

Stepping Stones School Hindhead

Tower Road, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 6SU

Inspection dates

25–27 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong and effective leaders are committed to improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders make sure that the independent school standards are met consistently.
- Staff are led very well. They are highly motivated and work effectively as a team. Staff morale is high and they are united in their aim to meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders have adapted the curriculum well to provide pupils with employability skills.
- While teaching, learning and assessment are good overall, there is a small amount of variability in its effectiveness across the school.
- Pupils make good progress across the curriculum, in English and mathematics as well as the wider subjects.
- Sixth-form provision is outstanding. Students are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of education or employment.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff care for and support pupils exceptionally well.
- Over time, pupils make great gains in their personal development, behaviour and self-esteem. They are highly appreciative of what the school does for them. The school has a strong family atmosphere in which pupils thrive.
- The majority of parents and carers would recommend the school to others and say how it has transformed their children's lives. However, a small proportion of parents feel that their concerns have not been addressed well enough.
- Leaders ensure that all required checks are carried out thoroughly on new staff. However, there were a few minor omissions on the single central register of checks. These were easily rectified during the inspection.
- Although governance provides clear direction for school leaders, governors have not visited the school regularly enough to ensure that all administrative aspects of the school are working as well as they could or should do.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that governors and leaders review their checking procedures so that they can ensure that statutory administrative procedures are meticulously followed at all times
 - building links with parents further to ensure that they feel well informed about the work that is going on to support their children so that any concerns are alleviated.
- Improve teaching and pupils' outcomes to match the best in the school, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers deepen pupils' learning at every opportunity, including when asking pupils questions
 - the teaching of mathematics provides more opportunity for pupils to apply their skills to solve real-life problems.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors share an ambitious vision to provide pupils with a high-quality educational experience that prepares them well for their future lives. Leaders make sure that the school community upholds the shared values of 'respect, endeavour, tolerance and resilience'. Staff are equally committed, and work tirelessly to meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They make sure that the independent school standards are met consistently. The areas for improvement recommended from the last inspection have been addressed successfully. Leaders are always looking to see how the school could do even better. Owing to this rigorous approach to improvement, leaders have expanded and improved provision considerably since the last inspection. There are increased numbers of specialist teaching staff and therapists, a wider curriculum and accredited courses, and improved accommodation and facilities. Leaders have introduced successfully a sixth form that is judged outstanding in this inspection just two years after opening.
- Parents speak of the transformational effect the school has on their children's lives. One parent said: 'The school is amazing. It has completely transformed my child. I cannot be happier.' While most parents are highly satisfied with the education their children receive, a small number of parents feel that their concerns are not dealt with effectively enough. School leaders and governors are working hard to improve further their engagement with parents. For example, they have appointed a family link worker to provide outreach support for pupils and their families.
- Staff say that they are led well and morale is very high. A member of staff, stating the views of many, said, 'We are a team, we are valued and can speak to leaders to share our worries or successes.'
- Leaders ensure that the performance of staff is monitored closely. Leaders are aware of the small variation in the quality of teaching and are taking effective action by providing a programme of high-quality training for staff. As a result, staff are continually honing their knowledge and skills.
- Representatives from different local authorities hold the school in high regard. They say that the school does everything possible to support pupils with high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They are very happy to place pupils at the school.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum successfully to include employability skills as a central theme. They continually evaluate the curriculum offer and have plans to refine further the opportunities it provides for pupils. Leaders make sure that pupils receive a highly personalised curriculum that includes a blend of therapy, work skills and academic courses appropriate to the pupils' needs and interests.
- A wide range of trips and visits supplements the school curriculum. In particular, all pupils at key stages 3, 4 and 5 undertake a work placement at 'The Cookie Bar', a social enterprise café close by and owned by the charitable trust that supports the school. Staff

make considerable use of the extensive grounds and local vicinity to enrich pupils' learning experiences.

- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. A well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme provides pupils with opportunities to explore tolerance, respect and democracy. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Governance

- A governing body oversees the work of school leaders. Governors, including parent governors and members of the charitable trust that owns the school, provide strategic direction to school leaders. They state that they want to build a 'world-class special school'.
- Governors have a range of skills and experience. Recently, governance has been strengthened with new members, including a new chair, who are due to join the governing body imminently. Governors are aware that recently they themselves have not visited the school regularly enough to see the school working and to provide checking procedures to support school leaders' work. Not all policies published online were up to date at the start of the inspection. Consequently, governors have not provided sufficient support and challenge that ensure that all administrative aspects of the school are working as well as they could or should do.
- Governors receive helpful reports from the headteacher showing the performance of pupils and other information. They have meetings to discuss these reports and provide challenge and support regarding, among other matters, pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour, and the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- A school improvement partner, commissioned by governors, visits several times a year and provides support and guidance to school leaders and governors. This external support is highly valued by school leaders and they take on board the recommendations that are made.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school publishes the safeguarding policy on the website, which follows all current government requirements.
- Checks made when recruiting staff are thorough and rigorous. Staff are vetted carefully using national databases, and the selection process provides close scrutiny of candidates' suitability to work with children and young people. However, at the start of the inspection, there were a few minor omissions on the register of these checks, such as a missing date. These dates were added immediately. Leaders and governors had not monitored the single central register closely enough.
- Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding ethos. Staff are trained well in safeguarding matters and know how to report concerns about pupils, should they arise. Leaders communicate well with parents, carers and other agencies, keeping records of conversations and actions, should there be concerns about a pupil.

- Leaders make sure that all health and safety precautions are followed well. The school complies fully with fire-safety regulations, including checks on fire-safety equipment and carrying out fire-evacuation drills. Records of health and safety checks are kept in good order. Risk assessment policy and procedures are implemented effectively. For example, the school swimming pool has a wide-ranging assessment of potential risks and the checks that need to be made to keep pupils safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Secure teacher knowledge and effective use of background information about pupils together ensure that teaching meets pupils' needs, many of which relate to high levels of anxiety. Strong working relationships and mutual respect exist between staff and pupils throughout the school, reflecting the school's values.
- The teaching staff team includes a large number of therapeutic professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and other therapists. Teachers, teaching assistants and therapists typically work closely together to support pupils' learning well.
- At key stages 3 and 4, there are significant strengths in teaching across subject areas. In particular, teachers' deep knowledge about the requirements for accredited courses supports pupils well. Teachers balance carefully the needs for preparation for examination and assessment with pupils' ability to work under pressure. Teachers plan activities carefully so that pupils get the right amount of support and challenge. However, long-term teaching plans do not always develop progression in pupils' skills.
- Across the school, the teaching of English is strong. Teaching provides opportunities for pupils to write about their interests or for a variety of purposes. Pupils are supported to use their imagination to make their writing interesting. Teaching encourages pupils to develop grammatical skills well. The promotion of reading material supports pupils, especially at primary level, to enjoy reading.
- The teaching of mathematics enables pupils to acquire skills and knowledge in calculation, algebra and other mathematical topics. Often, especially at key stage 4, pupils repeat calculations so that they become fluent in the concept being studied. However, mathematics teaching does not place enough emphasis on how mathematics can be used to solve real-life problems.
- Strong subject knowledge of teachers and well-planned activities inspire pupils to learn in wider subjects across the curriculum. In history, pupils are inspired by judicious use of historical sources and expert teaching to write with depth of analysis and evaluation about, for example, the Second World War. Science investigations and interesting practical activities typify the teaching of science.
- Much emphasis is placed on the teaching of employability skills. All pupils practise their ability to communicate, develop organisational skills and work in teams. Teachers ensure that work-related learning, including work experience, is planned effectively for all pupils in Years 9 to 11. Pupils often organise school events, including the school leavers' prom.
- Teachers monitor pupils' progress closely. Teaching staff provide helpful feedback according to the school's assessment policy. Pupils take care to respond to their teachers' feedback and consequently improve their work.

