

MEPA Academy Limited

29 Earl Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1PF

Inspection date

23 June 2021

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

Paragraph 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h)–2(2)(i)

- Despite the performing arts being at the heart of the proposed school's curriculum, leaders understand the importance of providing a strong academic foundation for pupils who will attend the school.
- The curriculum will be closely aligned with the national curriculum. An appropriate curriculum policy is in place. Schemes of work provided by the proprietor with the application show an adequate breadth of subjects to be studied at both key stage 3 and key stage 4.
- The proposed curriculum at key stage 4 includes English, mathematics and science, with a range of other choices for pupils, including music, art and design, languages and humanities. All subject pathways lead towards GCSE qualifications.
- The curriculum will be further supplemented by specialist provision in the performing arts. Drama, dance and music will form the backbone of this. Detailed programmes of study show what pupils will cover in ballet and commercial and contemporary dance, for instance. All vocational aspects lead to nationally recognised qualifications.
- Leaders propose that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) will be supported by specialist staff, including an experienced and qualified special educational needs coordinator.
- Pupils will have access to a comprehensive careers package throughout their time at the school. Leaders understand the importance of an independent element to this. They also understand that not all pupils will be able to progress into the theatre profession, hence their clear focus on the importance of the quality of education the school provides other than in the performing arts.

Paragraph 3–4

- The curriculum will be taught by qualified teachers, specialist tutors and professionals from the world of the arts. It is hoped that much of the staff base will be drawn from

professionals currently employed at the Junior School of the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts in London, which is due to close in July 2021.

- All staff employed at the proposed school will be specialists in their field. This includes those who deliver the academic aspect of the curriculum. Teaching in the vocational strand of the curriculum will be supplemented by visiting specialists from the theatre profession.
- The proposed school will have a strong ethos to promote equality and diversity. A programme to promote pupils' personal, social, health and economic education is in place, including a strand to cover relationships and sex education.
- Systems to assess the progress that pupils make are in place. These include the vocational strands of the curriculum, which will include examinations at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the independent school standards (the standards).

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

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- Leaders and staff will promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively through the taught curriculum and through establishing a strong bond of tolerance and mutual respect between staff and pupils alike.
- The vocational strand of drama will provide pupils with excellent opportunities to immerse themselves in the richness of African, Greek and Japanese theatre, for instance. Pupils will study music and dance from different cultures from around the world.
- Curriculum plans ensure that pupils will learn about British values, as well as actively promoting the development of pupils' self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Regular 'family lunches' will be part of day-to-day life at the school. The proprietor and headteacher see the school as a second family for all pupils.
- The proprietor and headteacher are able to articulate a clear sense of the ethos of the school. Teamwork and activities that develop pupils' confidence are very much part of the vocational curriculum. Pupils will benefit from a culture that promotes respect for others and for themselves.
- Leaders have set high expectations of themselves and staff. These include ensuring that pupils are not exposed to partisan political or religious opinions.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- The school has a safeguarding policy that broadly meets current requirements, although it lacks the contact details of key staff because they have not yet been

appointed. The policy is only available on request because the school's website is not yet complete.

- Leaders have yet to appoint a designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL and deputy DSL will be suitably experienced and trained.
- At the time of this inspection, the school did not have an adequate fire risk assessment. Nor were there clear records about when the fire alarm system or extinguishers had last been serviced. The single central register of checks on adults was also incomplete at the time of this inspection. Both these aspects have a negative impact on the safety of pupils and staff of the proposed school and need to be addressed if paragraph 7 of the standards is to be met.

