get them 'off the grid' and ready to learn. Scheduled 'pit stops' will enable pupils to reflect and call on the expertise of staff when they need academic or social and emotional support.
- Opportunities for pupils to take ownership of their own learning will also be given a high priority. Staff expect pupils to become confident learners who are able to contribute positively to life within the school, and extend this more widely into the local community.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

## Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

### *Paragraphs 6 and 7*

- Procedures to keep pupils and staff safe are a priority for leaders. Policies and systems that promote welfare, health and safety are fit for purpose and form the basis for a culture that takes safeguarding seriously.
- Staff are trained at a level appropriate to their individual responsibilities to keep pupils safe. This includes designated safeguarding leads and staff with specific roles such as

delivering first aid or oversight of recruitment. Regular updates are already in place to ensure that staff fully understand the potential issues and problems faced by pupils who will eventually attend the school.

#### *Paragraphs 9 and 10*

- Leaders have high expectations of how pupils will behave. Their expectations of how staff will pre-empt potential problems and provide a consistent approach to managing behaviour are also high.
- The school's policies for behaviour and preventing bullying are closely linked. Incentives for pupils to manage their own behaviour positively are clearly defined, as are the sanctions available to staff. Understanding the impact of poor behaviour on others will be underpinned by a restorative approach to dealing with problems if pupils are unable to control their emotions.

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

- The school has a clear policy to comply with relevant health and safety legislation. Key checks on facilities and equipment and procedures for fire safety are already in place. A fire risk assessment is already in place. Servicing of fire alarms, emergency lighting and extinguishers is carried out by external specialist contractors.
- The first-aid policy provides a basis for effective first aid. Most staff have already attended a one day first-aid training course. Key staff will receive additional training prior to the proposed school opening.
- The admissions and attendance registers will contain all of the information required once the school is open. Because the school is not yet open, pupils have not yet been accepted onto the school roll. Plans for the effective supervision of pupils are in place.
- The proprietor's risk assessment policy states clearly how risks are to be managed. Some key risk assessments are already in place. Others will follow prior to the proposed school opening. These include those for the use of specialist resources and equipment and for off-site visits, for instance.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

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

#### *Paragraphs 17, 18, 20 and 21*

- Leaders are knowledgeable about the checks that need to be made on adults coming into contact with children at the school. Recruitment procedures are comprehensive and supported well by specialists employed by the proprietor. All staff must complete a successful probationary period to ensure that they are well suited to working within the unique context of the school.
- The single central register of checks on adults is already in place and administered competently. Suitable checks have been carried out on staff employed at the school, as well as on members of the proprietor body. Leaders do not plan to employ agency or supply staff at the school.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

### *Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 31*

- The school occupies an extensive site on the edge of a small Oxfordshire village. Since the proprietor acquired the site earlier this year, a substantial amount of refurbishment has taken place. As a result, the facilities are finished to a high standard and very suitable for their intended use.
- The school benefits from extensive grounds, including woodland and more formally landscaped areas. These will be utilised to support staff in delivering the school's curriculum and extra-curricular activities, as well as providing pleasant surroundings for pupils to play outside.
- The lighting, space and acoustics in classrooms and in communal areas, such as the dining room, are all suitable. Outside, there is sufficient lighting to ensure safe passage in the dark.
- There are appropriate toilets and washing facilities for pupils and staff alike. All facilities have adequate water supplies, and the temperature of hot water is regulated appropriately. Drinking water is available and labelled as such.
- There is allocated accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils, as well as the short-term care of those who are sick or injured.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

## Part 6. Provision of information

### *Paragraph 32*

- The proposed school will not have its own website until it becomes registered. However, during the inspection, leaders demonstrated how the website will function and shared the key information that it will contain. This includes the school's safeguarding policy, which is compliant with current guidelines. Other key policies will also be available through the website or on request.
- Leaders have a strong understanding of all of the requirements of Part 6. Information regarding the proprietor, governance and leadership of the school will be available on the website. Leaders are fully conversant with the requirements to report on pupils' progress and attainment, as well as support the annual review process of pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

### *Paragraph 33*

- The complaints policy and procedures meet the requirements of Part 7. They set out clear timescales for the management of a complaint. There is provision for formal complaints to be heard by a panel of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the complaint.
- The complaints policy rightly stipulates that one of the members of the panel must be independent of the management and running of the school. It also states that

complainants have the right to be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish. The policy makes clear that any findings of a panel must be available to a complainant and, where relevant, to the person complained about.

- The headteacher is aware of the requirement to keep any copies of complaints confidential and available for inspection on the school premises.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34*

- Leaders and representatives of the proprietor demonstrate a good understanding of the requirements within the independent school standards. Most of the systems, policies and procedures that will be used at the proposed school are based on those established at the proprietor's other settings.
- School leaders are aware of their duty to actively promote the well-being of all pupils. They are also knowledgeable about their statutory duties to safeguard pupils.
- The school will have a governing body, known as the school board. This will be made up of directors and other leaders employed by the proprietor. Systems are in place for those in positions of governance to receive the key information that they will need to hold leaders to account for the quality of education the school will provide.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards.

## Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have a suitable accessibility plan. The plan sits within the accessibility policy and will be updated as appropriate once the school opens for pupils. The school is likely to meet paragraph 3 of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **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	148112
DfE registration number	931/6024
Inspection number	10158436

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	Other independent school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Limited
Chair	Julie Taylor
Headteacher	Julie Sadler
Annual fees (day pupils)	£94,531
Telephone number	01865 509 150
Website	None
Email address	julie.sadler@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	8 to 19	8 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	15	15

## 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 15

Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	Up to 15
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	Up to 15
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	Up to 15

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	5	6
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0

## Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is set in spacious grounds and situated in the Oxfordshire village of Alvescot. It was previously a conference centre, and was acquired by the proprietor in May 2020.
- The proposed school will offer specialised provision for up to 15 pupils aged eight to 19 years. It is expected that pupils will have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including social, emotional and mental health needs. It is expected that pupils will be placed at the school by local authorities. Most, if not all, will have education, health and care plans.
- The school will not use alternative provision in the first instance.



## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic of 2020.
- This was the first pre-registration inspection of the proposed school. The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Schools must comply with the independent school standards to be registered.
- The inspection focused on compliance with the regulatory requirements of the independent school standards, safeguarding procedures and Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
- The inspector toured the school's premises. He reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the single central register, safeguarding information, policies, and curriculum and assessment information.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The inspector also met with the proprietor's regional director of schools and a member of the proprietor's health and safety team. He also talked to the chair of the proprietor body on the telephone.

## Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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