

MEPA Academy Limited

29 Earl Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1PF

Inspection date

26 August 2021

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

- Leaders have a clear vision for the education they intend the school to provide. Their planned curriculum combines specialist performing arts education with a more traditional range of secondary-school subjects. Pupils will learn dance, drama and music alongside their core curriculum of English, mathematics and science. They will also study art, humanities and Spanish. Opportunities to experience technological education will be planned into other subjects. Learning will lead towards nationally accredited qualifications by the end of Year 11, including GCSE.
- The written curriculum policy captures leaders' intentions suitably. This policy is reflected in appropriate long-term planning across the anticipated range of subjects. These plans support the promotion of fundamental British values and reflect leaders' aspirations for pupils to receive a broad and ambitious education.
- Subjects will be taught by specialist teachers, who are in the process of being recruited. Those already appointed have experience of teaching in similar settings. They have relevant subject knowledge and experience. Leaders have identified how they will monitor the quality of teaching across the school, bringing in external expertise to validate their views.
- Leaders have given careful thought to how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) will be supported with their learning. The appointed special educational needs coordinator brings useful experience to her role. She has a clear and appropriate plan for how she will contribute to the school's work to identify and meet any specific learning needs that pupils may have. Plans for ongoing staff training are suitably considered.
- Pupils will receive personal, social and health education (PSHE) as part of their curriculum. Planning incorporates relevant themes such as relationships, equality and discrimination and the influence of peers. Leaders intend making use of nationally available resources and local experts to help them train staff and deliver PSHE effectively.

- Plans are in place for pupils to receive careers information and guidance. The proprietor intends using her established links within the local and performing arts communities to support this work. Although leaders anticipate that most pupils are likely to wish to pursue a career linked to the performing arts, this may not be the case for all pupils. Leaders have thought about how impartial advice from an independent consultant or adviser can be made available for pupils to access.
- A written policy identifies how teachers and leaders will assess and monitor how well pupils are learning over time. Leaders expect this process to guide teachers in understanding what pupils can do and how they need to improve. Information will be shared routinely with parents and carers, via written reports and consultation events throughout the year.
- The proposed school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards if granted permission to open.

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

Paragraph 5

- Leaders demonstrate a thoughtful approach towards this aspect of the school's work. They have considered carefully how they will develop a positive, respectful ethos across the school when it opens and as the number of pupils grows over time.
- Opportunities for pupils to learn about a range of faiths and cultures are threaded through the curriculum. Themes addressed in PSHE look set to help pupils learn about living in a diverse society. Pupils will have the chance to explore cultural themes, for example through studying different plays in drama, learning about different styles and influences in art and through the texts they read in English.
- Leaders are keen for pupils to learn about democracy through their lived experiences in school. Their plans for a school council and for electing 'home students' are designed to support this aim. Leaders have also considered how they can weave learning about different methods of government into discussions as part of tutor time, assemblies and shared lunches.
- Pupils will have opportunities to contribute to the local area. For example, they will participate in termly productions and perform at community events, such as the Maidstone Christmas lights switch-on. The proprietor intends replicating charity fundraising activities that already occur within her other performing arts establishments, such as food collections for the homeless. Leaders hope that the school council will play a leading role in determining which causes will be supported and why.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 6 and 7

- Arrangements for safeguarding are appropriate. Weaknesses identified at the last pre-registration inspection have been addressed robustly and thoughtfully.

- The written safeguarding policy is fit for purpose and will be shared with stakeholders via the school website. It provides a helpful point of reference for staff, leaders, parents and carers. It meets relevant legislation and statutory guidance requirements.
- The designated safeguarding lead has been suitably trained. Plans for training for other leaders and staff are well in hand. Intended procedures for identifying, reporting and recording safeguarding concerns are fit for purpose and reflect the school's context. Leaders have helpful arrangements in place for keeping their knowledge up to date over time and for quality assuring this aspect of the school's work.

