

# Inspection of Step by Step School Limited

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

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Inspection dates: 4 to 6 October 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Outstanding**

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The quality of education

**Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

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

Pupils at Step by Step deserve to be extremely proud of their school. It prepares them exceptionally well for the future. Many have had very poor experiences of school in the past. However, they thrive here. Pupils enjoy their time in school, and it makes a positive difference to their lives.

Staff spend time finding out about pupils' interests and the things they do well. This knowledge helps teachers to plan lessons that are precisely matched to pupils' individual needs and that build on what they already know and can do.

Pupils have many anxieties and frequently struggle to manage their behaviours, feelings and emotions. Staff look after pupils and help them to stay calm and settled. This support is consistent in every class. Staff are focused on encouraging independence, building skills and maximising pupils' potential.

Pupils get on well with each other in this harmonious school. They are supported by staff to develop positive friendships with their peers. One pupil demonstrated this when she asked a group of other pupils whether they wanted to play a game with her at breaktime. Pupils rarely fall out, and if they do, it is often the result of a misunderstanding. Staff help pupils to understand each other's points of view. As a result, pupils quickly restore their friendships.

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

Leaders and staff are committed to making sure that all pupils go on to lead independent, happy and confident lives. Staff are invested in every pupil's future and understand the importance of their work. A well-thought-out balance of one-to-one and small-group teaching, together with a range of therapies, make up the ambitious curriculum that pupils follow.

At the heart of every pupil's curriculum is the most important knowledge that they need. For some pupils, this is a focus on the functional skills that they will use in adulthood. During the inspection, older pupils told the lead inspector that they had just returned from a visit to a local coffee shop. They proudly explained that they had planned the visit, ordered their own drinks and paid for them using a debit card. They highlighted the dangers of sharing personal information with others, for example their PIN numbers.

Highly knowledgeable staff lead the teaching of reading. They carefully check pupils' reading ability when pupils first join the school. They use the information that they gather to provide appropriate teaching. Opportunities to visit the school's calming and well-stocked library give pupils the space and time to enjoy reading. Staff encourage pupils to read aloud in lessons. Pupils enjoy story time and are supported to understand a range of interesting texts.

Developing pupils' communication skills is a high priority for staff. A number of communication systems are used. These systems help pupils to share their wishes and develop independence. For example, pupils are expected to use their communication systems to make choices. Staff use a range of strategies effectively to help pupils do this.

A highly consistent approach to promoting positive behaviour in class and around school is used by all staff. They think very carefully about the behaviours they want to encourage and improve for each pupil. Staff have high expectations and quickly reward pupils when they demonstrate the behaviours they want to see.

Pupils get a lot from the school's personal development curriculum. Life skills, careers education and learning to manage their behaviour are all things that help to prepare pupils for the future. The personal, social and health education programme is designed to teach pupils the important content they need to know at the right time, for example how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Regular trips and visits mean that they can put this learning into practice. Varied, purposeful excursions also help to broaden pupils' horizons.

A passionate, committed and highly skilled board of trustees supports the school very well. Each trustee has a particular set of skills, helping the school to constantly improve. Trustees check carefully that leaders are doing all they can to achieve the school's mission. They ask thoughtful, challenging questions of leaders, which ensures that the school never stands still.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, staff and trustees receive regular, high-quality safeguarding training. As a result, they are knowledgeable and extremely vigilant. Staff know pupils very well. This enables them to spot any changes in pupils' behaviour swiftly. Staff know what to do when they have a concern about a pupil and they act quickly. A clear process is in place for staff to follow. Safeguarding leaders act promptly, maintaining meticulous records of any concerns about pupils and the subsequent actions they take. Every opportunity is exploited to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including online.

## **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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

## School details

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 134634   |
| <b>DfE registration number</b>             | 845/6054   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                     | East Sussex  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                   | 10243536   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Other Independent Special School   |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Independent school   |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 4 to 19  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed  |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 30   |
| <b>Number of part-time pupils</b>          | 0  |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Catherine James  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Gayle Adam   |
| <b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>            | £68,500  |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01342 811852   |
| <b>Website</b>                             | <a href="http://www.stepbystepschool.org.uk">www.stepbystepschool.org.uk</a>     |
| <b>Email address</b>                       | <a href="mailto:admin@stepbystepschool.org.uk">admin@stepbystepschool.org.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>         | 26 to 28 June 2018   |

## 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 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 40 pupils between the ages of four and 19.
- 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 mixed-age 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 engages with several national institutions, including the University of Brighton. It also has links with ABA networks worldwide.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and other members of staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the board of trustees and the former chair of the board of trustees, who remains a trustee.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading/communication, independent living skills, personal, social and health education and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received on Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and considered the results of the Ofsted staff questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with several pupils during the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke to several members of staff to gather their views about the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and met with safeguarding leaders.
- Inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed the school facilities, to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

### **Inspection team**

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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