

VTC Independent School

Unit 2, Centre 2000, St Michael's Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3DZ

Unique reference number (URN): 147205

Emergency inspection report: 9 June 2026

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), which is the registration authority for independent schools. It was commissioned because of concerns raised with the DfE about safeguarding, the curriculum and leadership at the school.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

When we carry out emergency inspections of independent schools, we report on the school's likely compliance with part 8 of the independent school standards first. Under part 8, the proprietor is required to ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards consistently. The standard in part 8 is intended to ensure that the quality of leadership and management at the school is sufficient for that purpose.

Many of the independent school standards checked at this inspection are not met. There has been significant turbulence in the leadership and management at the school over the past few years. The proprietor has recruited a new headteacher and advisory board and appointed external consultants to support them. The leaders spoken to during the inspection do not demonstrate a secure understanding of the requirements of the standards or the knowledge to ensure that they are met. For example, they did not recognise that members of an advisory board, who have responsibilities that include governance, need to have suitability checks and that these must be recorded on the single central record.

Leaders have identified pupils' very poor attendance as a priority focus and have recently started to address this. Leaders also recognise that the curriculum is narrow and are thinking about what needs to change for September. However, this work lacks urgency.

Leaders have produced many policies but some of these do not relate to the school or its pupils. Others are not followed as intended.

Finally, important information, such as the admissions register and the accessibility plan, is not in place.

The standards in part 8 are not met.

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Curriculum

The curriculum is narrow and pupils do not learn about aspects such as physical and creative education. For example, leaders did not appreciate the difference between physical activity, which focuses on movement and exercise, and physical education (PE), where pupils are supported to deliberately build their knowledge across the PE curriculum.

These paragraphs in part 1 are not met.

The personal, social, health and economic education is appropriate and helps pupils to develop respect for others. The curriculum plan and associated resources are used well by staff. Pupils are interested in the world around them and confident to discuss recent world events.

These paragraphs in part 1 are met.

Teaching and assessment

Those pupils who attend the school are supported well. Many pupils have had poor experiences of school before joining VTC. Here, they build positive relationships with staff, who help them to overcome their barriers to learning. These pupils make progress from their starting points and make up gaps in their learning. Students in the sixth-form provision often gain impressive qualifications and secure employment when they complete their courses.

The relevant paragraphs in part 1 are met.

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

Leaders aim to ensure that pupils are supported to gain a sense of self and become respectful and active young people who can contribute to society. Pupils

benefit from the mentoring and support to develop their character and navigate the world. This work helps them to develop respect for others and take responsibility for their actions. It is part of the reason that sixth-form students are successful in transitioning to the world of work after school.

However, the school's work to help pupils to develop an understanding of cultures other than those they are familiar with is not deliberately planned. The activities, for example theme days, are ad hoc and do not support pupils to develop this knowledge in a sustained manner.

This aspect of the standards is not met, therefore this part is not met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Safeguarding

Since the school's last inspection, there has been a change in leadership and a new safeguarding leader appointed in the main school. The leaders with responsibility for safeguarding have recently attended training. They have also increased their internal meetings to discuss necessary actions for pupils. Following advice from the local authority, leaders have tried to give all staff access to the online recording platform. This is intended to help ensure that all concerns are recorded promptly and picked up quickly. However, not all staff are currently able to access this system online. It is not yet working as intended. Leaders have a suitable, short-term workaround in place.

Leaders know each pupil very well. The records of leaders' work to safeguard pupils show that actions taken are timely and well considered. They involve outside agencies when appropriate. The school attends multi-agency meetings and records these clearly.

It is not clear how those pupils who do not attend school are kept safe. Leaders do check on them, but leaders lack ambition for these pupils to return to school swiftly and attend regularly.

Leaders have completed safer recruitment training but there is confusion about some of the requirements. The safer recruitment processes set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education are not followed routinely. For example, references have not been taken up for all staff.

These paragraphs are not met.

Behaviour and supervision of pupils

Very few pupils attend school regularly. Consequently, there are plenty of staff to support those who do attend. These pupils are supported well to consider their behaviour. The behaviour policy is used effectively, and pupils respond well to the thoughtful and caring interactions with staff. Sixth-form students, in particular, rise to staff's high expectations in the school's workshops and behave with respect and consideration.

These paragraphs remain met.

Health and safety, fire and first aid

The requirements of the fire safety order are met securely. For example, there is a keen understanding of the potential risks of the workshops. Staff ensure that students are alert to their responsibilities as well.