- While teaching, learning and assessment are good overall, there is some variation. There are many examples of excellence in the school where teaching provides precisely for pupils' needs and pupils show high levels of engagement. However, variability exists, especially in the quality of teachers' questioning. Although teachers help pupils to extend their understanding, challenging them and requiring them to think more deeply, questioning is not consistent enough in finding out what pupils know and can do well.
- Leaders ensure that parents are kept informed about their child's learning and progress. Teachers contact parents regularly and provide a detailed annual report. Despite many parents praising staff for keeping in touch regularly, a number of parents responding to Ofsted's questionnaire felt that communication about pupils' progress was an area to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Most pupils start at the school after negative experiences in previous learning or having been out of school for a period of time. Many are very despondent, displaying extreme anxiety or other behaviours. Leaders take great care to ensure that pupils transition successfully into the school. As a consequence, pupils feel safe and quickly gain confidence. As one parent said: 'Stepping Stones is like one huge, warm family. The staff know all the students extremely well. The care and kindness at Stepping Stones is like no other.'
- Pupils are highly appreciative of the excellent care they receive. Pupils say that their teachers understand them well and that the school is friendly. Pupils get on well together, and the school has a harmonious atmosphere. One pupil representing the views of others said, 'Everyone has difficulties so we understand what others are going through.'
- Pupils explain that bullying is extremely rare. Furthermore, pupils are certain that any bullying or friendship concerns would be resolved quickly and effectively by staff.
- The school ensures that pupils throughout the school have opportunities to receive careers advice and support. Key stage 2 pupils explore the professions needed in a successful community. Pupils at key stages 3 and 4 find out about apprenticeship and college courses through impartial and supportive careers advice.
- Transition arrangements are exceptionally well planned through close collaboration with colleagues at other educational establishments. Pupils have the opportunity to move on to college courses with the full support of the school. Leaders go to great lengths to ensure that pupils settle successfully in their next placement and do not feel cut off from the high levels of support they have received during their time at the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are courteous and polite. Staff are excellent role models and have high expectations of pupils' conduct and behaviour. A consistent and positive behaviour

management strategy enables pupils to reflect on the consequences of their actions in order to self-regulate their behaviour in the future.

