

Serenity School, Old Palace Croydon

Old Palace School, Old Palace Road, CROYDON CR0 1AX

Inspection date

5 August 2025

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) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 4*
- Leaders have established a clear ambition for the quality of education. The proposed curriculum policy builds on the school's high aspiration of providing 'a holistic approach to education and childhood development'.
- The planned curriculum includes all the areas of learning as required by the independent school standards (the standards). The curriculum is broad and offers a range of subjects, such as English, mathematics, science, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and physical education.
- Pupils in the proposed upper school will study a range of subjects, such as health and social care, business, art, food technology and travel and tourism. In Year 9, pupils will choose options from a range of vocational and academic courses provided through key stage 4 options. The pupils will have opportunities to study for qualifications across key stages 4 and 5. For instance, additional qualifications will be provided off site, where resources dictate, such as animal care and motor mechanics.
- A detailed curriculum design is in place for all subjects in each of the three pathways pupils can undertake, depending on their needs. The curriculum identifies the key knowledge and skills that pupils will learn as they move through the school. School has allocated the appropriate resources to support the delivery of the curriculum.
- The post-16 curriculum intends to provide a continuation of the key stage 4 curriculum model, with some additional courses and a higher level of qualification available. For instance, pupils study elements relating to employability, financial skills and digital enterprise.
- The intended curriculum offer is supplemented by a bespoke therapy offer for all pupils, determined by their needs and education, health and care (EHC) plan requirements. This will commonly include occupation health, speech and language therapy, counselling, and mentoring.
- Subject plans reflect the school's strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This sits at the heart of all curricular thinking and policies. The school has

considered carefully how fundamental British values are woven into and delivered through the school curriculum.

- The proposed school has established a clear approach to how leaders want staff to implement the curriculum. Leaders have a clear assessment policy in place that is linked to the delivery of the curriculum plans. Assessment systems are clearly devised so that pupils' starting points can be robustly assessed and a suitable pathway determined for them. Pathways will not be rigid. Pupils will be able to move between pathways or experience a blended approach. In addition to the proposed school's teaching and learning policy, leaders have identified a range of teaching techniques to check what pupils know and understand.
- Curricular plans for PSHE are in place. Staff have identified a range of resources to support the delivery of the content. This includes the teaching of age- and stage-appropriate relationships and sex education, considering the pupils' readiness to understand the themes covered. The planned programme reflects the statutory guidance and school's policy.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraph 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- Leaders place great emphasis on wanting to ensure personal development of pupils is a golden thread across the school. The school aims to embed a strong focus on encouraging pupils in developing a respect for and understanding of differences and similarities. This includes regarding diverse cultures, traditions and religions.
- The proposed school has compiled a range of activities and opportunities within the curriculum for pupils' personal development. There is also a full programme of online safety through digital education lessons. Relationships, health and sex education will be woven into PSHE lessons, the weekly assembly and daily tutor time programme. Personal development themes will connect with the academic curriculum through the choice and teaching of texts.
- The proposed school intends to offer learning experiences in the arts, sports and independent living. Wider experiences include opportunities for swimming, horse riding, rock climbing and crochet. There will also be clubs on site run by older pupils for younger pupils, and a trip each half term.
- Leaders will provide opportunities for pupils to develop independence, resilience and leadership skills, in preparation for adulthood. There will be a range of enrichment opportunities built into the school day to complement the taught curriculum and encourage pupils' interests and talents.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7b, and 9 to 16(b)

- The child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures meet requirements. The executive headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Safeguarding leaders have completed appropriate training. They are experienced and knowledgeable in identifying risks. Leaders know how to access external professionals

and expertise within local authorities, as well as in the police and healthcare to support pupils and families.