This paragraph is still met.

The arrangements for health and safety more generally are not met. The health and safety policy does not reflect the set-up of the school. For example, it names an outside group as having 'ultimate responsibility for health and safety matters in the school'. This is not accurate.

The first-aid policy is not followed on a day-to-day basis. Leaders recently attempted to support the implementation of this policy by creating a checklist for staff to ensure the first-aid kits in the vehicle workshop are suitably stocked. They were confident that all would be in order. When the kits were checked during the inspection, there were out-of-date items, which included burn gels. This could, potentially, cause a serious problem.

These paragraphs are not met.

Risk assessment

The general risk assessments, for example those for the welding workshop and catering area are suitable. However, more specific risk assessments have not been considered. For example, the school holds information about the support specific pupils might need for different activities. This has not been shared in a way that could help mitigate the associated risks. This potentially puts pupils and staff at risk.

Leaders do not understand their duties in relation to the use of force and seclusion. They have recently attended a training session, but this has not helped leaders to understand the up-to-date requirements.

These paragraphs are not met.

Admissions and attendance

There is no admissions register. Leaders do not know the legal requirements around recording and presenting this information.

Pupils' attendance is recorded. Leaders have very recently started to analyse this information to work out how they can address the serious absence among so many pupils.

This paragraph is not met.

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

The recruitment checks made on staff, supply staff and the proprietor

The recruitment checks for staff as required by the standards are met. The school does not use supply staff. Leaders have not followed safer recruitment processes because they failed to obtain references for all staff.

The school did not believe that the members of the advisory body needed to have suitability checks. This is incorrect. The school's specification for these individuals sets out that they will 'offer expert advice on complex issues', participate in decision-making, 'challenge and scrutinise the outcomes and decisions' of leaders, hold leaders to account and 'contribute to the effective governance'. This indicates they are involved in the management and governance of the school.

The single central record of these recruitment checks

When scrutinised during the inspection, there were gaps in the single central record. For example, there was a blank space for the prohibition check of a member of teaching staff. This check had been completed but not recorded properly. The members of the advisory board had no checks completed and therefore none recorded.

This part is not met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Medical room and accommodation for pupils' therapy needs

Both school sites have medical rooms, which are set up appropriately and will meet the needs of pupils who need short-term care or treatment. The rooms include washing facilities and are near toilets.

These paragraphs remain met.

Ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils

The school premises are maintained to a suitable standard. The sixth-form facility is of high quality and provides industry-equivalent facilities in welding and catering. The main site is less well furnished but maintained to a reasonable standard. In both, the fabric and maintenance of these premises ensure the health, safety and welfare of pupils and staff.

This paragraph remains met.

Part 6. Provision of information

All at the school are certain that there have not been any such incidents that include the use of force or seclusion and restraint. However, the lack of knowledge displayed by leaders about the requirements for recording and reporting any such incidents means that these paragraphs are not met.

The school's safeguarding policy is available for parents and carers on its website.

In addition to the standards in scope, it was evident that the information that is required to be published about the proprietor is not available on the school's website.

The relevant paragraphs are not met.

The school's accessibility plan

The school has not produced an accessibility plan. Leaders are unsure what this is or why it is a requirement.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under sections 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our updated inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

This inspection was commissioned by the DfE to look at the independent school standards relating to leadership and governance, safeguarding, health and safety and the curriculum, including promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and culture awareness.

The inspection was conducted without notice.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher and other staff. They also spoke with both of the external consultants appointed to support the headteacher, one of whom is also the chair of the advisory board.

The chair of the proprietor body is Paul Thompson. He was not available during the inspection.

The school is registered as an independent school. All pupils have education, health and care plans for the special educational needs and/or disabilities. These needs are mostly related to social, emotional and mental health. Many have spent a significant amount of time out of education before joining the school.

Lead inspector

Lucy English

His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector

Lee Selby

His Majesty's Inspector

About this school

Proprietor

Vocational Training Centre Ltd

Headteacher

Michael Sewell

Type of school

Other independent school

Capacity

32

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll

21

Number of part-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll

0

Age range of pupils

13 to 18

Gender of pupils

Mixed

Annual fees for day pupils

£16,000 to £88,000

Email address

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Annex. Independent school standards

Independent school standards that the school does not meet

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(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;

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(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which-
 - 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;

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.

