

Step by Step School

Neylands Farm, Grinstead Lane, Sharpthorne, East Sussex RH19 4HP

Inspection dates

26–28 June 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The dedicated team of senior leaders has worked tirelessly to make sure that pupils make outstanding progress. They have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- Parents and carers are delighted with the school. All who responded to the Ofsted survey would recommend the school to others.
- The school is a happy place. Relationships between staff and parents are very strong. Pupils' personal development is excellent. Staff help pupils to develop their attention spans. Pupils learn to manage their anxieties and behaviour.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is exceptional. Pupils make excellent progress in developing their social and academic skills. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
- Leaders and trustees have ensured that the school curriculum provides an exceptional range of experiences.
- Systems to keep children safe are effective. Parents confirm that their children feel settled and secure at this school.
- Many aspects of governance are effective. However, trustees do not receive clear enough information about pupils' progress. This affects their ability to hold leaders to account.
- There were a few minor administration issues related to record-keeping that were not in place when the inspection started. School leaders addressed these during the inspection.
- School leaders have identified that they do not provide enough on-site work experience opportunities for pupils.

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 the quality of leadership and management by:
 - implementing school plans to increase the number of work experience opportunities at the school
 - providing trustees with clear information about pupils' progress so they can challenge senior leaders more effectively
 - ensuring that standards of record-keeping are always of the highest quality.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders are passionate about ensuring that pupils achieve their full potential. The school is warm and welcoming. Pupils come in each day excited about their learning. Staff, even those who are new to the school, work as a cohesive team. They have the highest aspirations for pupils' social, emotional and academic development. Leaders and trustees have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. All who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, or who spoke to the inspector would recommend the school to others. Most parents commented that their children had made 'amazing progress'. Some said that during the holidays their children put on their uniform because they want to come to school. Parents find that the strong communication between school and home is 'invaluable'. They feel very well informed about their children's progress.
- Staff induction procedures are effective. Staff who responded to the Ofsted survey were very positive about the school. They feel well supported by leaders and managers.
- Pupils are happy at the school. They enjoy the range of activities provided. One of the reasons the curriculum is so effective is that it provides pupils with real-life experiences. Pupils make rapid progress in achieving their 'daily living skills' targets, such as using money when buying coffee at a local coffee shop.
- All the required areas of learning for independent schools are covered. Pupils have many opportunities to take part in creative experiences, such as art and music. They grow vegetables and develop strong horticultural skills. Pupils enjoy earning badges with the school's scout group. Outings, and visitors into school, enrich pupils' experiences. Sporting skills are very well developed through the use of the school's on-site gym and climbing wall. Pupils go off-site regularly for activities such as swimming.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. They have a good understanding of British values. For example, pupils learn about the importance of showing tolerance and respect of others.
- The school places a great deal of emphasis on preparing pupils for their future lives. For example, work experience opportunities take place at nearby shops and cafes. Plans identify that the school wants to further develop the on-site work experience provision.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because some aspects of record-keeping are not well enough managed. A few minor administration issues were rectified during the course of the inspection. Leaders do not provide trustees with clear enough information about pupils' progress. This affects their ability to hold leaders effectively to account.

Governance

- The board of trustees are passionate about ensuring that pupils receive the very best education.
- The trustees are highly experienced individuals. They monitor most aspects of the school successfully. They are very knowledgeable about the school's finances. There are

appropriate arrangements in place to manage the performance of staff. Trustees have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas still to improve.

- Trustees fulfil their statutory duties. They have completed many training courses relating to safeguarding. This includes training to ensure the safe recruitment of staff.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff have a detailed understanding of the vulnerability of the pupils at this school. They have completed an extensive range of safeguarding training, such as on the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff are vigilant in recording any concerns.
- Those who attend alternative provision are well supported. The school conducts thorough risk assessments for activities to ensure that pupils are always safe.
- The school has a safeguarding policy that is published on its website. It is compliant with the latest statutory guidance from the Department for Education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils make exceptional progress because staff understand pupils' different needs exceptionally well. When a pupil arrives at the school, staff make a detailed assessment in 10 areas of learning. These include living skills, social development and academic skills. Accurate targets are set to develop pupils' learning. Each session is methodically planned to meet these targets.
- Staff have an exceptional rapport with pupils. They have a thorough understanding of their complex needs. Staff recognise that some pupils have specific aversions. They work hard to ensure that these are addressed in the safe school environment. This helps to prepare pupils well for their futures.
- Staff plan interesting activities that capture pupils' imaginations. They are skilled at using audio, visual and tactile stimuli to best effect. This was clearly seen in a lesson based on the story 'Where the Wild Things Are', where staff used a wide range of stimulants, such as music, pictures and creative activities, to reinforce pupils' understanding of the text.
- Occupational therapists play a vital role in helping pupils to improve their physical skills. Speech and language therapists work closely with staff to reinforce communication skills.
- Most staff are very well qualified, and some have achieved a master's degree in applied behavioural analysis (ABA).

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils make significant gains in developing their attention spans. Many start school unable to focus on tasks for more than a few seconds. Due to highly effective teaching, these skills increase rapidly. This is one of the reasons why pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points.

