

Our Rock Academy

The Old St Justus Church, Clifton Close, Rochester ME2 2HG

Inspection date

28 October 2024

Overall outcome

The school is unlikely 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 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h) to 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2)

- The school's curriculum policy outlines an ambition that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) will achieve well academically and personally. The school is aspirational in wanting pupils with SEND to access a broad curriculum that is personalised to pupils' needs. Its educational aim is for pupils to gain meaningful qualifications that will prepare them for the next stage of their education and adulthood. This will include level 2 qualifications, including GCSE.
- However, beyond this vision, the school does not have an ambitious and logically sequenced curriculum. The proprietor has not ensured that pupils will experience a high-quality education.
- The school's curriculum design has only just begun. Proposed schemes of work do not identify the essential knowledge that pupils will need to learn. The school indicated that it will rely on teachers planning their own units of work and lessons. This could lead to a disjointed and jumbled curriculum.
- The school recognises that pupils may have lower starting points because of missed schooling. However, the school's curriculum thinking has not taken sufficient account of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- Reading is viewed by the school as very important. However, the proprietor has not outlined a clear reading strategy to develop pupils' reading skills. Although there are some age-appropriate books in the school, there is not yet an agreed approach to ensure all pupils read fluently and widely.
- There is no appropriate phonics programme in place to teach pupils at the earlier stages of learning to read.
- The school will prioritise pupils receiving therapy support to help them access an academic education. Even so, this planned approach is not yet defined.
- There is no entitlement yet in place for pupils to receive up-to-date and relevant careers information, education, advice and guidance.

- The significant weaknesses in the curriculum extend to pupils' personal development. There is not a well-planned and sequential curriculum for the teaching of relationships, sex and health education and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Although the school understands its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, teaching content does not yet identify how pupils will learn about the protected characteristics. It is not clear how the proprietor intends to share this information with parents and carers.
- The provision for physical education is not strong enough. The school has not yet fully considered how pupils will be encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

- Beyond a headteacher, the proprietor has not appointed any other staff. A proposed staffing structure shows the desire to employ only qualified teachers with experience in working with pupils with SEND.
- The school is looking to recruit subject-specialist staff to teach secondary-aged pupils. Class sizes are likely to be small.
- The school does not have a comprehensive oversight of how it will assess pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, it has not finalised what entry assessments will be used so that the school fully understands pupils' educational starting points.
- A training plan to enhance staff's skills in curriculum implementation is also not outlined.
- All of the independent school standards (the standards) in part 1 are unlikely to be met if the proposed school opens.

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

Paragraph 5, 5(a) to 5(d)(iii)

- The school recognises the importance of promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. But like the academic curriculum, there is not a well-planned and coherent personal development programme in place.
- Given that the design of the personal development programme is in its infancy, it is unclear how the proprietor will ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. This includes teaching pupils about fundamental British values.
- The proprietor has not yet thought about the opportunities and experiences for pupils' SMSC development. This includes how pupils will develop their self-esteem, confidence and in making a positive contribution to society.
- The curriculum does not yet identify opportunities for pupils to explore democracy and debate key ideas.
- All of the standards in part 2 are unlikely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 32(1)(c)

- The headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead for the school and has ensured that the school's policy meets current statutory guidance. In the absence of the

headteacher, there will be two deputy designated safeguarding leads. One of these will be the operations manager. Worryingly, the other named person in the policy has not been appointed to work at the school.

- School leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of keeping pupils safe through child protection procedures. This includes an awareness of local risks that pupils could face. The school has set out an appropriate staff induction plan which will include safeguarding training and regular updates.
- Although the headteacher demonstrates knowledge of leading safeguarding, the proprietor has not ensured that all designated safeguarding leads have up-to-date statutory training.
- An online record keeping system will be used but this has not yet been actioned. School leaders understand how to log any safeguarding concerns which include making timely referrals to the local authority.
- The inspection identified concerns about the proprietor's oversight of health and safety, including managing risk. These shortfalls along with some weaknesses in safeguarding practices would likely mean safeguarding is not effective.

Paragraphs 9 to 10

- The school's behaviour policy outlines the school's vision and approach to supporting pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This includes the use of positive rewards and sanctions. The school has planned strategies to help pupils self-regulate. Positive and trusting relationships between staff and pupils are at the centre of the school's approach.
- There will be a system to track pupils' behaviour. The school will record any incidents of poor behaviour, including bullying. It will analyse any trends and patterns to help amend pupils' personal support plans. The school will train staff to spot any potential emotional triggers for pupils.
- All staff will be trained in positive handling techniques. These will only be used when absolutely necessary to keep a child, and those around them, safe. Any use of physical intervention will be carefully documented. The school will then review and amend agreed plans for pupils.
- The proprietor has ensured that the use of suspensions and exclusions will follow statutory guidance. The school will also inform the local authority of a suspension or exclusion as pupils will have EHC plans.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 14

- The proprietor does not have a strong overview of health and safety legislation. The proprietor assumed that acquiring the premises of a former school would likely mean that all relevant standards would be met. The proprietor did not know about the government advice on standards for school premises which was last issued in 2015.
- The school is not compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This is because all necessary fire checks have not been carried out. The proprietor is in the process of commissioning an approved fire assessor to complete statutory checks.
- There is an appropriate first-aid policy in place. Staff will be suitably trained to administer first aid and keep relevant records.

