

# Stepping Stones School

Independent school standard inspection report

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|-------------------------------|--------------------|
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| Inspection dates              | 23–24 May 2012     |
| Reporting inspector           | Angela Corbett HMI |

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Stepping Stones is an independent special day school located in a converted church and grounds close to the centre of Hindhead in a rural part of south-west Surrey. The school, which is owned by a single proprietor, opened in 2004 and is run by a charitable trust. It is registered for up to 30 students aged from 8 to 16 years of age with hemiplegia and other forms of moderate physical or learning difficulties. There are currently 23 students on roll aged from 9 to 17 years, 20 of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Students are taught in one of four groups with specialist subject teaching for those in Key Stages 3 and 4. Most students have experienced significant interruptions to their previous education. The school was last inspected in January 2009.

The school mission statement is 'to provide a stimulating, caring and friendly learning environment which will maximise the students' educational achievement and their potential for independence'.

## **Evaluation of the school**

The school provides an outstanding quality of education and meets its aims very successfully; reflecting good progress since the last inspection. Students thrive here, developing independence and becoming confident and enthusiastic learners. They make outstanding progress because of good teaching and the exceptionally well-tailored curriculum. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding due to the focus on developing the whole person, valuing difference and appreciating the needs of others. Consequently, students' outstanding behaviour is reflected in the high levels of care and respect students show for each other. Despite the high level of day-to-day care for students, the overall provision for their welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding arrangements, is inadequate. Although the school meets most regulations, a number are not met, in particular those relating to health and safety and the safeguarding of students.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

## Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It is broad, balanced and provides full access to the National Curriculum as required in some students' statements of special educational needs. However, there are a limited number of design and technology activities. The policies and schemes of work that underpin the curriculum are reviewed annually to ensure the needs, aptitudes and interests of current students are met. It has a number of strengths. First, there is a strong focus on preparing students for life beyond school by developing their basic skills, building self-esteem and fostering independence. Second, it is highly tailored to each individual, providing additional support or time on some aspects and access to alternative subjects or experiences. Third, carefully planned induction into the school enables students to make rapid gains, in particular for younger students in reading and writing, within relatively short spaces of time. The range of accreditations has increased since the last inspection, and include Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN), entry level and/or GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, art, Spanish and business studies. Notably, GCSEs in citizenship and religious education (RE) at Key Stage 4, and the 'opening minds programme' at Key Stage 3 are making significant contributions to students' personal, social and health education (PSHE). The four classes are loosely based on the school's three key stages, with two groups at Key Stage 3. However, it is the flexibility of grouping students by ability and maturity for all or some of their lessons that enables them to flourish, develop their social and teamwork skills and contributes to their outstanding progress both academically and personally and their enjoyment of school. On a daily basis, students' horizons are significantly broadened through one or more of the wide variety of additional experiences such as the use of external facilities, short visits, longer trips, visiting speakers and work-related learning.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. Teaching in most lessons is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. It is not outstanding overall, because there is some satisfactory teaching and the quality of assessment, while improved, is not yet outstanding. There are strong relationships between staff and students who show high levels of trust in their teachers to help them to learn. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use questioning well to probe students' understanding and promote their learning. Teachers and support workers are skilled at encouraging students to tackle tasks for themselves and develop resilience in their learning. In the most effective lessons, time is used well, with rapid pace and very smooth transitions between the interesting and often challenging tasks and activities. For example, in a Key Stage 4 English lesson, the teacher's excellent use of text to illustrate the structure of poems, and convey the meaning of imagery, enabled students to make outstanding progress. Teachers plan and structure students' learning well to secure good progress, as seen in a Key Stage 2 music lesson. In many lessons good use is made of peer-assessment; for example in a Key Stage 3 humanities lesson when students assessed each other's presentations on different aspects of Victorian life. On some occasions teachers talk for too long and tasks are not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of those with different levels of ability within the class to fully challenge and extend learning. Nonetheless, all students are making at least good progress in all subjects at Key Stages 2 and 3. Progress

accelerates as they spend longer in the school, so that students achieve GCSE grades often at or above national averages in several subjects. This represents outstanding progress from their often below age-expected starting points, in particular in English, art and mathematics. Students are confident users of information and communication technology (ICT) and frequent use is made of new technologies to promote learning.