- Sometimes pupils new to the school display challenging behaviours associated with their specific educational need. Pupils explain that the strategies used very occasionally to help them calm down work extremely well. Consequently, any disruption to learning is minimised and the usual peaceful status quo is restored quickly.
- Most pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. Leaders analyse patterns of attendance carefully and find out reasons for every absence. Any problems or barriers to good attendance are resolved quickly and effectively. Consequently, any persistent absence is entirely limited to medical issues.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school at different ages and some have huge gaps in their learning. Pupils' abilities and knowledge are assessed carefully when they join the school. Leaders work with colleagues in pupils' previous schools to ensure that knowledge about pupils is transferred effectively. This detailed information is used to develop uniquely tailored learning programmes.
- Pupils at all key stages make sustained progress during their time at the school. Since the last inspection, leaders have overhauled the way in which they monitor trends in progress of groups, so that emerging patterns are identified and any dip is immediately rectified.
- Leaders have concentrated on improving pupils' literacy and oracy skills successfully across the school. At key stage 2, a strategic reading programme has helped to improve pupils' reading and comprehension skills. Leaders recognise the need to develop a love of reading among pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Pupils' writing at all ages across the curriculum shows strong progress, with a grasp of grammatical skill and flair appropriate to pupils' age and ability. Pupils speak confidently, including when expressing their views and opinions.
- At key stages 3 and 4, pupils make great gains in their learning overall, especially in their social and emotional development. Pupils say that they have made much progress all round while at the school.
- Inspection evidence showed that pupils made variable progress in small pockets across the curriculum. For example, work scrutiny showed a gap in pupils' mathematical problem-solving skills. While progress was generally secure in wider curriculum subjects, at times, prior learning is not built upon effectively, and pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- The school has extended the range of accredited courses such that pupils gain a selection of qualifications appropriate to their abilities. As the numbers of pupils are small, it is not appropriate to compare outcomes of these courses to national averages. Nevertheless, for many pupils, they achieve qualifications which they did not think would have been possible prior to attending the school.
- Pupils are prepared to move on successfully to post-16 courses. Most Year 11 pupils currently in the school propose to stay on to the sixth-form provision.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of the sixth form is exceptionally strong. This is because leaders are adamant that students receive a first-rate study programme emphasising employability skills and development needed for their future lives.
- Teaching is highly effective in the sixth form and is stronger than in the rest of the school. Teachers plan learning programmes precisely, according to the needs of the examination boards. Teaching provides the right combination of challenge, encouragement and support. Teachers expect students to work independently when appropriate, including when studying online courses. Students respond very positively to their teachers, learning well and making outstanding progress.
- As a result of the well-planned curriculum and excellent teaching, students develop their confidence and make very strong progress in a wide range of skills, including in English and mathematics. The school's provisional information for 2019 indicates that the first group of sixth-form leavers have achieved a variety of appropriate academic and vocational qualifications. The range of qualifications includes level 2 academic courses in English, mathematics, science and humanities. Vocational BTEC national curriculum courses include art, music, sport, media, work skills and cooking.
- Placements in businesses or other establishments ensure that students are ready to interact in the world of work. The sixth-form leader knows students very well and goes to great lengths to place students in exactly the right environment so they will experience success. Should a student need greater support, they are placed in a supportive workplace environment such as The Cookie Bar, which is very close to the school. As students become more confident, they move on to bigger employers and organisations. Sixth-form students say that they have benefited enormously from work placements.
- Students speak very highly of the pastoral support they receive. They say that there is always someone to speak to should they have a problem.
- Highly effective careers advice is provided in the sixth form, as in the rest of the school. Students leaving the sixth form this summer plan to move on to a wide range of destinations, including local further education colleges to study academic or vocational courses and apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	134833
DfE registration number	936/6584
Inspection number	10056677

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The governing board
Acting co-chairs	David Forbes-Nixon and Jo Franklin
Headteacher	Melissa Grigsby
Annual fees (day pupils)	£28,000 to £34,000
Telephone number	01428 609083
Website	www.steppingstones.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@steppingstones.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–16 June 2016

Information about this school

- Stepping Stones is an independent special school for pupils with moderate physical or learning difficulties, and with education, health and care plans. Most pupils are placed at the school by Surrey and Hampshire local authorities.
- The school operates across two sites.

- The last standard inspection was in July 2016, when the school was found to be providing a good standard of education. In July 2018, the school received a material change inspection in order to increase the number of pupils on roll from 84 to 95, and the upper age limit from 18 to 19. This inspection judged that the school would be likely to meet all the standards relevant to the material change.
- Pupils have the opportunity to learn employability skills in The Cookie Bar, a local social enterprise café.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and a group of staff. There were 52 responses from staff to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- The lead inspector met with a member of the governing body and a prospective governor, and held a telephone conversation with two further governors.
- A meeting and telephone conversation were held with representatives of two local authorities that place children at the school.
- Inspectors took account of 62 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire. An inspector met with a group of parents.
- Teaching and learning were observed across all age groups. Inspectors were accompanied to all lessons by a senior member of staff.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, and inspectors talked to pupils around the school. A total of 62 pupils responded to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- A telephone conversation was held with the school improvement partner.
- A number of documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding documents, progress information and policies.
- The school's website was viewed.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Clementina Aina	Ofsted Inspector

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