

# Inspection of Headstart

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

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Inspection dates: 21 to 23 November 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

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

Staff make sure that the school day gets off to a calm and friendly start, checking in with each pupil and providing reassuring support where needed. Pupils are soon busily occupied in a range of activities chosen carefully to appeal to pupils' interests and personal development targets, such as preparing breakfast, playing cricket or completing a word search. Warm and good-humoured relationships ensure that pupils feel secure and respected. Many greet visitors with a cheery 'good morning' and 'how are you?' as they settle happily into a busy school day.

The school has high expectations of pupils, with a strong focus on helping them to secure nationally accredited qualifications. Outdoor learning in the school's extensive land-based provision is a key part of school life and makes a strong contribution to learning. For instance, pupils routinely help with tasks such as feeding and moving the animals, as well as completing land-based qualification programmes in subjects such as equine studies and horticulture.

The school's culture of understanding, encouragement and reassurance is highly effective in helping pupils to develop a growing sense of self-worth and ambition. Pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education, both personally and academically.

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

The school's broad and balanced curriculum has been thoughtfully designed to provide three programmes of study. Leaders assess pupils' needs and starting points carefully when they join the school. They work closely with pupils and their parents and carers to identify the best curriculum pathway to ensure success for each pupil.

Pupils achieve a range of nationally recognised qualifications, including BTECs, GCSEs and A levels. The school's innovative and exceptionally high-quality careers programme makes a strong contribution to pupils' preparation for the next stage of education, training or employment. The school's success is reflected in the oldest pupils' readiness to move on to a range of destinations, including further education. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school works hard to make sure that pupils have access to the subjects and qualifications that interest them most. Staff and pupils work together to assess pupils' progress against individualised targets, which are based on pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils develop a strong sense of the personal progress they have made as a result. The breadth of the curriculum ensures that everyone can shine. Subjects such as music, for instance, make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. For example, during the inspection, pupils sang with huge enthusiasm and enjoyment during a music lesson and were warmly applauded by staff. Some pupils go on to become accomplished musicians with ambitions of a future career in the music industry.

Leaders have developed a well-sequenced reading programme since the previous inspection. Pupils often make striking progress in learning to read, ensuring greater access to learning across the curriculum, as well as fostering their enjoyment of books. All staff are trained in the teaching of phonics. They tailor the teaching of early reading skills carefully to support individual pupils' needs. During the inspection, for instance, staff used Sign alongside phonics, where appropriate, to reinforce learning.

Pupils thrive in the school's therapeutic and supportive environment, gradually growing in confidence and rediscovering an appetite for learning. Often, pupils' education has been highly disrupted before joining the school. Some have experienced significant trauma, exclusion from previous schools and extended periods of time outside formal education. The school successfully reignites pupils' interest in learning so that they are increasingly motivated to do well and attend school regularly. Leaders monitor attendance closely and are alert to patterns of non-attendance. They work constructively with parents and external agencies to secure important improvements in individual pupils' attendance. Parents praise the quality of communication between school and home.

Staff know and understand pupils' needs very well. They successfully combine high expectations with patience and sensitivity, planning lessons with care to capture pupils' interest and to build on what they have learned previously. Lessons are typically purposeful, and pupils are hard-working as a result, although sometimes pupils can become unsettled. This can be the case where tasks are not adapted well enough during lessons to support pupils' needs.

Leaders monitor the use of positive handling systematically, identifying any patterns in its use and adjusting support for individual pupils where necessary. Developments in training and procedures have led to significant reductions in the need to use positive handling during the past two years. All staff are trained in its use, although usually, a quiet, calm insistence that pupils behave well and follow staff's instructions is sufficient. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and that they know whom to speak to if they are worried about something.

There have been some notable improvements in the school's work since the appointment of new leaders, including in behaviour and staff well-being. The school is currently experiencing a more settled phase after a period of high staff turnover. Recently introduced initiatives, such as well-being meetings with the chair of governors, have made a valued contribution to staff morale, ensuring that staff can share their views. Staff who spoke with inspectors said that they love working in the school. One said, 'We work as a family – we all support each other.'

The proprietor is passionate about the school and wants the very best for staff and pupils alike. The proprietor uses well-established procedures to monitor the school's work and to ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met. The proprietor and governing body hold leaders firmly to account for behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. They recognise, however, that their roles in providing challenge for leaders around the quality of education are less well developed.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum is not always adapted well enough to support pupils' emerging needs during lessons. This means that the work is not always matched closely enough to pupils' needs and they learn less well as a result. Leaders have already identified this aspect of the school's work for further development and should deliver improvements as planned.
- The proprietor and governing body do not hold leaders to account for the quality of education rigorously enough. This hinders their effectiveness in monitoring the school's performance and in supporting developments. The school should strengthen this aspect of governance.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134148
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/6051
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10290439
<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>	43
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	13
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Nicki Dann
<b>Chair</b>	Moira Swinbank
<b>Headteacher</b>	Scott Fasciolo-Barnes (Executive Headteacher)
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£53,040 to £125,860
<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>	5 to 7 February 2020

## Information about this school

- The executive headteacher took up his position from November 2021.
- The school is situated on two sites. The main site is located in Ninfield, East Sussex TN33 9EG. The second site is located in Golden Cross, East Sussex BN27 4AN.
- The school is registered to admit up to 50 pupils. All pupils have an EHC plan with a diagnosis of autism, often accompanied by a range of associated conditions.
- The previous standard inspection took place in February 2020, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all of the independent school standards were met.
- The school does not use 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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 held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included discussions with the executive headteacher, assistant headteachers, deputy headteacher and other leaders. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's surveys and discussions. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times during the school day.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.

- Compliance with the independent school standards was checked throughout the inspection, including through tours of both school sites, discussions with leaders and a review of relevant documentation.
- The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out the standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned.

### **Inspection team**

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachel McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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