

# Inspection of Headstart

Crouch Lane, Ninfield, Battle, East Sussex TN33 9EG

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Inspection dates: 5–7 February 2020

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	<b>Yes</b>

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils thrive at this school and feel safe. Staff make personal development and welfare of pupils the highest priority. The school is a warm, happy place and as one pupil said, 'This is my second family.'

The school's curriculum has outdoor learning at its heart. Pupils benefit greatly by taking responsibility when working with animals and on the land. The outside environment also enables therapeutic support that enhances pupils' well-being considerably.

Most pupils have complex needs associated with their communication difficulties. Many pupils have experienced disjointed education in the past and are despondent when they arrive at the school. Because school staff have great expertise and get to know pupils extremely well, pupils' behaviour improves dramatically. Pupils re-engage with their education and develop a love of learning.

Everyone gets on very well together and pupils say that bullying is not a problem.

Leaders ensure that all the school community have high expectations of pupils. Parents and carers praise the school and say it has transformed their children's lives. Pupils believe that they can achieve more than they ever thought was possible.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

The proprietor, governors and leaders have a compelling vision. They aim to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. They are clear that each child needs exactly the right curriculum for them. As a governor said, 'We fit the curriculum to the child and not the child to the curriculum.'

Teaching sequences the learning so that pupils learn new skills and knowledge that flow from previous learning. Pupils achieve well. A parent, representing the views of others, said, 'Headstart has given my child the chance to succeed.'

A successful core curriculum builds pupils' literacy, numeracy, communication and social skills. The curriculum follows the national curriculum. It also provides pupils with the opportunity to follow their interests. When appropriate, pupils choose a range of courses resulting in accredited qualifications. These include academic subjects such as English, mathematics, science and history GCSE. Vocational learning includes creative media, art and design, land-based studies and construction. Leaders provide extra tuition should a pupil have a particular interest that is not covered by the range of courses available. Pupils enjoy their learning and what the school has to offer.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading. Pupils who are ready learn to use phonics well so they can start to read, write and speak. Weekly singing practice provides a joyful opportunity for the pupils to celebrate reading. This is because pupils read

words from a screen while taking turns to sing. Pupils read daily and usually from books that are appropriate to their ability. Most-able pupils have a range of books available to them. They speak with enthusiasm about Shakespeare's works and other classic texts such as 'Animal Farm'. Helpfully, staff use texts and reading material to help pupils empathise with characters and explore social issues.

Staff enhance the curriculum with the use of the rich land-based resources. For example, when learning about the Stone Age in history, pupils make simple bread, cooking the loaves in the fire pit.

Personal, social and health education is highly successful. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to understand social and relationship issues. For example, a series of lessons about Black History Month prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.

The curriculum helps pupils to learn strategies to improve their communication. As time passes, they learn to interact successfully with others. A pupil explained, 'We can become experts in a subject so it gives us something to talk about with others who have a common interest.' Pupils grow in confidence at this school.

The sixth-form provision is a strong feature of this school. Most sixth-form students study at a second school site. As with the rest of the school, leaders have determined that students will follow a study programme that is personalised. Students become increasingly independent. Careers guidance supports each student well. Typically, students move on to mainstream further education, specialised colleges or supported living. Staff make sure that students are prepared well for their future lives.

Extra-curricular activities such as field trips and charity events extend pupils' learning very well. An active school council also encourages pupils to work together and develop leadership skills. Pupils understand each other and older pupils are positive role models for their younger peers. They engage very well in lessons and contribute positively to the life of the school. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. The management of pupils' behaviour is a real strength of the school.

The buildings and outside area are kept well. There are robust health and safety policies and procedures so that the school site is safe.

The proprietor has made sure that the school complies with legislation associated with equality duties. Governors are skilled and knowledgeable and provide helpful guidance to the leaders of the school. The proprietor and governors visit the school regularly to see it working for themselves. Leaders have made sure that the school meets the independent school standards. There have been two changes in headteacher since the last inspection. The governors and current headteacher have ensured that the staff have been a cohesive team throughout this time.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders take safeguarding very seriously. Pupils say that they feel safe. Leaders make sure that staff are well trained and watch out for any signs that a pupil may be at risk. Leaders document any safeguarding concern diligently and double-check that procedures are followed correctly.

Pupils have lots of opportunities in the curriculum to learn about keeping safe. They learn about how to keep safe online. Staff keep in touch with parents so that any concerns are discussed immediately.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- School leaders have recently carried out a review of the reading curriculum. Leaders should deliver on their plans to improve pupils' reading skills further and to extend the opportunities that pupils have to read.
- Leaders produce various plans for improving the school. However, sometimes progress is checked only by ensuring that actions identified in plans have been carried out. Consequently, the impact of the actions on pupils' learning is not always considered well enough. The governing body and leaders should improve monitoring of plans by reviewing the success of actions precisely.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134148
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/6051
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10116543
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 21
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	46
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	8
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Nicki Dann
<b>Chair</b>	Scott Fasciolo-Barnes
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jacquie Fairhurst
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£30,000 to £60,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01424 893803
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.headstartschool.co.uk">www.headstartschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@headstartschool.co.uk">admin@headstartschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11–13 July 2017

## Information about this school

- The school has had two changes in headteacher since the last inspection. The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left the school in August 2018. The current headteacher took up her role in January 2020, although she has had oversight of the school since September 2018 as a leadership adviser and interim headteacher. The previous headteacher had taken up post in April 2019.
- The school is situated on two sites. The main site is in Ninfield, East Sussex. The second site is in Golden Cross, East Sussex.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties associated with their individual needs. Many of the pupils have autism spectrum disorder.
- The last standard inspection took place in July 2017, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all of the independent school standards were found to be met.
- No alternative provision is used by this school.

## Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, other leaders, governors and the proprietor.
- We conducted deep dives in these subjects: reading, land-based studies, personal, social and health education, and history. After a meeting with subject leaders, lessons were visited and pupils' work was scrutinised. Meetings were held with teachers to discuss pupils' learning.
- We spoke with pupils about their learning and other aspects of the school.
- We considered the responses from Ofsted's online questionnaires completed by staff, parents and pupils.
- Discussions were held with a number of parents and an email from a parent was considered.
- Staff recruitment records and safeguarding documents were checked. We conducted discussions with teachers and pupils about keeping safe. The lead inspector held a meeting with the school's designated safeguarding lead.

- A range of school documents were scrutinised, including curriculum plans and the school development plan. We reviewed the school website.

### **Inspection team**

Sue Child, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Gary Holden

Her Majesty's Inspector

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