

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

School name	The Ropemakers' Academy
Department for Education (DfE) registration number	845/7001
Unique reference number (URN)	147910
Inspection number	10153535
Inspection dates	30/06/2020 to 03/07/2020
Reporting inspector	Stewart Gale HMI



Information about the inspection

This inspection was carried out 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 inspection was carried out during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As a result, we could not visit the school site or meet with the proposer in person. The inspector held telephone discussions and video conferencing with the headteacher, the chief executive officer (CEO), the trust's safeguarding leader and the special needs coordinator. The inspector scrutinised video evidence of the permanent school site and reviewed the architect's plans. The inspector evaluated information available on the school's website and reviewed a range of policies and procedures. The inspector also held a telephone discussion with the local authority officer responsible for the development of the temporary accommodation. Using all available information, the inspector is able to give sufficient assurance that the school is likely to meet the independent school standards.

Information about the registration

The school is seeking registration as a free school for:

Number of day pupils	80
Age range	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Type of special educational needs	Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)

Context of the school

The Ropemakers' School intends to open in September 2020. It will be a special school providing high-quality education, day care and support for pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Pupils are likely to have diagnoses for SEMH disorders. The school has plans to admit up to 80 pupils between the ages of 4 to 16 years. In the first two years, the school will not receive children in Reception.

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.

Leaders expect the school to start with 14 pupils, most of whom are likely to be in Year 7.

The impact of COVID-19 has stalled the construction of the school site and premises. As a result, pupils will attend school on the site of the Phoenix Academy, part of STEP Academy Trust, Hailsham. Completion of the new accommodation at Reef Way is expected to be during the spring term of 2021. The temporary school is approximately one mile from the new school site.

The Ropemakers' School will join the Beckmead multi-academy trust. The local authority (East Sussex) are heavily committed to the long-term success of the school, particularly as this will be the primary placing authority.

Advice to the Secretary of State for Education

Overall outcome	The school is likely to meet all the relevant independent school standards when it opens.
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Compliance with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014

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

The standards in this part are likely to be met. The headteacher and trustees have a clear vision that is likely to build pupils' character and personal development. Plans and policies reflect leaders' intentions to actively promote British values and help pupils learn right from wrong. The aims and ethos of the school are likely to promote high-quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly taking into account the SEMH needs of the pupils. The school will welcome pupils from all religious denominations, faiths and backgrounds. Leaders have high aspirations and are keen for pupils to take responsibility and make valuable contributions to the school and world around them. Leaders demonstrate high regard for the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. Policies reflect a firm commitment to ensure that pupils, staff, parents and visitors are likely to benefit from mutual care, respect and tolerance at The Ropemakers' School.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The standards in this part are likely to be met. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are likely to be effective. The headteacher and trustees have a comprehensive knowledge of their safeguarding duties. Plans and policies are formulated well and give confidence in leaders' intentions. Leaders ably demonstrate a strong culture for safeguarding pupils. Trustees are seeking to appoint a governor with a professional social care background. The headteacher has previously sat on a local authority safeguarding children's board. Trustees have extensive knowledge and are likely to hold school leaders to account rigorously. The headteacher and trustees are fully aware of processes for referring concerns to the local authority designated officer and the Teaching Regulation Authority, as needed. The rigorous checks and processes in place already ensure that staff and governors are trained and accredited with suitable qualifications.

The school's policies relating to pupils' welfare, health and safety are robust. These fully account for the unique context of the school, including short-term arrangements when the school is likely to be operating from the Phoenix Academy. Policies offer reassurance that all health and safety arrangements are appropriately considered. For example, the written behaviour policy is firmly rooted in the school's ethos and shared vision. Sanctions, including the use of exclusion, are clearly explained. There is also an appropriate anti-bullying policy ready for immediate implementation.

The school is likely to comply fully with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The new school building and grounds are being finished to conform to the latest guidance and regulations. There will be a full fire risk assessment on completion of the building works, commissioned through East Sussex Traded Services. School leaders ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place for all

aspects of the school's work, including ongoing construction, further staffing appointments and staff training. Due to the high needs of the pupils to be admitted, the headteacher and trustees already have systems in place to help keep pupils safe and reduce the risk of harm through individual risk assessments. Personalised risk assessments for pupils will be routinely implemented and rigorously monitored as part of the school's approach to delivering statutory EHC plans.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The standards in this part are likely to be met. Leaders have robust procedures and practices for recruiting, appointing and vetting staff. The single central register (SCR) meets the requirements set out by the Secretary of State and is compliant with the independent school standards. Checks for staff, supply teachers, leaders and visitors (including contractors) are also in place. Trustees run the same checks for all who have applied to work in the school. These include a person's identity, right to work in the UK and relevant qualifications, as well as appropriate section 128 checks for leaders. However, the counter-signature of the chair of the trust's board by the Secretary of State is not yet complete. The inspector saw evidence that this process has started and will be completed digitally before September 2020. The SCR is legible and kept in an electronic format. Trustees carry out this effectively as part of a strong culture for safeguarding.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

The standards in this part are likely to be met. The new school building is designed well to promote the school's vision and values. Plans show how the accommodation is likely to fully meet the independent school standards. The school has been designed to meet the SEMH needs of prospective pupils. For example, plans show many therapy and calming rooms, as well as provision for sensory relaxation, movement and counselling rooms. New toilets and modern washing facilities will be provided for the sole use of pupils. All rooms and levels are fully accessible to those with physical disabilities. The school will have separate toileting and age-appropriate hygiene facilities, including for children in the early years. There will be a medical room for the immediate use of those who may need it. There are no areas of the school that are inaccessible to those with physical disabilities or mobility issues.

