

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

School name	Aspire Academy
DfE registration number	999/1672
Unique reference number (URN)	1672
Inspection number	446898
Inspection dates	10 July 2014
Reporting inspector	Fatiha Maitland

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M1 2WD

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Information about the inspection

This inspection was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

Context of the school

The proposed Aspire Academy is an alternative provision (Free School), which will be situated in Harlow, Essex. The school is not open but intends to open in September 2014. It will operate from a large building, which is currently known as West Essex Children's Support Service. This is still operating and will close at the end of July 2014. The school has some access to the premises at present and has conducted some of the safety checks. It is expected that the premises will be handed over to Aspire Academy Trust by Essex local authority at the beginning of August 2014. The school is planning to use the premises to accommodate pupils from September 2014 till half-term in October 2014. Afterwards, the school will continue to use some parts of the building to teach young pupils. Older pupils will move to temporary accommodation on site until newly refurbished premises are ready to receive pupils.

Aspire Academy Trust plans to admit up to 107 boys and girls, aged between four and 16 years. The school will cater for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and other related conditions, including specific learning difficulty (SpLD), moderate learning difficulty (MLD) and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The school aims 'to help pupils gain the social, emotional and educational levels which will enable them to return to or take up places successfully at mainstream schools and academies. For those for whom this doesn't prove possible, they will leave Aspire Academy with educational qualifications, personal, social and life skills, self-esteem, confidence and future opportunities at least as good as they would have gained at a good or outstanding mainstream school/academy'.

The school has no specific religious affiliation. The inspector carried out a scrutiny of documentation and had discussions with the management team of the school in one of the offices situated in Harlow Education Consortium, Harlow Study Centre, Waterhouse Moor, Harlow, Essex, CM18 6BX. The inspector and the managers of the school also undertook a learning walk around the premises at Commons Road, Harlow, Essex, CM18 7EZ. This learning walk was led by an existing member of staff from West Essex Children's Support Service as agreed with the headteacher of the school. The inspector thanked the member of staff for her full co-operation.

Compliance with the regulations

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school leaders provided sufficient evidence to indicate that the planned provision

for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is likely to meet all the regulations, but implementation could not be checked. The school's vision, aims and ethos and the programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education intend to give pupils a positive outlook on life, help them to distinguish right from wrong and to be able to make informed healthy choices.

Scrutiny of documentation indicates that there is a strong emphasis on promoting tolerance and developing an appreciation of and respect for other faiths and cultures. Learning about government, politics and parliament, and human rights, alongside visits to places of interest and support from 'People who help us', aim to provide pupils with opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of public institutions and services in England, to respect British democracy and to be aware of the importance and workings of the civil and criminal law.

Leaders will monitor the content and the teaching of its curriculum, including extra-curricular activities and support from visitors to the school, to ensure that the school does not promote any particular political views to pupils; a balanced presentation of viewpoints will be offered.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

A number of regulations are not likely to be met. Implementation could not be checked, as the school was not operating. The school has prepared written policies to promote good behaviour amongst pupils with clear codes of conduct and a set of rewards and sanctions, and information about the prevention of bullying. The school has a detailed policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; this contains all the required information and is well supported by the school's safer recruitment policy and procedures. The school has recently appointed a designated child protection officer. This person has undertaken the advanced child protection training, as is required. Not all staff have yet received the relevant child protection training, but staff are firmly booked to attend the relevant child protection training on 2-3 September 2014, so that requirements are likely to be met.

The school has prepared a health and safety policy and detailed procedures to assess and manage safety risks related to educational visits, but has not planned or carried out the risk assessment on the premises and resources to minimise risks. Fire evacuation policy and procedures are in place. The school has conducted checks on fire equipment and electrical appliances. It has also carried out a fire risk assessment on premises. However, the school has yet to assure itself that there is a satisfactory level of fire safety for the temporary accommodation to be used from mid-October 2014, when the building has been refurbished, to ensure pupils' health and safety. The school can only carry out the necessary risk assessments, including those on premises and resources, when the building is handed over by the local authority and once the building is refurbished.

A first aid policy exists. This provides sufficient guidance for staff on hygiene procedures in case of spillages of blood or body fluid and how medical conditions

should be treated and recorded. There are currently three certified first aiders in school, including one with a paediatric first aid qualification. The school has an admission register and attendance registers which meet requirements. An equality policy is in place. The school has not devised a suitable three-year accessibility improvement plan to fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

In order to meet the requirements in full, the school should:

- carry out risk assessments on the premises and resources to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfE guidance (paragraph 11)
- assure itself that there is a satisfactory level of fire safety for the temporary and newly refurbished buildings, identified by risk assessments under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- devise a suitable three-year accessibility improvement plan to fulfil duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The school is likely to meet all of the regulations related to the suitability of the proprietor and staff. The management of the school is aware of all safeguarding requirements. The school has conducted all the required vetting checks on members of staff to ensure their suitability to work with children and young people. Suitable recruitment procedures are in place for the employment of additional staff and for staff provided by an employment agency. The Department for Education has carried out all of the required checks on the chairperson of the proprietorial body.

The school has a single central register and recorded in this all the required information on all members of staff and the proprietorial body.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school has firm plans to ensure that the building is likely to meet all of the regulations. The learning walk in the current premises indicates that the accommodation meets all of the regulatory requirements. Older pupils will access swimming and physical activities in a nearby secondary school as agreed with the management of the school until the building is refurbished.

Scrutinies of the school's floor plan and discussions with the senior management of the school indicate that the temporary premises and the newly refurbished buildings are fit for purpose. The newly refurbished building consists of several classrooms. The premises also benefit from specialist accommodation including an information and communication technology suite, a science laboratory, an art and design and technology workshop, and a food and technology room. The school has several larger spaces which will be used for assemblies, lunch and physical activities.

The school will have a suitable designated area for pupils to go to when they are unwell. The current provision of toilets and washbasins is suitable for staff and the proposed number of pupils, including those with disabilities. Pupils will have access to a suitable outdoor area to play safely. The newly refurbished building will have showers and changing facilities for older pupils to use.

The Education Funding Agency, which is the Department Delivery Agency, is managing the process of acquiring the premises on behalf of the Trust. The Department will wish to continue to monitor the progress of the premises directly with the Agency.

Provision of information

The school must make available details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The provision is likely to meet all the regulations.

Recommendation to the Department for Education

Registration

YES. The school can be registered and allowed to open on receipt by DfE of evidence of improvement in relation to the following matters:

- carry out the risk assessment on premises and resources to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfES guidance (paragraph 11)
- assure itself that there is a satisfactory level of fire safety for the temporary and newly refurbished buildings, identified by its risk assessment under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- devise a suitable three-year accessibility improvement plan to fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010
- make available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils, and on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State, or an independent inspectorate:
 - details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

Recommended number of day pupils: 107 pupils

Recommended number of boarders or residential pupils (if applicable): N/A

Recommended age range: 4-16 years

Recommended gender of pupils: Mixed

Recommended type of special educational needs: BESD, SpLD, MLD and SLCN.