

Stepping Stones School

Tower Road, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 6SU

Inspection dates 14–16 June 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have made successful changes to ensure that pupils receive high levels of care and good outcomes. Consequently, the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Personal development is rightly prioritised. Strong relationships and provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding enable pupils to demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning.
- Pupils behave extremely well because they receive excellent support and experience consistently respectful relationships.
- Pupils' special educational needs are well supported. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise and achieve their individual targets.
- Leaders have placed a strong emphasis on developing teaching and learning. Teaching is good because teachers receive effective support and challenge that enable them to improve.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They provide pupils with challenging and interesting tasks. As a result, pupils across the school achieve well.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of the pupils. Consequently, different groups of pupils make good progress across the curriculum.
- Equal opportunities are well promoted. Leaders ensure that all pupils have equal access to an appropriately challenging curriculum. Teachers ensure that pupils understand differences, such as beliefs, and know that regardless of difference everyone is entitled to a fair chance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders and governors are not yet able to explain well enough the impact of their work on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders cannot currently demonstrate the progress of individuals and different groups across the range of subjects.
- Not all staff make regular checks on pupils' learning during lessons and use this information to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Occasionally pupils do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves. Sometimes staff do not make the best use of time and resources to develop learning.

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?

- Strengthen the leadership, management and governance of the school by ensuring that:
 - the system for tracking pupils' achievement in all subjects is embedded and provides helpful information about the progress of individuals and groups
 - teachers, leaders and governors make the best use of pupils' progress information to improve teaching and learning and to measure the impact of their work.
- Further improve teaching, learning and assessment in order to secure outstanding outcomes by ensuring that:
 - staff make the best use of time and resources to facilitate pupils' learning and enable them to think for themselves
 - staff regularly check pupils' learning and adjust their teaching to maximise progress in lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher and governors have set and are following a clear course for improvement to ensure that pupils receive high levels of care and a high-quality education. The headteacher is energetic and inspirational to staff, who consequently demonstrate an equally high level of commitment. One staff member said, 'The headteacher really encourages me to go the extra mile.' As a result, important changes have been implemented so that pupils receive a good standard of education and all the independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher has rightly placed a strong emphasis on developing teaching and learning and making sure that teachers are held to account. She has expanded the leadership team to provide greater challenge and support to staff. Together, leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and learning and provide helpful feedback to teachers. Teachers also receive valuable training and work closely with colleagues in the 'triad' of schools to develop their practice. Consequently, the quality of teaching has risen.
- Pupils' special educational needs are well supported. The assistant headteacher has built individual therapies into the curriculum. Leaders have also ensured that teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their individual targets and acquire essential life and learning skills. Consequently, pupils are making good progress against their personal targets.
- The curriculum is a clear strength of the school. It is broad, balanced and flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of the pupils. Through careful timetabling and the use of specialist teachers in key stage 3 and key stage 4, pupils learn a wide range of subjects. Topics such as 'the First World War', 'Stig of the dump' and 'South America' are engaging for pupils, who delight in sharing facts that they have learned. Extra-curricular opportunities further enrich the curriculum. Residential trips to Spain, regular theatre trips, visits to a recording studio and physical activities like rowing, as well as the after-school enrichment programme of clubs, are popular, foster new interests and enable pupils to develop a wide range of skills.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is promoted well. There are numerous opportunities within the curriculum for this aspect of learning. In many lessons, teachers support pupils' social, moral and spiritual development in discussions, by sharing ideas and facilitating group activities. Pupils' cultural development is furthered through celebrations of a range of festivals and links with other countries such as Uganda. This work also actively promotes British values such as mutual respect and tolerance. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- There is a deliberate focus on ensuring that pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. Leaders regularly check that provision is effective and enabling pupils to achieve well. Teaching arrangements are flexible to accommodate any necessary changes. Furthermore, staff take time to promote equal opportunities to pupils. In one lesson, a pupil gave an example of her grandfather knitting that challenged expected gender roles. Both staff members seamlessly reinforced pupils' understanding that anyone can do anything. Equal opportunities are well promoted.
- Leaders have made important changes to the assessment system to enable them to check that pupils are on track to meet their high expectations. Teachers are starting to make use of this more detailed information to support pupils' learning better. However, this system is still very new and does not yet provide information for the full range of subjects. Although leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness, they are not able to describe the progress that pupils are making in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. Furthermore, leaders do not use pupils' progress information enough to demonstrate the impact of their work.
- Leaders are outward looking and wisely draw on support from other professionals. There are strong relationships with the local authority and the school works with a number of local schools to share resources and expertise.
- Almost all parents would recommend the school. Some parents feel that the school now provides the right balance of nurture and challenge to their children. They also appreciate the support that they receive and some said that they feel very lucky to have a place for their child at this school.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are ambitious and very effective. They have appropriate skills and knowledge and use this well to challenge senior leaders to ensure that their improvement plans are on track. Governors ask for information about pupils' progress and are starting to use this to check the impact of their work.