Teachers know their students extremely well and use information from ongoing assessment of students' learning within lessons and their books to inform planning. Students are frequently advised on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, although this tends to be verbal rather than in writing. The quality of written guidance is still variable and, while some good practice was seen, students across the school do not consistently take responsibility for their personal learning targets. Students' attainment and abilities are assessed prior to, and on entry to, the school. However, while a more systematic approach to recording assessments and tracking students' progress has been adopted, it lacks rigour and consistency due to some missing data.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding. Students' behaviour is outstanding and the students are exceptionally courteous and welcoming. They show great respect for each other both in lessons and around school and instinctively offer caring support. They develop into confident and well-rounded young people with real enthusiasm for learning and school life, and show exceptionally positive attitudes towards overcoming their disabilities. Consequently, their attendance is above average when medical treatments and illness are not counted.

Citizenship, religious education and PSHE lessons provide excellent opportunities for students to consider a wide range of moral and ethical issues with great maturity. They develop a good understanding of different cultures and people's ways of life both within Great Britain and overseas. Students learn to appreciate difficulties that others experience through raising funds for charity, including housing in countries such as Somalia and Haiti, and providing warm clothes for children in Afghanistan. They make good contributions to the local community; this includes visiting elderly people in a nearby care home and active participation in the 'Smile at me' campaign which raises awareness of disability. Music and art lessons, special events in school such as Chinese Week and visits, including those to the local fire station, museums, theatres and the Houses of Parliament, significantly enrich students' cultural experiences and give students greater understanding of public institutions and services in England. The regular visits to partner schools, participation in community events such as their performance at a Shakespeare festival and work in the school's commercial coffee shop help students to gain confidence in meeting people and coping with new situations. This, together with the high focus on the development of basic and life skills, including financial management and careers advice, helps equip students extremely well for life beyond Stepping Stones.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The welfare, health and safety of students are inadequate because the school does not meet a number of regulations for health and safety, fire safety, first aid and safeguarding. The school has not been sufficiently rigorous in ensuring that: policies and procedures fully reflect current government guidance and are followed assiduously; implementation is regularly monitored and reviewed; staff are appropriately trained; and, full written records and risk assessments in relation to health and safety, including fire safety, are formally undertaken and kept. However, the day-to-day care of students is excellent and staff are vigilant in relation to their well-being and safety at all times. Students are well supervised. All students spoken to, and most in their inspection questionnaires, say they feel safe in school, a view echoed by parents and carers. Students learn how to stay fit and healthy through physical education which includes swimming lessons and sailing. In science and cooking lessons, as well as at lunchtimes, they gain an understanding of food hygiene and healthy eating. To help students keep mobile and supple, the school provides regular exercise and physiotherapy sessions in line with students' needs and the requirements of their statements. All students use school equipment, their mobility aids and the lifts to the two upstairs classrooms sensibly to ensure their own and others' safety.

Students say bullying is rare and they learn about how to use computers and the internet safely. The school keeps a record of sanctions imposed on students for serious disciplinary offences. Any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with effectively. While the school does record daily attendance, an admissions register has not been maintained, as required. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school has established procedures for checking that all staff are suitable to work with children and young people, including Criminal Records Bureau checks. However, the school's procedures lack rigour and the appropriate checks have not been undertaken for all of the school's trustees. At the start of the inspection none of the trustees were included on the school's single central record of recruitment checks. By the end of the inspection some of this information was added, but omissions remained.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is housed in a converted church which has been adapted to provide a high quality and safe learning environment. Careful consideration has been given to ensuring that students are able to move around the school and grounds independently most of the time. Classrooms are well equipped and resourced to meet the differing needs of students. Most are equipped with projectors. Students have their own laptops and there is good access to music technology equipment. Students use off-site facilities to compensate for the lack of science or sporting facilities. All areas of the school are clean, tidy and well maintained. Washrooms and

facilities for students who are ill meet requirements and the grounds have been well adapted with access to both play and quiet areas. Since the last inspection acoustic panels have been installed in the main hall and the Key Stage 2 classroom to improve access to lessons for a few younger students.

## **Provision of information**

Most of the required information to parents and carers is provided through the school's website and prospectus. However, some required details are missing and the specific areas of non compliance are noted below. Parents and carers are kept informed about students' progress and personal development through half-termly meetings and an annual report which is also used for annual review meetings. Parents and carers also value the routine daily contact. Nonetheless, a few felt that this could be improved. An annual account of income received and expenditure, incurred by the school for students placed by a local authority, has not been submitted to local authorities.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

A written complaints procedure is in place which meets requirements.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of students at the school and ensure these arrangements have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7)
- ensure there are effective measures, including risk assessments, to ensure pupils' health and safety which have regard to the DfE guidance (paragraph 11)
- ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- revise and implement the written policy on first aid ensuring there is a fully qualified first aider (paragraph 14)
- ensure that the admission register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006<sup>4</sup> (paragraph 17).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors (standards in part 4) and must:

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<sup>3</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made).