- Additional deputy DSLs have been appointed and are undergoing relevant training as required. The proposed school has a series of training for staff planned for the first two weeks of the term to ensure that all staff are fully inducted, and know and understand the school's expectations, processes and procedures.
- Substantial training has been undertaken by staff in advance of the proposed school's registration. This includes training for first aid, administration of medication, health and safety and risk assessment. Staff induction requires safeguarding training in advance of start for all staff. DSL training has already been undertaken for those who will take up these roles.
- Information about safeguarding is available on the proposed school's website. Leaders intend to provide additional information in the school's welcome pack. They intend pupils to learn how to keep safe and manage risk for themselves through the activities planned within the PSHE programme.
- There is a suitable health and safety policy. The proprietor's risk assessment policy is detailed and comprehensive. Leaders show a secure awareness of the range and type of risk assessments the proposed school will be required to maintain. These include for a wide range of activities, and also for fire, school buildings, use of spaces, and events inside the school and in the local community. The risk assessments are suitable and comprehensive. They outline, with precision, the important measures required to minimise and mitigate against risks, dangers and hazards.
- The proposed school has developed a behaviour for learning policy. This outlines expected arrangements for recording concerns, sanctions and rewards. Leaders are keen to create a positive culture that promotes positive behaviour. They aim to ensure that all pupils can learn in a calm, safe and supportive environment. There are plans in place to provide pastoral care through the support of mentors and progress partners.
- The proposed school's anti-bullying and harassment policy is appropriate. Its aims are in line with the school's vision of creating an environment where pupils feel safe, respected and have a sense of belonging.
- The first-aid policy meets requirements. The proprietor intends for all staff to be trained in administering first aid and medication, where required. Leaders have drawn up rotas to ensure pupils are appropriately supervised throughout the school day.
- The admissions register is recorded suitably. The proposed school has registered 123 pupils, who are due to begin in September, subject to the school's registration. The required information about pupils is clearly documented in electronic form. The final system which will be used is not yet in place due to the requirement for the provider of the management of information system to have a Department for Education (DfE) registration number for the school first. The school plans to make careful records of wider information about pupils via the admissions forms. This includes detailed information about EHC plans, prior attendance and safeguarding vulnerabilities, for instance.
- Attendance procedures will be managed by the attendance lead who is also the lead deputy DSL. There are clear processes set out in the proposed school's attendance

policy, which include first day calling arrangements, thresholds for escalation depending on duration of absence and any vulnerabilities and processes for recording and reporting on attendance.

- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b) and 21(5) to 21(5)(c)

- Those responsible for the oversight of human resources are knowledgeable about matters relating to the recruitment of staff personnel. The leaders understand the importance of safe recruitment. They know how to complete and record all the statutory employment checks for staff and the proprietor. These are completed and recorded accurately on the single central record.
- The proprietor and executive headteacher have completed safer recruitment training. During the appointment process, including interviews, leaders check candidates' understanding of statutory safeguarding requirements. They establish whether newly appointed staff have a clear understanding of their role and contribution in cultivating a safeguarding culture.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to (24)(1)(b) and 24(2) to 29(1)(b)

- The proposed school premises are a purpose-built accommodation for education. The site was used by another school until July 2025.
- The premises and facilities are of high quality. They are fit for purpose and should ensure the health, safety and welfare of pupils. There are three buildings on the same site, all three storeys. The site also includes a large grand hall and ample communal spaces. Many of the original historical features remain in the building, including oak wood panelling, doors, stained-glass windows and the cathedral. The proposed school is working closely with the Whitgift Trust to ensure that any new developments are in line with the grade 1 listed requirements and are sympathetically in keeping with the original architectural features.
- The proposed school's fixtures and fittings ensure functionality. This includes, for example, the equipment for the teaching of art, science and food tech rooms which is of a high specification. Outdoor play equipment for the early years is due to be installed over the summer holiday period.
- The proposed school library is well stocked with an extensive range of books and texts.
- There are several information technology rooms available. Technicians are installing new hard drives in all computers.
- The proposed school has suitable lighting for the nature of the activities intended, inside and outside. Natural lighting ensures that learning spaces are bright.
- Classrooms are spacious with fitted blinds to control daylight and sunlight and prevent rooms from overheating during the summer period.