Paragraphs 9, 10 and 14

- Written policies for behaviour, anti-bullying and exclusion are in place. Together, they promote leaders' high expectations consistently well. Pupils will learn about positive relationships and behaviours as part of their curriculum. Systems have been devised to help the headteacher oversee and monitor any behavioural concerns that may arise.
- Arrangements for supervising pupils throughout the day are well considered. The planned number of full-time staff that leaders intend to recruit is sufficient to facilitate this. Plans for how pupils will move safely between the two buildings on the main school site are suitable.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13 and 16

- The proposed school's health and safety policy reflects relevant legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The headteacher will take day-to-day responsibility for overseeing the main school site. External experts will be brought in routinely, for example to check electrical appliances and computer equipment.
- A fire risk assessment was completed promptly after the previous pre-registration inspection, carried out by an expert from beyond the school. Minor issues that were identified have subsequently been addressed. Consequently, arrangements to meet the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 are now in place.
- Other risk assessments are basic but appropriate. Further risk assessments are due to be completed by staff as part of their induction to the school. Leaders are alert to scenarios where other risk assessments will need to be put in place, such as linked to curriculum activities, use of teaching spaces and walking to the performance space at Studio 6.
- The school's first-aid arrangements are fit for purpose. Sufficient staff are first-aid trained, with plans for others to receive training in due course. Leaders are alert to the increased risk of injury linked to the school's context as a performing arts college. They have arrangements in place for monitoring the occurrence of injuries, in order to identify and address any patterns promptly.

Paragraph 15

- Leaders know what information they are required to hold on the school's admissions register. They are in the process of collecting the relevant information from prospective pupils as part of the ongoing admissions process. They intend holding this information in a book in the first instance.
- Pupils will sign in when they arrive on site in the morning. Formal registers will be taken twice daily, as well as in each lesson. The headteacher and deputy headteacher

will monitor attendance patterns over time, using practices established in the performing arts college already run by the proprietor.

- 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

Paragraphs 17, 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3), 21–21(3)(b)

- Leaders understand the checks they are required to make on prospective employees and those responsible for governance. They have undertaken helpful training to develop their knowledge and acted robustly to address weaknesses evident at the previous pre-registration inspection.
- The single central record (SCR) contains all of the information required for the staff currently employed. For other prospective staff, most checks are already in place and recorded on the SCR. The remaining checks – mainly prohibition from teaching checks – are likely to be able to be completed quickly should the school be given permission to open.
- Some staff are already employed by the performing arts college owned by the proprietor. As such, relevant checks, such as with the Disclosure and Barring Service, have already been undertaken.
- Leaders do not intend using supply staff.
- The requirements of these parts of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22 to 31

- The school will occupy specialist performing arts facilities in two adjacent buildings in the centre of Maidstone. Each building is accessed via a secure door from the street. Pupils will have exclusive use of the premises during the school day. They will also make periodic use of a performance space at Studio 6, which is a short walk away.
- Teaching spaces are light, bright, clean and fit for their intended purpose. Pupils will have use of specialist performing arts studios, a general classroom and a computer suite which also houses a small library. The number and size of rooms is more than sufficient for the intended number of pupils.
- Pupils will have access to an indoor common room area when not in lessons. This provides adequate space for pupils to have their lunch. Drinking water is available throughout the school and is labelled as such.
- While the school does not have its own outside space for pupils to play, leaders have made adequate provision for pupils to make use of local outside spaces. Pupils will have plenty of opportunities to be physically active as part of their curriculum.
- There are sufficient toilets for the number of pupils in the schools. Hand-washing facilities include access to hot and cold running water. Shower facilities and changing arrangements are adequate for the setting. Hot water throughout the site does not present a risk of scalding.
- The medical room is fit for purpose, with hand-washing facilities and an adjacent toilet. It provides a suitable space for pupils to receive short-term care in the event of

being unwell. The school does not anticipate admitting pupils with complex needs who might need ongoing and specific medical care.

- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- Leaders understand what information they are required to make available to prospective pupils, parents and other stakeholders. They intend doing this via a website, which will also provide information about the proprietor's existing performing arts college and part-time school. This website is due to go live imminently.
- A 'behind-the-scenes' version of the website was seen during this inspection. It shows almost all required information to be in place. This includes contact details for school leaders and the proprietor and relevant policies, such as those relating to safeguarding, curriculum and behaviour. A small number of policies are yet to be uploaded but are available on request in the meanwhile.
- Leaders place great value on the importance of communication with pupils and parents. They have appropriate plans in place for reporting on pupils' academic attainment and progress. They intend providing twice-yearly written feedback, complemented by two parent consultation events.
- The school is likely to meet the requirements of this part of the independent school standards.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- The school's written complaints policy is fit for purpose. It is published to the new version of the school website and available on request in the meanwhile.
- The complaints policy sets out a clear and appropriate process for dealing with any concerns that may arise. It allows the opportunity for complaints to be resolved informally wherever possible. Where necessary, procedures for escalating complaints to a more formal process are clearly described, with appropriate timescales described at each stage of proceedings.
- The requirements of this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Leaders' shared ambition to establish a successful performing arts school is clear. They demonstrate commitment to pupils' care and education, wanting them to achieve academic success while pursuing their passion for performing arts. This aspiration is evident through the work that leaders have undertaken so far to set up this proposed school and in their plans moving forward.
- The proprietor and headteacher have acted decisively to address gaps in their leadership knowledge since the previous pre-registration inspection. Consequently, they are now well placed to successfully fulfil their roles in the proposed school.

- The headteacher brings experience of having worked in other similar schools. As a result, he understands the specialist nature of the education that the school intends to provide. Other recruited and prospective staff and leaders bring similar useful experience and expertise to their roles.
- The proprietor will have sole responsibility for the school's governance in the first instance. Her knowledge of performing arts education is already well established through her experience of leading a performing arts college and part-time performing arts school. She has taken sensible steps to learn more about other aspects of leading an independent school, including becoming more familiar with the independent school standards. She intends making use of relevant experts from beyond the school to assure herself about the quality of education being provided and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
- Leaders are likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders have produced a written accessibility plan that meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. They are mindful of potential difficulties around accessing the school building, which occupies several floors, and steps that may need to be taken to address this in the future. Their plans to keep accessibility arrangements under review are appropriate.

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	148632
DfE registration number	886/6164
Inspection number	10205332

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 the performing arts
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Mandy Ellen Cook
Headteacher	Matthew McDowall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,000 to £15,000
Telephone number	01622 756 644
Website	www.mepaacademy.com
Email address	mepaacademy@btconnect.com
Date of previous inspection	23 June 2021

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	50	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	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

- MEPA Academy intends to provide full-time education for pupils aged 11 to 16. The school will have a focus on the performing arts. Study of these subjects will sit alongside a traditional academic curriculum.
- The school will be governed by a sole proprietor, who is currently principal of an established performing arts college and part-time performing arts school in Maidstone. She will be supported by a management team which comprises other school leaders, with relevant experts providing consultancy support.
- The proposed school will be based in premises in the centre of Maidstone, ME14 1PF. The main site is part-owned and part-leased by the proprietor. Pupils will also make occasional use of Studio 6, a performance venue owned by the proprietor. This venue is a short walk from the main school site at ME16 8PP.
- Leaders do not intend to use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to the proprietor making an application to open a school. All parts of the independent school standards were considered.
- This is the second pre-registration inspection that the proposed school has received. The previous one took place on 23 June 2021.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and proprietor, and briefly with the special educational needs coordinator, to discuss leaders' plans for the proposed school.
- The inspector toured the main school site, along with school leaders, and briefly visited the secondary site at Studio 6. She reviewed a range of relevant policies and documents, including those referring to safeguarding arrangements.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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