

# Stepping Stones School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119103
<b>Local Authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326947
<b>Inspection date</b>	9 December 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Atkinson

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Julie Ashton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Bowerham Road Lancaster Lancashire LA1 4HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01524 67164
<b>Fax number</b>	01524 841239

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Stepping Stones School provides short term educational places for up to 24 boys and girls. It also supports intervention programmes in mainstream schools for pupils who are at risk of being excluded. At the time of the inspection there were 13 boys and one girl on roll. They come from the Morecambe, Lancaster and Carnforth districts. On entry all pupils are attaining below, and often well below, the expected national levels in English and mathematics. All pupils have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The majority of pupils have either been permanently excluded or were likely to be excluded. A small proportion of pupils have a statement of special educational need. Virtually all pupils are White British and no pupil speaks English as an additional language. Approximately three quarters of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. There are no pupils in public care.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school that provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils resulting in their outstanding personal development. It has made significant improvement since its last inspection and gives good value for money. The headteacher's enthusiastic, determined and focused leadership is the key to establishing and sustaining a very positive ethos that underpins the school's successes. The very good relationships that staff develop with pupils have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards learning. The outcomes are that pupils are motivated to work hard, grow in confidence and begin to realise their true potential. The encouraging and highly supportive atmosphere created by staff helps pupils to settle quickly and stay engaged with their learning. The staff provide excellent support in changing pupils' behaviour. They establish firm boundaries that pupils know and understand. They set clear targets, have high expectations and use rewards appropriately to reinforce them. As a result, pupils demonstrate a pattern of behaviour and an attitude towards learning that enables the majority of them to return successfully to their mainstream or other schools.

The school has a good reputation in the local community and parents are very happy with the education their children receive. They readily acknowledge the improvements in their children's behaviour, attitude and achievements. As one parent commented, 'I am so grateful to Stepping Stones; they have helped my son and I to have a better outlook on his needs.' Pupils' enjoyment of and participation in the wide range of available opportunities is evident throughout the day. The curriculum is tailored to meet their personal needs and the outcome is that all pupils achieve well and, in many cases, do far better than expected.

Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils really enjoy their learning. Whilst overall standards are below national expectations, pupils make good progress in most of the basic skills. Writing skills still lag behind reading levels. Teachers and teaching assistants work very successfully as teams, have high expectations and provide sensitive support that motivates pupils and gives them the determination to persevere, even when things are hard and they get disheartened. The effect is most noticeable in the outstanding progress that pupils make in their personal development and behaviour and there have been no exclusions in the past three years. It is no surprise that pupils develop outstanding relationships with adults resulting in a transformation of their attitudes towards learning and desire to do well. As one pupil tellingly commented, 'I'm really doing well at school now and want to do better.'

The curriculum is good and broadens pupils' horizons by widening their access to community activities through the involvement in the Local Education Active Partners (LEAP). As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good but more needs to be done to develop their cultural development. There are very good systems for tracking pupils' progress and challenging targets are set. Pupils are kept very well informed about how well they are doing and how much effort they are making although marking in science does not always make it clear what pupils need to do to improve.

The school has very good links with other agencies and staff work collaboratively and imaginatively in providing solutions for individuals' complex circumstances, needs and aspirations. Pupils have tremendous respect for the staff and place a very high value on the very positive ethos that is created where they feel safe, secure and at ease in sharing their anxieties and problems. The school provides a good diet for pupils and complements this through a good range of opportunities for physical exercise, resulting in pupils making more informed choices