The school will be fully fitted with appropriate acoustic boarding to all internal walls within classrooms. Lighting and ventilation have been carefully considered to make best use of natural light. Further light fittings (internally and externally) mean that the school is likely to be able to fulfil the range and functions of the school's purpose and its curriculum. The school grounds have been well designed to accommodate the vast age range of the pupils, including those in the early years as well as teenagers. The site will have plenty of space for pupils to play, relax and learn. For example, there will be an outdoor space for reflection and meditation with separate areas for pupils of different ages to have access to age-appropriate activities, including a multi-use games area.

During the interim period, while the new school is being completed, pupils will share part of the Phoenix Academy site. Beckmead Trust has agreed terms and conditions for using the site with the local authority and STEP Academy Trust. The agreement details are precise and take full account of the safeguarding needs of pupils at The Ropemakers' School, as well as at the Phoenix Academy. Boundaries divide the two with fencing erected to keep school areas separate. Plans also include separate access, drop-off and entry points for pupils and parents. The local authority is funding the renovations necessary to ensure that the temporary site is likely to meet the independent school standards.

Part 6. Provision of information

The standards in this part are likely to be fully met. The trust and headteacher ensure that all particulars and policies required have been fully completed in line with the independent school standards. These are already uploaded to the school's website and made available to prospective parents. As a result, parents can access key policies, including those for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision, safeguarding and complaints. Contact details and updates are being provided through links to the trust's website. The school has a work mobile telephone number in operation for parents during work hours, as there is no telephone line on site yet. Leaders have made all necessary provision to communicate information, including facilities to receive hard copies of any policies, on request.

Policies relating to those with SEND or for whom English is an additional language have already been adopted by the trust. School leaders are well prepared and likely to be able to meet the full range of pupils' needs on opening, particularly given their designation as a special school.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The standards in this part are likely to be met. The complaints policy is complete and has already been uploaded to the school's website. It complies with the independent school standards and is ready for implementation. The policy clearly states deadlines and timeframes for different stages of a complaint, including formal and informal. Relevant information satisfies standards relating to appeals and ensuring independence or neutrality through a panel hearing. The policy provides details of how any findings or recommendations are to be handled, including that a copy of these must go to the complainant. The lead inspector was unable to check how complaints are logged and processed as the school is not open yet.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

The standards in this part are likely to be met. Trustees and the headteacher are organised and prepared for the opening of the school in September 2020. They have taken much time to work alongside the local authority and STEP Academy Trust to ensure that they will be ready, including procuring the temporary school accommodation. Trustees are in the process of appointing local governors to deepen

the school's capacity at governance level. Currently, there have been four high-quality applications for local governors, which are due to be ratified in July 2020. The applicants include those with extensive educational backgrounds, including one who manages an outstanding Nursery in the locality. As a result, the trust board are confident that the local governing board, as per the trust's scheme of delegation, will be operational from the start (accelerating plans to introduce a local governing board within the first year as part of its operational model). Leaders are galvanised and have a strong moral imperative to make the school a happy and safe haven for the pupils. Trustees and the headteacher show the same vision to make Ropemakers' School an excellent, life-changing place for all. Their determination is matched by their meticulous approach and careful planning.

Leaders are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities to implement the independent school standards as a minimum expectation. Leaders demonstrate a high regard for safeguarding policies and procedures, which are likely to be effective. Safeguarding arrangements are likely to be effective in actively promoting the well-being of all pupils.

Similarly, leaders' understanding of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework and Equalities Act 2010 is likely to ensure that all pupils benefit from a positive start. Leaders are fully committed to equality and the active promotion of British values.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

The school has an accessibility plan. Leaders are taking all reasonable and practicable steps to ensure full access and entitlement for all pupils.

Statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage

The school will admit Reception-aged children after its first two years of operation. The EYFS is appropriately considered in relevant documentation. Leaders have a good understanding of the uniqueness of the early years. They have plans to ensure that the EYFS is an integral part of the whole school, including the curriculum offer. Leaders are due to recruit staff with EYFS expertise in the next two years. There will be an EYFS leader as part of the school's leadership team.

Leaders have given due consideration to the changing and toileting arrangements for children in this age range, with plans for a dedicated hygiene room and appropriate washing facilities. The classrooms and outdoor spaces offer much room and scope to meet the full curricular aims of the EYFS, including children's personal, social and emotional development.

Safeguarding and welfare requirements for those in the early years are fit for purpose.

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