

Advice note for a pre-registration inspection of a free school

School name	Mercia School
DfE registration number	4015
Unique reference number (URN)	145897
Inspection number	10053906
Inspection dates	14 June 2018
Reporting inspector	Malcolm Kirtley



Information about the inspection

This inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the Secretary of State for Education. It was carried out under section 99(1) of the Education and Skills Act 2008.¹

In carrying out this type of inspection, inspectors assess the extent to which the school is likely to meet 'The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014' when it opens.²

The inspector, accompanied by the headteacher designate, undertook a tour of the new school site which is due for completion on 31 August 2018. The inspector scrutinised a number of policies and documents. He also looked at the proposed structure and content of the school website. The inspector reviewed systems and records used to check the suitability of staff who will be working at the school. The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher who will together form the senior leadership team from September 2018. He also held a discussion with the chief executive officer of the Mercia Learning Trust.

Information about the registration

The school is seeking registration as a free school for:

Number of day pupils	123 in September 2018 PAN 180 from 2020
Age range	11-18 (By 2024)
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Type of special educational needs	Not applicable

Context of the school

Mercia School will be an 11-18 new school serving the growing population in the south west of Sheffield. It will open to pupils in Year 7 in September 2018 before growing to its full capacity of up to 1260 pupils in 2025. The school will occupy a new, purpose-built building which is due for completion on 31 August 2018.

The school will be part of the Mercia Learning Trust. The trust already has five schools within its trust.

The school will provide an extended school day, running from 8:25am until 5:00pm. Leaders will offer a curriculum that provides a thorough grounding in academic study. This will be supported by extensive opportunities to participate in the performing arts and a diverse range of sporting activities, including fencing and archery. Formal supervised study will also be incorporated into the extended school day.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/section/99

² www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule/made; Part 1 to Schedule 1 is not reported against because it does not apply to academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs.

Advice to the Secretary of State for Education

Overall outcome	The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens
------------------------	---

Compliance with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014³

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

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. Policies set out by the designated headteacher and his team show that leaders have shared high expectations and clear policies for behaviour with all prospective pupils and parents. This forms a major aspect of the school's ethos. Leaders have devised a mastery programme that will address a range of themes that will promote respect for the law and democratic values. This programme will also address a number of protected characteristics covered by the 2010 Equality Act. This programme, delivered in tutorial time and assemblies, will be complemented by activities across the wider curriculum. In English, pupils will study texts that will explore other cultures, while in history, pupils will study the impact of legislation over time.

As the school will forefront a knowledge based-curriculum, leaders plan to develop pupils' critical faculties so that they can evaluate the credibility of opposing views they may encounter over time.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. A wide range of interrelated policies are in place. These indicate that health, safety (including fire safety), behaviour and the provision of first aid, will be in place. School leaders are being trained in first aid and the senior leadership team will all be trained to a level that will enable them to carry out responsibilities as designated safeguarding leads. Leaders have completed a series of risk assessments to cover external visits and will subscribe to an online local authority risk assessment tool for external trips and visits.

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

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. A single central record is in place. The central record details the required checks made on employees and records the date when those checks were confirmed. These processes will be extended to the non-teaching staff who will be recruited over the summer. The human resources manager from the Mercia Learning Trust has a thorough understanding of vetting requirements and applies this to trust members,

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/contents/made. Part 1 to Schedule 1 is not reported against because it does not apply to academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs.

governors, teachers and volunteers. In the event that the school uses supply staff, clear systems are in place to both check and record their suitability.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. The school will occupy purpose-built accommodation on a green field site in the south west of the city, comprising some seven acres. The building is nearing completion and provides light, spacious accommodation to address the needs of the pupils and to reflect the school's core ethos. Large public spaces have been created in the dining areas to meet the school's plans to provide family dining areas, where pupils and staff will eat together in family groups. A large school hall provides opportunities for a diverse range of performance activities. The school will have extensive indoor and outdoor spaces to support a wide variety of sporting activities.

Leaders have worked with designers and architects to ensure that toilet spaces will provide pupils with areas that are safe and private. A building management system regulates water temperatures. Additional toilets and customised changing rooms have been developed to address the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lifts and ramps are available to support access for any children or adults with mobility needs. A separate room has also been customised to support pupils at times of prayer or worship. Drinking facilities are available on every floor.

The builders and designers have been particularly mindful of incorporating high standards of fire safety. A number of rooms, including laboratories and music rooms, have been designed with specific features to manage acoustics. The building benefits from considerable natural light but also has extensive indoor and outdoor lighting.

Part 6. Provision of information

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. All the required policies are in place and they will be available to parents from the school's website when this becomes operational in a few weeks' time. Leaders have developed policies to meet the needs of the new school and reflect some of its distinctive characteristics, such as the behaviour policy. The website will provide the required contact information and has the capacity to host the publication of additional pieces of required information once the school opens.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. The complaints policy has been developed to meet statutory requirements. It will be available on the school website. The policy clearly sets out different stages in the handling and resolution of complaints. In addition, the policy outlines the processes to follow in the event of any appeals against the outcomes of decisions.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. The Mercia Learning Trust is presently comprised of five successful schools from both the primary and secondary sectors. The headteacher designate of Mercia School has

been appointed from Newfield School, a school that has undergone rapid improvement since it joined the Mercia Learning Trust.

Senior leaders at the school, and at the trust, demonstrate a thorough understanding of regulatory requirements. They have worked with external partners to check the suitability of core policies and procedures. Senior leaders have made extensive visits to free schools and academies to learn from best practice.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for their school. They have developed a number of distinctive characteristics and have policies and procedures in place to support their effective implementation. They have worked closely with the community to share the ethos and aims of the new school. Prospective parents and pupils have already shown commitment to the school's values and expectations, including the extended school day. The school has addressed local community needs, with all prospective pupils on roll living within 1.3 miles of the school. The school has been oversubscribed, with four applications for each place in its first year of operation.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

Mercia School is likely to meet all the requirements in this part of the regulations. The policy for equality addresses protected characteristics and leaders show an understanding of how these will be addressed through the school curriculum and the ethos and values of the school. The policy sets out how leaders and governors will monitor the effect of the policy.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018