- Governors maintain good oversight of their responsibilities. For example, they receive detailed reports from the headteacher. These enable governors to check that important tasks are complete, such as teachers' appraisals, and that the independent school standards are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures are clear and robust. As a result, staff have a shared commitment to promoting pupils' welfare and a culture of vigilance prevails. The school works closely with families and other professionals to support pupils and take action if they have concerns. Additionally, the headteacher has been proactive in ensuring that staff know how to protect pupils from radicalisation. She has also ensured that there are opportunities for pupils to learn about these dangers within the curriculum.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They set challenging activities and use their knowledge of pupils' abilities to provide additional activities to deepen their learning. For example, in a key stage 3 information technology lesson, staff provided individualised prompts and encouragement so that all pupils could succeed in retrieving detailed information from a database. The teacher was able to challenge some pupils to go even further and carry out their own research. As a result, most pupils, including the most able, are making good progress.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' vocabularies. For example, in a key stage 3 English lesson, pupils were considering the arguments for the United Kingdom to leave or remain in the European Union. The teacher used words such as terrorist, trade and member states when sharing points of view, and supported pupils to use these in their own writing. Consequently, pupils' writing and verbal responses demonstrate a rich vocabulary.
- Lessons capture pupils' interests very well. Teachers use practical experiments, drama and engaging facts to ensure that pupils remain focused. For example, in a science lesson, pupils worked in pairs to measure the average swing of a pendulum to discover the impact of mass on momentum. Pupils worked with great enthusiasm and were able to explain at the end of the lesson what their experiment proved.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and, as a result, pupils are making good progress across the curriculum. In a geography lesson, a teacher was able to challenge a pupil to make links in her learning. The pupil could explain how a stack was formed. The teacher developed this by prompting her to describe the difference in the rock formation between a beach and a headland.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to read. Teachers take time to work with pupils to ensure that they understand what they read. Consequently, pupils are making good progress in reading from their varied starting points.
- In the best lessons, teachers regularly check pupils' learning and adjust their teaching. For example, in a key stage 2 mathematics lesson, the teacher made regular checks on pupils' progress while they completed a task. She recognised that some pupils had made errors in finding fractions and stopped to remind pupils how to find and write fractions correctly. Following this the teacher checked to see that pupils had corrected their work. However, this practice is not consistent across all lessons and in all subjects.
- Strong relationships ensure that pupils make good progress. Staff work very well together and know each pupil very well. One pupil said, 'Teachers find the best way for us.' As a result, teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support to pupils. This ensures that pupils are focused and able to complete tasks. However, teachers do not always make the best use of time and resources to strengthen pupils' learning. In lessons, pupils sometimes do not receive sufficient time to think things through for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Personal development is a consistent feature of school life because leaders recognise its importance. Lessons foster pupils' confidence and abilities to work with others, and enable them to develop essential life and learning skills. As a result, pupils are highly focused learners and leave very well prepared for the next stage in education.