- Emergency lighting is fitted on all floors. External lighting is provided to ensure that people can enter and exit the proposed premises safely.
- Acoustic conditions and sound insulation are appropriate and take careful account of the range of activities that will be on offer in each room or space. The proposed school's thick walls ensure that disturbances from external noise are measured and minimised.
- The medical room for short-term care of sick and injured pupils is of a suitable size. It is fitted with a wash basin, first-aid room examination couch and other furniture. A toilet suitable for disabled pupils is situated nearby.
- Disabled toilets available on most floors have relatively easy access. All have suitable wash basins and can be secured from the inside. Doors open directly onto a corridor or a circulation space. The disabled facilities allow for informal supervision by staff without compromising privacy for pupils.
- There are a range of toilets available for pupils. Toilet doors can be secured from the inside for pupils' privacy. Hot and cold water for handwashing is regulated to avoid scolding.
- There are drinking water points provided widely throughout the building and labelled as such. These are separate from the toilet facilities.
- External communal and play area are spacious and have suitably paved flooring. They have suitable barriers. All windows are appropriately secured and restricted to allow for ventilation safely.
- The proposed school intends to use off-site provision for its sporting activities. Risk assessments are in place for the sports centre the school will use. These all offer shower facilities.
- Relevant signage clearly indicates all fire exits, routes and meeting points.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f) to 32(2)(b) and 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(4)(c)

- The proposed school has presented all the information required by the standards on its website. School policies are up to date and personalised to the school context. This includes the child protection and safeguarding policy.
- The proposed school provides the relevant contact details for the headteacher and the proprietor, should parents wish to contact them. Information is comprehensive and well organised.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33 to 33(k)

- The complaints policy clearly sets out the process to be followed if anyone wants to make a complaint about the school. The policy includes clear information about how complaints can be made, suitable timescales and how the school will record complaints and share outcomes. The complaints policy meets the requirements.

- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The members of the proprietor body are experienced and have a very secure knowledge of the proposed school. They have a strong track record of governance and leadership across other independent schools within the group of schools.
- The proprietor, together with the executive headteacher, are ambitious in ensuring high-quality provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's values of caring, valuing and challenging every member of the school community underpins leaders' commitment to diversity and inclusion. Leaders place emphasis on promoting an ethos where pupils and staff are supported to be the 'best version of themselves'.
- There is a clear leadership structure in place, with defined lines of management and accountability. An appraisal system is in place and ready to be rolled out across all staff.
- The proprietor has designed robust measures for communicating with parents and carers. This will include, for example, six weekly review meetings, termly surveys and stakeholder meetings. All pupils will come from within the Croydon area. Leaders are keen to build close bonds with parents, carers and the local community.
- As a result, the proprietor has ensured that all the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proposed school has a suitable accessibility policy and plan in place.
- The proposed school is likely to meet the requirements in this part.

Statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage

- The school has made suitable provision within the curriculum to meet the statutory requirements in this part. The plans in place cover all the areas of learning as per the early years statutory framework. These include plans to develop children's curiosity and independence.

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	151898
DfE registration number	306/6040
Inspection number	10411632

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 special school
School status	Independent day school
Proprietor	Serenity School Old Palace Croydon Limited
Chair	Ebere Emezie
Headteacher	Charmaine Ayisi
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,000 to £78,000
Telephone number	07841591851
Website	www.serenityschool.org.uk
Email address	SEG@serenityschool.org.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	4 to 19	4 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	450	450

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	450

Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	450
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	450
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	450

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	75
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	75

Information about this proposed school

- The proposed school is an all-through school for boys and girls between the ages of 4 to 19.
- Pupils at the school will be commissioned by Croydon local authority. All pupils will have ECH plans. The proposed school will cater for pupils with a range of needs, including pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties. The school also plans to cater for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The members of the proprietor body are also responsible for the governance of the school.
- The proposed school will be located at Old Palace School, Old Palace Road, Croydon, CR0 1AX.
- The proposed school does not intend to make use of alternative provision.
- The proposed school is part of the Serenity Education Group, which is a provider of independent special schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to check whether the proposed school was likely to meet all the standards if it were to open.
- This was the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection. The inspection visit was conducted with two days' notice.
- The inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer, chair of the proprietor body and executive headteacher, about their ambitions for the new school, their values and the arrangements for governance.
- The inspectors met with other staff of the Serenity Education Group regarding the site and buildings. This included touring the buildings and grounds.
- The inspectors reviewed documents relating to the curriculum, the school's safeguarding policy, pupils' welfare and health and safety, risk assessments and leaders' processes for recruitment, including for checking and recording the suitability of staff.

Inspection team

Lascelles Haughton, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rebecca Iles-Smith

His Majesty's Inspector

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