- 13 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy.
- 15 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006[13].
- 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.
- 16A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 16A(1)(a) ensures that a procedure is in place for recording each use of force incident in accordance with section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006;
 - 16A(1)(b) ensures that a procedure is in place for recording each incident in which a member of the school staff secludes, restrains or immobilises a pupil for whom education is being provided at the school (a "seclusion or restraint incident"); and
 - 16A(1)(c) takes all reasonable steps to ensure that both procedures are complied with.
- 16A(2) The procedure under sub-paragraph (1)(b) must require that the record is made in writing as soon as practicable after the incident.
- 16A(3) The procedure under sub-paragraph (1)(b) need not provide for any action to be taken in relation to a seclusion or restraint incident that also constitutes a use of force incident within the meaning of section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and therefore falls to be recorded under the procedure referred to in sub-paragraph (1)(a).

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

- 20(6) The standard in this paragraph is met in relation to an individual ("MB"), not being the Chair of the school, who is a member of a body of persons corporate or unincorporate named as the proprietor of the school in the register or in an application to enter the school in the register, if-
 - 20(6)(a) MB-
 - 20(6)(a)(i) is not barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act where that individual is or will be engaging in activity which is regulated activity within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 4 of that Act; and

- 20(6)(a)(ii) does not carry out work, or intend to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction;
- 20(6)(b) subject to sub-paragraphs (7) to (8), the Chair of the school makes the following checks relating to MB-
 - 20(6)(b)(i) where relevant to the individual, an enhanced criminal record check;
 - 20(6)(b)(ii) checks confirming MB's identity and MB's right to work in the United Kingdom; and
 - 20(6)(b)(iii) where, by reason of MB's living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining an enhanced criminal record certificate is not sufficient to establish MB's suitability to work in a school, such further checks as the Chair of the school considers appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- 20(6)(c) subject to sub-paragraph (8), where the Secretary of State makes a request for an enhanced criminal record check relating to MB countersigned by the Secretary of State to be made, such a check is made.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is-
 - 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff ("S"), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.
- 21(6) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is, in relation each member ("MB") of a body of persons named as the proprietor appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether the checks referred to in paragraph 20(6)(b) were made, the date they were made and the date on which the resulting certificate was obtained.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 32A(1)(a) ensures that the procedures for recording use of force incidents and seclusion and restraint incidents referred to in paragraph 16A(1)(a) and (b) include procedures for information about each such incident (except where the pupil concerned is aged 20 or over or provision made under sub-paragraph (2) applies) to be provided to each parent of the pupil as soon as practicable after the incident; and
 - 32A(1)(b) takes all reasonable steps to ensure that those procedures are complied with.
- 32(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 32(1)(a) the information specified in sub-paragraph (2) is provided to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector[14], the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate[15];
- 32(2) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is-
 - 32(2)(b) either -
 - 32(2)(b)(ii) where the proprietor is a body of persons, the address and telephone number of its registered or principal office;

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; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Duty to implement an accessibility plan under schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

Accessibility plans

- 3(1) The responsible body of a school in England and Wales must prepare—
 - (a) an accessibility plan;
 - (b) further such plans at such times as may be prescribed.
- (2) An accessibility plan is a plan for, over a prescribed period—

- (a)increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school’s curriculum,
- (b)improving the physical environment of the school for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the school, and
- (c)improving the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.
- (3) The delivery in sub-paragraph (2)(c) must be—
 - (a)within a reasonable time;
 - (b)in ways which are determined after taking account of the pupils’ disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.
- (4) An accessibility plan must be in writing.
- (5) The responsible body must keep its accessibility plan under review during the period to which it relates and, if necessary, revise it.
- (6) The responsible body must implement its accessibility plan.
- (7)A relevant inspection may extend to the performance by the responsible body of its functions in relation to the preparation, publication, review, revision and implementation of its accessibility plan.
- (8)A relevant inspection is an inspection under—
 - (a)Part 1 of the Education Act 2005, or
 - (b)Chapter 1 of Part 4 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 (regulation and inspection of independent education provision in England).
- 4(1) In preparing an accessibility plan, the responsible body must have regard to the need to allocate adequate resources for implementing the plan.
- (2) The proprietor of an independent educational institution (other than an Academy) must, if asked, make a copy of the school’s accessibility plan available for inspection at such reasonable times as the proprietor decides.
- (3) The proprietor of an independent educational institution in England (other than an Academy) must, if asked by a Minister of the Crown, give the Minister a copy of the school’s accessibility plan.

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