Paragraph 9–16(b)

- The school has a behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy that are adequate for the purposes of Part 3 of the standards. Leaders will expect staff to have a consistent approach to managing behaviour. Induction training will include guidance on behaviour management for all staff.
- The school has health and safety and risk assessment policies. Both are fit for purpose and name the proprietor and headteacher as the key staff responsible for these aspects.
- The school does not currently have a recent fire risk assessment. The proprietor is in the process of arranging for this omission to be addressed.
- The school has a first-aid policy in place. The proprietor intends that key staff will attend appropriate first-aid training once they have been appointed and before the school opens.
- The proprietor intends that enough staff will be employed for the adequate supervision of pupils. Admissions and attendance registers will be maintained in accordance with paragraph 15 of the standards.
- Despite the school having a risk assessment policy, some key risk assessments are not yet in place. This includes an adequate fire risk assessment and a risk assessment for pupils using a local park during their break, for instance.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

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

Paragraph 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3), 21(1)–21(3)(b)

- At the time of the inspection, only the proprietor and the headteacher were entered on the single central register. No other members of teaching or support staff had yet been employed.
- Leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the requirements of Part 4. The single central register is incomplete and does not contain the information required because leaders are unclear about all the checks that need to be made before staff are employed.

- The headteacher has completed safer recruitment training. It is intended that the proprietor and other leaders, once they are employed, will also complete safer recruitment training, including in how to maintain the single central register.
- The chair of the school is the sole proprietor. There are no other directors or members of a board.
- The proprietor does not intend to use supply agency staff.
- The school is unlikely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2), 25–29(1)(b)

- The proposed school will be situated in a building already owned or part leased by the proprietor. Until recently, it was the site of the proprietor’s theatre college. The building is fit for purpose as a theatre school and contains ample teaching space, including dance, theatre and music studios.
- Pupils will also have access to a professional performance venue a short walk from the main school building.
- The school will have appropriate toilet and shower facilities for pupils and for staff. However, at the time of the inspection, these did not have an adequate supply of hot water. As such, it was not possible to check the potential risk of scalding. The proprietor has plans to address this.
- The school has a dedicated medical room, but at the time of this inspection, it was not equipped with a washing facility, and nor was it adequately furnished. The proprietor has plans to address this.
- Elements such as lighting (including external lighting), acoustics and sound insulation are all adequate. Drinking water is available and labelled as such.
- Because the school does not have an adequate fire risk assessment, it was not possible to say that the school’s premises are currently maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured (paragraph 25 of the standards).
- The school is unlikely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)–32(1)(g), 32(1)(j)–32(2)(b)(1), 32(2)(d)–32(3)(a), 32(3)(c)–32(4)(c)

- At the time of this inspection, the proposed school did not have a functioning website. The school’s safeguarding policy is available on request.
- Leaders are aware of the requirements of Part 6. Key policies are in place and available, although some lack details of the key staff responsible because they have not yet been appointed.
- Leaders are aware of the requirements of Part 6. They understand that key information must be published on the website once it is ready, or be made available

on request. This includes contact information for the proprietor and school policies, for instance. They also know about the additional information, such as pupil reports, that they must provide and to whom they should provide it.

- The school has an appropriate complaints policy that will be published on the website.
- The school is unlikely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33–33(k)

- The school's complaints policy and procedures are available on request. They set out clear timescales for the management of any complaint. The policy meets all of the requirements of Part 7. Leaders demonstrate that they have a clear understanding of the policy and how it will be implemented.
- Leaders plan to keep any copies of complaints confidentially and available for inspection on the school premises.
- The school is likely to meet all of the requirements in this part of the standards.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- Leaders were not fully ready for this pre-registration inspection. Their collective understanding of the requirements of the standards is not as strong as it should be.
- Most aspects that were found 'unlikely to be met' can be addressed relatively quickly. However, leaders should ensure that they work rapidly to address their own lack of understanding of the requirements of the standards, alongside their work to remedy the shortcomings identified in this report.
- The proprietor does not intend for there to be a governing body in the first instance. However, the proprietor does plan to employ independent consultants to advise her on the quality of different aspects of the proposed school. This includes the quality of education the school will provide and for key aspects such as safeguarding.
- Key staff have yet to be appointed. This includes those who will lead aspects such as provision for pupils with SEND. The proprietor has already identified individuals who may be suitable for many of the vacant positions at the school. She should be mindful of the requirements of appointing any staff, including the correct checks that must be made before staff start to work at the school.
- There is no doubt that the curriculum offer, and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils could be a strong aspect of the proposed school if it is approved. Leaders' intentions to promote pupils' well-being are clear to see. More now needs to be done to develop their understanding of the standards, so that all standards can be met consistently.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have compiled a suitable accessibility plan to improve access to the premises. Leaders intend to update the plan at appropriate intervals. The school is likely to meet paragraph 3 of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