Paragraph 15

- The information on the school's admission and attendance registers will be maintained in accordance with requirements of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- There will be close analysis of pupils' attendance and any patterns of absence that needs further exploring.
- The school understands that its attendance policy should take into account the most recent guidance from the Department for Education (DfE).

Paragraph 16 to 16(b)

- Currently, there is no appropriate risk assessment policy. This means it is unknown how the proprietor will assess risk.
- A nursery, managed by a different provider, operates within the grounds of the school. The nursery was not open during this inspection. However, the proposed school's playing grounds run parallel to the nursery's outdoor area. This creates possible risks for both the nursery and the proposed school. Currently, a low perimeter fence is all that separates the nursery from the school. The proprietor has not yet engaged with the nursery's management team to mitigate any possible risks involving children and pupils.
- Some of the standards in part 3 are likely to be unmet if the proposed school opens.

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(6)

- The proprietor has ensured that they and school leaders have had appropriate safer recruitment training.
- The single central record contains all required information for the appointed headteacher. There is a human resources team that supports the school with carrying out necessary pre-employment checks.
- The school does not intend to use supply staff.
- All of the standards in part 4 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(2) and 25 to 29(1)(b)

- The proposed premises are a former independent school which closed earlier this year. The building requires much work for it to successfully cater for the proposed pupils' specific needs. Planned refurbishments have not yet happened. For example, classrooms still had some teaching resources and pupils' work from the former school.
- The school will use mobile cabins for its primary provision and therapy work. These are situated within the school's outdoor grounds. There will be two classrooms allocated for key stage 2. These have not been maintained to a high standard. In one of the classrooms, there was a smashed window. This window had not been boarded up and so presented a risk of harm.

- The main school building will cater for secondary-aged pupils. There are four classrooms to keep class sizes small. However, these classrooms have mostly been left untouched since the former school closed.
- There is natural light in rooms and lighting and acoustics are appropriate.
- Within the main building, there are two single-sex toilet rooms. These both have two toilet cubicles in each. The proprietor plans these to be used by the whole school. This could negatively impact primary-aged pupils who do not have toilets close by.
- The proprietor has not sourced suitable changing accommodation and shower facilities for pupils to use following physical activity.
- There was a scalding risk from the hot water tap in one of the pupil toilets. The proprietor has not ensured that the temperature of the water is controlled to ensure that it is not too hot.
- Drinking water is available and clearly marked.
- The medical room is unfinished and requires work so that it is suitable to cater for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils. It is next to the pupil toilets.
- Pupils will use the school hall to eat their packed lunch. The proprietor is not intending to serve hot meals. One side of the hall is the school library.
- Some of the standards in part 5 are likely to be unmet if the proposed school opens.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1) to 32(1)(j), 32(2) to 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(2)(d) and 32(3) to 32(4)(c)

- The proprietor has registered a school website name. There are plans to design and launch a school website.
- In the absence of a live website, the proprietor demonstrates they know about the statutory policies and other information required to be available to parents by the standards. Leaders understand that pupil reports will inform parents and carers about their child's academic achievements across the curriculum.
- Parents will be able to request paper copies of policies and documents where needed.
- All of the standards in part 6 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33 and 33(a) to 33(k)

- The school's complaints policy is clear and outlines the process and timescales to raise a concern. This begins with the aim to resolve complaints informally.
- Records will be kept of any complaints received and what subsequent actions the school has taken.
- All of the standards in part 7 are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

- The proprietor articulates a moral conviction to improve the life chances for vulnerable

pupils.