<sup>4</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/contents/made).

- ensure that no member of the proprietorial body is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (ISA barred list), or does not carry out or intend to carry out work at the school in contravention of any direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act in respect of that person (List 99), or disqualification prohibition or restriction having the same effect (paragraph 21(6)(a))
- ensure that the identity and right to work in the United Kingdom and enhanced CRB checks are undertaken for all members of the proprietorial body (paragraph 21(6)(b))
- ensure that for each member of staff the register shows the person is not barred from regulatory activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the safeguarding vulnerable groups act 2006 (ISA barred list), or there is no direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act in respect of that person (List 99), or disqualification prohibition or restriction having the same effect together with the date the check was completed (paragraphs 22(3) and 22(4))
- ensure that for each member of a body of persons named as the proprietor the checks referred to in 21(6)(b) were made, the date they were made and the date on which the resulting certificate was obtained is shown on the register (paragraphs 22(6) and 22(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available to parents and carers of students and parents and carers of prospective students:
  - particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions
  - particulars of the sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving
  - particulars of the arrangements for tackling bullying
  - particulars for promoting students' health and safety on educational visits
  - details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 24(1)(b))
- ensure that an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of any students placed by a local authority is submitted to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State (paragraph 24(1)(h)).



## Inspection judgements

|             |      |              |            |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

### The quality of education

|  |   |   |  |  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Overall quality of education   | ✓ |   |  |  |
| How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils | ✓ |   |  |  |
| How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs         |   | ✓ |  |  |
| How well pupils make progress in their learning  | ✓ |   |  |  |

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

|  |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | ✓ |  |  |  |
| The behaviour of pupils  | ✓ |  |  |  |

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

|  |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils |  |  |  | ✓ |
|--|--|--|--|---|

## School details

|   |  |           |           |
|---|--|-----------|-----------|
| <b>School status</b>  | Independent  |           |           |
| <b>Type of school</b>   | Special, for pupils with hemiplegia and other moderate physical and learning difficulties. |           |           |
| <b>Date school opened</b>   | 2004   |           |           |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>  | 8–16 years   |           |           |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>   | Mixed  |           |           |
| <b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>                              | Boys: 12   | Girls: 10 | Total: 22 |
| <b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>                              | Boys: 0  | Girls: 1  | Total: 1  |
| <b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b> | Boys: 11   | Girls: 9  | Total: 20 |
| <b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>                          | Boys: 0  | Girls: 0  | Total: 0  |
| <b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>                                       | £11,200–£14,200  |           |           |
| <b>Address of school</b>  | Tower Road<br>Hindhead<br>Surrey<br>GU26 6SU   |           |           |
| <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01428 609 083  |           |           |
| <b>Email address</b>  | enquiries@steppingstones.org.uk  |           |           |
| <b>Headteacher</b>  | Mr Neil Clark  |           |           |
| <b>Proprietor</b>   | Mr Larry Sullivan  |           |           |

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**

25 May 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Stepping Stones School, Hindhead GU26 6SU**

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I very much enjoyed talking with you, and visiting your lessons and activities. I am pleased to say that the quality of education you receive at Stepping Stones is outstanding. Here is a summary of the main inspection findings.

- Whatever your age, you thoroughly enjoy school. You told me that you appreciate how you are being helped to achieve and overcome your disabilities.
- Regardless of when you join the school, you make consistently good, and for some of you outstanding, progress in the younger classes. Your progress is even better in the older class so by the time you leave your achievement is outstanding, particularly in English, mathematics and art.
- You show exceptional care and respect for each other, reflecting your outstanding personal development and behaviour. I was particularly impressed with how well you work together in lessons and help each other to get around.
- Teachers assess how well you are doing all the time and carefully adjust their teaching to support your learning. The systems for tracking your progress have improved; however, there is not yet a consistent approach to this and I have asked the school to work to improve this process.
- The curriculum is excellent because you are provided with a very wide range of activities and experiences that broaden your horizons, build your self-confidence, develop your social skills and help prepare you for life beyond Stepping Stones.
- As you told me, all the staff care about you so that you feel safe in school. However, the overall provision for your welfare, health and safety is inadequate because some of the regulations relating to your health and safety and the provision of information to your parents, carers and others are not met.

Your headteacher and all the staff are highly committed to doing the best for you. I have asked them to ensure that all of the regulations for independent schools are met. You can help by continuing to make the most of the opportunities offered to you. I would like to wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett  
Her Majesty's Inspector