- Pupils value their school greatly and are proud to contribute to its development. They revel in roles such as school councillors, house leaders, sports leaders and more recently as English ambassadors. Through this they also learn about the importance of democracy and equal opportunities.
- Independent careers advice and an ongoing focus on ensuring that pupils are ready for transitions support pupils very well to take their next steps. The school is proactive in seeking to develop employability skills and providing meaningful work experiences linked to pupils' interests with local employers such as the stables, cookie bar and a beauty parlour. As a result, pupils rightly have high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Pupils have plenty of opportunities to learn how to keep safe and healthy through their regular personal, social and health education lessons. Topics such as drugs and alcohol, online safety and 'the secrets of a happy life' are enjoyed by pupils and teach important messages. Sex and relationships education also provides pupils with valuable information, advice and support.
- Bullying and discrimination are very rare. The calm and respectful environment that pervades the school is reflective of this. One pupil explained this as, 'We are understanding of everyone.' There are many opportunities for pupils to learn to respect and appreciate differences, such as backgrounds, through the curriculum. Pupils know that adults will help them if they have any problems. As a result, pupils say that they feel safe at school and almost all parents agree.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- In lessons, pupils behave very well. They are enthusiastic learners and listen with interest, often responding with their own ideas to demonstrate their thinking. Pupils also support each other to remain focused. In a key stage 3 English lesson, one pupil noticed that a friend had lost focus and asked him about his writing to bring his attention back. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning.
- Around the school, pupils behave extremely well. Pupils display excellent manners such as holding doors open and inviting others to go before them. They respond well to adults because relationships are very strong and adults consistently apply the shared expectations of pupils' behaviour.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Leaders know pupils well and ensure that those with more challenging behaviour receive appropriate care and support. Consequently, the school is a harmonious community.
- Attendance is good. Pupils' absence has reduced because the headteacher has set clear expectations and is working closely with parents and other professionals to provide effective support and challenge to families. Fewer pupils have higher levels of absence than in the past.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils across the school make good progress against their individual targets and in therapies. This is because these targets are prominent, regularly practised within lessons, and staff and pupils strive to ensure that they are met.
- Progress in English, mathematics and science for current pupils is good, taking into account their starting points and very varied needs and abilities. This is because teaching meets pupils' differing needs well.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. All pupils who left last year moved to sixth-form colleges having secured appropriate qualifications such as GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, art and physical education.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics is strong. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Attainment in reading is lower because pupils find this more difficult. However, pupils make good progress in reading as they move through the school. Leaders have placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils acquire this essential skill.
- Different groups of pupils, including the most able, make good progress from their starting points. The curriculum provides appropriate pathways that enable all pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' exercise books show that they are making progress in other subjects across the school. The school's effective curriculum enables them to build important skills, knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 134833 |
| Inspection number | 10006326 |
| DfE registration number | 936/6584 |

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.

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| Type of school | Special school |
| School status | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 7–17 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 45 |
| Number of part time pupils | 3 |
| Proprietor | The governing body |
| Chair | Norman Stromsoy |
| Headteacher | Melissa Farnham |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £18,000–£26,000 |
| Telephone number | 01428 609083 |
| Website | www.steppingstones.org.uk |
| Email address | headteacher@steppingstones.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 23–24 May 2012 |

Information about this school

- Stepping Stones is an independent special day school. The school has places for up to 45 pupils. There are currently six classes: one for key stage 2 pupils, four for key stage 3 pupils and one for key stage 4 pupils. By the time they leave the school, pupils complete qualifications, up to and including GCSEs.
- The last standard inspection took place in May 2012 and some independent school standards were judged to be not met. At the subsequent progress monitoring inspection in October 2012, all but one standard were judged to be met.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans or a statement of special educational needs. The school caters for pupils with hemiplegia and other forms of moderate physical or learning difficulties. Pupils join the school with a range of abilities and varied levels of achievement across different subjects.
- There are no disadvantaged pupils.
- The school aims to 'change lives for the better and strive to ensure that every child can realise their potential and make their unique contribution to society'.
- Stepping Stones works in a 'triad' with two community special schools, Sunnydown School and the Hope pupil referral unit to support improvements to teaching and learning. Pupils are also able to use specialist facilities for science, physical education and design technology at several other local schools.
- Pupils have the opportunity to learn employability skills in the school's cookie bar shop in Hindhead and on a range of other work placements in Year 10. The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in nine lessons, seven of which were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, a group of pupils and two governors.
- There were 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector also met with four parents.
- The inspector checked compliance with the independent school regulations. A range of documents were looked at including statutory policies, records relating to safeguarding, curriculum plans, pupils' progress information, and records of behaviour and attendance. The inspector toured the school in order to check the premises.
- The inspector considered 25 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Caroline Dulon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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