

Step by Step School Limited

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

Inspection date

8 July 2021

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- Trips, visits and off-site activities make an important contribution to pupils' personal, social and health development. Pupils usually participate in a wide range of activities from week to week, including trampolining, horse riding and swimming. Meanwhile, opportunities for the older pupils to use community services, such as a dental surgery, a hairdresser and a café, help to foster independence and life skills.
- The pandemic has inevitably curtailed the school's usual schedule of trips and visits. Nonetheless, some activities, such as opportunities to work on the school's allotment, have continued as normal. Leaders intend to reinstate the usual schedule of trips and visits as soon as practical.
- Fundamental British values are promoted through carefully planned and meaningful activities, such as making choices about activities or voting for class names. Respect for others is strongly promoted throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn to recognise and celebrate difference and diversity. The school teaches a number of world religions as well as key festivals, such as Diwali and Easter. Regular visits to places of worship are built into the religious education curriculum to help pupils to learn about different beliefs.
- Adults develop strong and trusting relationships with the pupils. The school's behaviour policy encourages pupils to appreciate the impact of their behaviour on others. Individualised behaviour plans help pupils to develop reliable strategies to support daily life.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- Leaders give pupils' safety and welfare an appropriately high priority. Well-established procedures and a calm, purposeful atmosphere ensure that pupils can learn, play and relax safely. Staff are alert to pupils' needs and respond sensitively when extra help is needed. They respond warmly to pupils, with lots of smiles, encouragement and reassurance.
- Current health and safety policies and procedures are likely to support the proposed increase in pupil numbers. The safeguarding policy meets statutory requirements and is published on the school's website.

Paragraphs 9–10

- The school's comprehensive behaviour policy pays close attention to each pupil's specific needs. Leaders work in close partnership with parents and carers. Staff make sure that they are fully informed of strategies used in school to support pupils' behaviour so that parents can use them at home too.
- All incidents of challenging behaviour are recorded centrally. Leaders keep a close eye on pupils' behaviour over time. They analyse behaviour patterns regularly, making changes to the support strategies in place when required.

Paragraphs 11–12

- Leaders have developed and established a range of reliable health and safety policies and procedures. All members of staff play their role in helping to maintain site safety. They follow agreed procedures consistently and complete regular checks of the school site.
- The school buildings currently in use comply fully with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire signs, exits and extinguishers are clearly indicated and suitably located throughout the school's existing buildings.
- Fire doors have not yet been installed in the new classrooms, which are still under construction. However, plans are in hand to ensure that this work is completed in line with statutory requirements. The new classroom areas will not be used until checked and signed off as fully compliant by a local authority building inspector.
- The proprietor ensures that the school's fire safety arrangements are checked regularly by a specialist. Leaders make sure that any recommended actions are addressed swiftly.

Paragraphs 13–16(b)

- The school's first-aid policy is fit for purpose and posted on the school's website.
- The school provides ample provision for the proposed increase in the number of pupils on roll. Leaders will ensure that the staff-to-pupil ratio remains high if the material change is granted.
- The school's risk assessment policy provides a secure framework for staff to evaluate and mitigate potential hazards. Risk assessments are routinely completed as part of school life to ensure pupils' safety.

- The proprietor has ensured that the parts of this standard considered during this inspection are likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3)–19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)–21(3)(b), 21(5)–21(6), 20(6)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–(4), 21(7)(a)–21(7)(b)

- Leaders make sure that all required pre-employment checks are carried out for new staff and governors. These include statutory checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.
- Leaders have completed appropriate safeguarding checks for the building contractors who are currently working on the school site.
- Leaders maintain complete and up-to-date records of suitability checks. The business manager meets regularly with the designated safeguarding leads to ensure that all checks and records are in order.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2), 25–29(1)(b)

- The process of building two new classrooms, a new sixth-form common room, a staff room and other associated areas is well under way but is not yet finished. Most of the structural work has been done, with the remaining work due for completion in the next few weeks. The school's existing classrooms and buildings provide suitable short-term accommodation for the proposed increase in pupil numbers should the building's completion be delayed.
- The new classrooms have been thoughtfully designed with pupils' needs in mind. Classrooms are spacious, airy and bright. Additional areas under construction include toilets, and quiet rooms for pupils to study. Acoustics and lighting are appropriate.
- The new purpose-built medical room is suitably equipped with a sink and a nearby toilet and will supplement the school's existing medical room when completed.
- The new sixth-form common room will provide pupils with an attractive and well-equipped area for relaxing and socialising. New kitchen facilities will enable them to prepare snacks and meals, and so will contribute to the development of pupils' independence and life skills.
- Suitable toilet and washing facilities are incorporated into the new building. Drinking water is readily available.
- The school's existing outdoor areas provide pupils with extensive areas to learn, socialise and relax. There is ample space to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers. Additional covered spaces are used flexibly for teaching and recreation. Pupils can use a range of good-quality play equipment. They clearly enjoy using the school's outdoor spaces, carefully supervised by adults.

- Substantial hedging and fencing ensure that the site is secure. The caretaker regularly checks the site's perimeter.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The headteacher makes sure that pupils' personal development and welfare are at the heart of the school's work. She has built a team of knowledgeable leaders who work with her to support pupils' learning and well-being.
- Governors have strengthened their roles considerably since the last inspection. For example, they have developed a robust monitoring schedule that helps them to check that the independent school standards are consistently met. Governors ask leaders challenging and pertinent questions during governors' meetings. They use a range of activities, such as school visits and staff presentations, to see the school's work in practice. Safeguarding is a standing agenda item for governors' meetings.
- Leaders plan to implement the expansion in pupil numbers gradually over time. The school has plenty of capacity in terms of space and staffing to accommodate 40 pupils on roll. The proposed increase in pupil numbers is not dependent on completion of the current building work to extend the school's accommodation.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	134634
DfE registration number	845/6054
Inspection number	10197401

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Step by Step School Ltd
Chair	Stuart King
Headteacher	Gayle Adam
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,052 to £68,571
Telephone number	01342 811852
Website	www.stepbystepschool.org.uk
Email address	info@stepbystepschool.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26–28 June 2018

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	4 to 19	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	32	40	40

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Not applicable

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	32	40
Number of part-time pupils	0	Not applicable
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	32	Not applicable
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	32	Not applicable
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	32	Not applicable

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	48	Not applicable
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	Not applicable
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this school

- Step by Step was established as an independent special school in 2014. The school is run as a registered charity. It is governed by a board of trustees. The school is led by the headteacher with the support of the leadership team.
- The school caters for pupils with 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. Pupils often have medical needs, such as epilepsy. Many 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. The Department for Education (DfE) has agreed a temporary published admission number of 32 while the current building works are completed. Currently, there are 32 pupils on roll between the ages of six and 19 years. The majority of pupils are boys. Approximately seven 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 time out of education and may have experienced placement breakdowns in 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 seven mixed-age classes. There are three primary, two secondary and two sixth-form 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 a range of alternative provision to meet pupils' needs, such as St Piers College in Lingfield, Plumpton College in Brighton, and Pericles, a training and work project based in Hoathly Hill, West Sussex.
- The school was previously inspected in June 2018, when overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE to evaluate the school's application for a material change. The proprietor wishes to increase the maximum number of pupils on roll from 30 to 40.
- This was the school's first material change inspection.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, the teacher in charge, the school business manager and the school administrator. The inspector also held a virtual discussion with the chair of governors.
- The inspector toured the school premises and visited a number of classrooms. She reviewed the school's website and considered a range of school policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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