- Currently, however, the proprietor does not demonstrate they understand how to provide pupils with an ambitious curriculum that will enable pupils to thrive and succeed.
- There are weaknesses in the proprietor's knowledge and understanding of the standards and other statutory responsibilities in running an independent school. They do not yet effectively demonstrate that the requirements of the standards would be met consistently over time.
- A proposed governing body will fulfil the proprietor's responsibilities for governance. Although, currently, there are no terms of reference in place. A chair of governors has been appointed and she demonstrates sound knowledge of setting a strategic vision, managing resources and holding school leaders to account. The chair is also accessing training to help better understand school governance. The son of the chair of the proprietor body will also be a governor alongside working as the school's operations manager. Other governors are yet to be appointed.
- The proprietor's application to the DfE stated that the school would be ready to open at the beginning of this academic year. During the inspection, the proprietor reflected that there is much work to do. This is because the proprietor did not have a secure understanding of the inspection framework for pre-registration inspections and the proposed school's readiness to open. Consequently, the proprietor is re-evaluating their plans with a revised opening date no earlier than February 2025.
- The school has not contacted any local authorities to begin an admissions process for pupils. There is not a clear plan of how it will assess and evaluate which pupils' needs can be successfully met if the proposed school were to open. Initially, the proprietor stated pupils will likely come from different London boroughs. This has now changed to mostly catering for pupils who reside in Medway or Kent.
- The proprietor is at an early stage in thinking about robust processes for quality assurance. They will look to use some independent advisers who are not connected to the school to verify the school's impact for pupils. Currently, there is no coherent plan in how the proprietor will fully hold school leaders to account for the educational performance of pupils.
- The school has not yet produced a school development plan to support its first year of operation. Leaders assume the school will quickly reach the proposed capacity of 19 pupils. However, it does not know how many of these pupils would be of primary age.
- Some of the standards in part 8 are likely to be unmet if the proposed school opens.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's accessibility plan fulfils leaders' duties under the Equality Act 2010. The proposed plan considers the needs of pupils with SEND. It includes pupils' access around the school site and how best to support them with accessing the curriculum.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements, as set out in the annex of this report.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	151202
DfE registration number	887/6014
Inspection number	10366071

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	Our Rock Group Limited
Chair	Emmanuel Olumayowa Ajayi
Headteacher	Greg Higman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£40,000 to £80,000
Telephone number	020 8304 4473
Website	www.ourrockacademy.co.uk
Email address	office@ourrockacademy.co.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	8 to 16	8 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	19	19

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	19
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	19
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	19
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	19

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	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this proposed school

- Our Rock Academy will be the first educational setting run by Our Rock Group Limited. The proprietor also owns Our Rock Care Place which provides care home services.
- The proposed school site is a former independent special school, Manorway Independent School. Manorway formally closed in February 2024. Also, within this site, there is a registered childcare setting, Noah's Ark Nursery and Pre-School. This nursery is open Monday to Thursday during term time only and caters for children aged two to four. Noah's Ark is not owned or managed by the proprietor. Directly opposite the school site is the Strood Children and Family Hub, which is overseen by Medway Council.
- The school will admit both primary and secondary-aged pupils, starting from key stage 2 through to key stage 4. All pupils will have an EHC plan, with a diagnosis of social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism. Pupils will attend full time and be placed by their home local authority.
- The headteacher took up his post at the end of September 2024.
- The school does not intend to use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to determine if the school is likely to meet the standards if it is given permission to open.
- This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspection focused on compliance with the regulatory requirements of the standards, safeguarding procedures and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, chair of the proprietor body, and the operations manager. The lead inspector held a telephone call with the chair of governors.
- Inspectors visited all parts of the proposed school premises. They also looked at a wide range of documents and policies.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Marian Feeley

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is unlikely to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
 - 2(1)(b)(ii) do not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
 - 2(2)(d) personal, social, health and economic education which-
 - 2(2)(d)(i) reflects the school's aim and ethos; and
 - 2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act[9];
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
 - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(a) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with primary education at the school is provided with relationships education,
 - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2),
 - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools,
 - 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and

- 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.
- 2A(2) Arrangements made by the proprietor for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)(b) must ensure that where a pupil's parent requests that the pupil is wholly or partly excused from sex education provided as part of relationships and sex education, the pupil is so excused until the request is withdrawn, unless or to the extent that the head teacher considers that the pupil should not be so excused.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly;
 - 3(i) does not undermine the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs; and
 - 3(j) does not discriminate against pupils contrary to Part 6 of the 2010 Act[10].
- 4 The standard in this paragraph is met where the proprietor ensures that a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place.

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

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
 - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which-
 - 5(b)(i) enable pupils to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence;
 - 5(b)(ii) enable pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law of England;
 - 5(b)(iii) encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated and to society more widely;

- 5(b)(iv) enable pupils to acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England;
- 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures;
- 5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act; and
- 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England;
- 5(c) precludes the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school; and
- 5(d) takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils-
 - 5(d)(i) while they are in attendance at the school,
 - 5(d)(ii) while they are taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised by or on behalf of the school, or
 - 5(d)(iii) in the promotion at the school, including through the distribution of promotional material, of extra-curricular activities taking place at the school or elsewhere,

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 23(1)(c) suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.
- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including-
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.

- 25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 28(1)(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.
- 29(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable-
 - 29(1)(a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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