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	148632
DfE registration number	886/6164
Inspection number	10195984

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 for performing arts
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Mandy Ellen Cook
Principal	Mandy Ellen Cook
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,000 to £15,000
Telephone number	01622 756 644
Website	None
Email address	mepacademy@btconnect.com
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	11 to 16	11 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	Up to 50	Up to 50

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 50

Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	Up to 50
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	0
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	0

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	6
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	4
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school will be situated in a building that is already owned or part leased by the proprietor in the centre of Maidstone, Kent. The building is ideally suited for its purpose as a school for the performing arts, containing a range of drama, dance and music studios. Pupils will also have occasional access to another high-quality facility currently used as a base for the proprietor's performing arts college.
- The school will provide a bespoke curriculum enriched by the performing arts. The school's programmes of study are similar to the national curriculum and will be delivered by suitably qualified teachers. The school's vocational offer will be taught by specialists from a wide range of performing arts, including professionals from the field of dance and drama.
- The school will be led and managed by the headteacher. At the time of this inspection, the headteacher was the sole member of staff, appointed on a part-time basis by the proprietor. However, the proprietor has well-advanced plans to fill teaching positions if the proposed school is approved.
- The school will not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.
- 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 main school building and another nearby facility owned by the proprietor. He reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the single central register, policies, and curriculum and assessment information.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and with the principal, who is the school's sole proprietor. The inspector also met with an educational consultant who is currently advising the proprietor and headteacher prior to the proposed school's opening.
- At the time of the inspection, no permanent teaching or support staff had been appointed other than the headteacher.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school standards

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.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005[12].
- 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)(a) no such person is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act where that person is or will be engaging in activity which is regulated activity within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 4 to that Act;
 - 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;
 - 18(2)(c) the proprietor carries out appropriate checks to confirm in respect of each such person–
 - 18(2)(c)(i) the person’s identity;
 - 18(2)(c)(ii) the person’s medical fitness;
 - 18(2)(c)(iii) the person’s right to work in the United Kingdom; and
 - 18(2)(c)(iv) where appropriate, the person’s qualifications;
 - 18(2)(d) the proprietor ensures that, where relevant to any such person, an enhanced criminal record check is made in respect of that person and an enhanced criminal record certificate is obtained before or as soon as practicable after that person’s appointment;
 - 18(2)(e) in the case of any person for whom, by reason of that person living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining such a certificate is not sufficient to establish the person’s suitability to work in a school, such further checks are made as

the proprietor considers appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State; and

- 18(3) The checks referred to in sub-paragraphs (2)(c) and (except where sub-paragraph (4) applies) (2)(e) must be completed before a person's appointment.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(2) The register referred to in sub-paragraph (1) may be kept in electronic form, provided that the information so recorded is capable of being reproduced in legible form.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
 - 21(3)(a)(i) S's identity was checked;
 - 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to 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 such a direction;
 - 21(3)(a)(iv) checks were made to ensure, where appropriate, that S had the relevant qualifications;
 - 21(3)(a)(v) an enhanced criminal record certificate was obtained in respect of S;
 - 21(3)(a)(vi) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(d);
 - 21(3)(a)(vii) a check of S's right to work in the United Kingdom was made; and
 - 21(3)(a)(viii) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(e),
 - 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

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including–
 - 24(1)(a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility; and
- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–

- 28(1)(b) toilets and urinals have an adequate supply of cold water and washing facilities have an adequate supply of hot and cold water;
- 28(1)(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.

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 role 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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