- The school prepares pupils, including those in the sixth form, extremely well for their future lives. Pupils make rapid progress in their living skills. Parents commented how well their children can now do basic tasks, such as washing and dressing themselves.
- Pupils have increasing chances to develop their independence. They make good use of the school's bedsit, where they practise laundry tasks. Pupils develop effective cookery skills; for example, they learn how to make pasta.
- Pupils indicated that they feel safe at the school. They say that staff look after them well. When they first arrive, many pupils have significant difficulties in working with other pupils. Staff ensure that pupils start to understand about the needs and emotions of others.
- The longer pupils are at the school, the more they develop confidence in their own abilities. For example, most can order and pay for food while out shopping. Pupils visibly glow with pride when they engage in the mini-enterprise project. They enjoy the responsibility of ordering the correct ingredients. Pupils like working together when producing and selling sandwich wraps.
- Those who attend alternative provision do well. Staff who go with them each week ensure that they are well supported. This ensures that pupils attend well and develop strong personal and social skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Although at times some pupils display challenging behaviours, these are well managed. Behavioural analysts play a significant role in providing activities that will best encourage positive behaviours.
- Most pupils who have been at the school for more than a few months behave very well. Staff are expert in sensing pupils' anxieties and potential triggers. They are able to de-escalate any situations quickly. Staff help pupils to develop their understanding of acceptable behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Outcomes are outstanding because most pupils make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Pupils' communication skills are exceptionally well developed. Those who are non-verbal develop the skills to use pictures and symbols. They learn to make their views and wishes known. This has a marked impact on improving pupils' self-esteem and reducing their levels of frustration.
- Pupils make strong progress in developing their speaking skills. Staff ensure that pupils regularly practise making sounds. For example, they help pupils to form their mouth and tongue correctly to make the sound 't'. Those who are verbal develop a larger vocabulary. Many pupils have made huge strides in improving their listening skills. For example, in one lesson, pupils listened carefully to identify whether the teacher wanted them to pick up a picture of a car or a toy car.
- Pupils' physical development is rapid. This is due to the very effective support of the

occupational therapists. They help those with weak muscle groups to become stronger. Pupils regularly use the school's well-equipped gym and climbing wall. Those who find it hard to hold small items, such as pencils, regularly exercise their fingers. Pupils enjoy taking part in various sporting activities, such as horse riding, which help to develop strong balancing skills.

- Pupils make excellent progress in their reading skills. First, they learn to sit and engage with the pictures. They then sound out letters and blend them together to make words. Those with more developed skills read a variety of fiction and non-fiction books. Pupils make rapid progress in their writing, and a few develop sufficiently to write short paragraphs.
- Progress in mathematics is strong. Staff take every opportunity to help pupils learn to count. Once these skills are established, pupils develop the skills to use mathematics in real-life situations, such as telling the time.
- Pupils gain a range of entry-level accreditations aimed at developing their independence, and their vocational, academic and life skills.

School details

Unique reference number	134634
DfE registration number	845/6054
Inspection number	10047020

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	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Proprietor	Step by Step School Ltd
Chair of trustees	Stuart King
Headteacher	Donna Fidler
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,042 to £66,237
Telephone number	01342 811 852
Website	stepbystepschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@stepbystepschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 June 2015

Information about this school

- Step by Step was established as an independent special school in 2004. The school is run as a registered charity. It is governed by a board of trustees. The school is led by a director, who is responsible for the finances, staffing and promotion of the school. The teacher in charge is responsible for managing education in the school.
- The school caters for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Many have other associated difficulties, such as sensory processing issues and challenging behaviours. Nearly half of the pupils have involvement with the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Pupils often have medical needs, for example 26% of pupils have epilepsy. Over half of the pupils are non-verbal and communicate through pictures and symbols. The school employs behaviour analysts

as well as occupational and speech and language therapists.

- The school is registered for up to 30 pupils between the ages of four and 19. Currently, there are 27 pupils on roll between the ages of six and 19 years. The majority of pupils are boys. There are too few pupils in the sixth form to report on their progress without them being identified. Approximately five local authorities use the school to place pupils.
- A number of pupils enter at different times during the school year. Prior to attending this school, pupils have often had some time out of education or have been excluded from their previous schools.
- The school aims to 'help pupils develop the skills, understanding and confidence to reach their full potential and, as far as possible, lead full and independent lives'.
- Pupils are taught in six mixed-age classes. There are two primary classes and four secondary classes. Each class is overseen by a class leader. Each pupil has a tutor who is responsible for their day-to-day programme. Staff deliver sessions based on the principles of applied behaviour analysis (ABA). The school works with several national institutions, including the University of Brighton. It also has links with ABA networks worldwide.
- The school uses alternative provision at St Piers School, Lingfield.
- The school was previously inspected in June 2015, when the overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school with the teacher in charge. There were two meetings with pupils to gather their views about what it was like to attend this school. Pupils' folders and photographic records were also examined.
- There were conversations with five parents. The 14 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own questionnaire were also considered. The views of 47 members of staff who completed questionnaires were also noted.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school policies, procedures and records in order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Conversations were held with the trustees, senior leaders, therapists and other staff.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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