about healthy lifestyles. Attendance is good and for the majority of pupils this represents a very significant improvement. The good leadership and management, the high morale of the staff and the excellent teamwork of all staff mean that the school has a good capacity to improve.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in writing.
- Provide more opportunities to support pupils' cultural development.
- Give clear advice to pupils on how they can improve their work in science.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The majority of pupils join the school with a history of poor behaviour, indifferent attitudes towards learning, poor attendance and a lack of self-confidence. Most have learning difficulties or are not achieving their potential. Attainment on entry is below that of pupils of a similar age. They make particularly good progress in terms of improving their behaviour, managing their emotions and in concentrating on their learning. Whilst overall standards are below national expectations, the achievement of pupils during the time at the school is good and occasionally very good. Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening, reading, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Writing levels are improving due to the school's implementation of a specific teaching approach but the rate of progress is not yet as good as in other key skills. The pupils are set very challenging targets and, over a period of two or three terms, many exceed expected progress and make up previously lost ground. As a result, by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008 half of the pupils attained the expected level for their age in English and mathematics and almost all pupils attained this level in science. The outcome is that the rate of reintegration and retention to mainstream and special schools is particularly good.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The pupils' outstanding progress in personal development reflects their understanding of the school's emphasis on how to behave responsibly and interact appropriately. Pupils' spiritual, social and moral development is excellent. The school has improved opportunities to broaden pupils' cultural development but does not do enough to support their understanding of diversity in the community. When pupils start at the school, their attitudes towards learning and other pupils are often negative and disrespectful. However, under the guidance and support from staff, pupils learn to help and appreciate each other, listen to other points of view and be positive members of teams and group activities. Behaviour is exemplary.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the opportunities to take part in sporting and physical activities and the good diet made available to them at breakfast and lunch. Pupils feel very safe in the warm and supportive environment and the daily meeting is very successful in encouraging them to express their feelings and anxieties in an open and honest manner. Pupils are very well prepared for their return to mainstream school and the next stage of their education because of the sharp improvement in their basic skills and motivation levels.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching is good and pupils are actively involved in their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants form very good, trusting relationships with pupils that enable them to relax, enjoy their work and make good progress. Planning is good and work is pitched at the right level – initially to ensure that pupils can succeed and are motivated but then to challenge and push them to have higher expectations of what they can achieve. Pupils respond very well to the clear routines and their behaviour, attention and concentration levels are extremely good. When a pupils' behaviour is occasionally unacceptable it is dealt with calmly and with support for the individual involved resulting in minimal disruption to the teaching and learning. Staff make it very clear what pupils are going to do in lessons and give them very good feedback at the end of each lesson about how well they have worked and behaved. Marking is effective in telling pupils about their efforts but in science, does not explain clearly enough what they need to do to improve.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good curriculum that meets pupils' needs well. It concentrates on English, mathematics, science and ICT because the majority of pupils have fallen behind in these areas. Teachers make these subjects exciting and relevant by connecting them to a particular topic and as a result pupils make better links between their learning in different subjects. Through good external links especially the involvement with Local Education Active Partners (LEAP) the pupils experience a much broader curriculum that gives them opportunities to be involved in enterprise activities, have a residential experience, including outdoor pursuits, and to receive coaching in specific sports. These experiences have a very positive impact on their self-confidence and help them to build good relationships with each other and members of the wider community.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

The school ensures that the care, guidance and support for all are outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are in place. Pupils have excellent opportunities, informal and formal, to share with staff any concerns and anxieties as well as to celebrate their successes. Relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding and pupils know that any personal or learning difficulties will be addressed positively and supportively. Pupils have an excellent understanding of their learning and behaviour targets. Staff discuss with pupils throughout the day how well they are doing towards their targets and are highly effective in motivating them. Although support to pupils is unconditional, staff are particularly astute in ensuring that pupils develop as much independence as possible. As a result, pupils who return to mainstream school or move to a new school are very well prepared for the transition and better equipped to make a success in their learning and personal development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher is effective in supporting all staff in developing their leadership and management roles. As a result, the small and relatively new leadership team is taking the school forward with confidence and ambition. The good assessment procedures and the effective tracking have led to staff having a good overview of pupils' achievements and progress. This leads to pupils having appropriate access to relevant learning opportunities with challenging targets that result in good progress and enjoyment of school. The leadership team are effective and rigorous in how they monitor and evaluate the work of the school and are acutely aware of what the school needs to do next to improve. The management committee provides good support through its active involvement in monitoring the work of the school to identify its strengths and areas for improvement.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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**Overall effectiveness**

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

**Annex B**

**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stepping Stones School, Lancashire, LA1 4HT

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I inspected your school. I enjoyed talking to you and was very impressed by how hard you work. It was very clear that you enjoy coming to school and look forward to the different opportunities that the school offers. When I looked through your books I was amazed at the very good work that you do and the progress you have made. You are obviously very proud of your work and I would encourage you to continue to do your best because the staff of Stepping Stones and your parents want you to do well.

You told me that you like school and find all of the staff very helpful and I agree that they are. I think that Stepping Stones is a great school because the headteacher and the staff look after you exceptionally well, help you to achieve your best and give you excellent advice about any problems or worries that you have. You have some fantastic opportunities for sport and outdoor activities and the school has certainly made you more confident and ambitious.

I have spoken to all the staff and it was agreed that the school could help you even more if it improved your standards of writing, gave you more opportunities to understand other cultures and gave you clearer advice on how to improve your work in science.

I'm really sorry that I couldn't get to the football tournament but I know that you will have done your best and made the staff and your families proud of you.

I wish you well for the future.

John Atkinson

Lead inspector