

Stepping Stones School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	9366584
Unique Reference Number	134833
Inspection number	330410
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Linda Kelsey HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Stepping Stones is run by a charitable trust as an independent special day school catering for up to 25 students aged from 7 to 16. Currently, there are 14 on roll and this number has increased since the last inspection. The majority of the students have hemiplegia and other forms of moderate physical or learning difficulties. There are three classes operating for each of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and apart from Key Stage 2 students are taught entirely by subject specialists. The school currently has two full-time qualified teachers including the headteacher, seven part-time staff and two learning support assistants

The school mission statement is 'to provide a stimulating, caring and friendly learning environment which will maximise the students' educational achievement and their potential for independence'.

Evaluation of the school

This is a good school where students, who have had past poor experiences of school and academic achievement, can thrive. It has improved its policies for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare as identified in the last report. It knows that it has more to do in improving the assessment of each student. It also recognises that each student is an individual and provides a well balanced personalised curriculum based on the needs of the student. It has some outstanding features in the way in which it has developed students' spiritual, moral and social outlook on life enabling them to realise their full potential and grow in confidence despite their physical difficulties and medical setbacks. Behaviour and attitude of the majority is excellent. Many have learnt to develop their self control and support others because they have learnt how to manage their own difficulties with the support of the teachers and staff. As a result, students are growing into well balanced, mature individuals who are well prepared to move onto further education. All but two of the regulations are met.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school offers a broad, balanced and highly personalised study programme to meet individual needs. It is based on all students gaining skills in literacy, numeracy, science, French, humanities (including religious

education (RE)), music and art, as well as opportunities for developing life skills such as cooking, which will equip them for the future. However, as yet the curriculum is not fully embracing the understanding about what it means to grow up in our multicultural society. The school has recently established links with a primary school in London which has a wide ethnicity of pupils, and an orphanage in Russia. It has already developed links with schools in Zambia and Uganda. Through these contacts the school is planning to develop the multicultural curriculum further.

All pupils have their own laptop which they use regularly at school and take home for homework. As a result, students have good skills in information and communication technology (ICT). Students who left the school last year have all embarked on further education courses at nearby colleges, something that they would not have aspired to in the past. Through its partnership with other local institutions the school offers swimming lessons and physical education (PE) coaching. Through extra curricular activities, the students go on visits to outside places of interest, riding, sailing and perform in concerts outside the school and in their own Shakespeare production. They take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Photographs clearly illustrate that students enjoy using additional facilities such as the sports hall and sailing club. The use of specialist teachers for music, art, history and PE further enriches the quality of the curriculum overall and enables students to grow in confidence about how they can overcome their physical disability to achieve their full potential. The outside area with its well laid out garden and hard surfaces enables students to enjoy time outside socialising and exercising with swings, balls and scooters supplied by the school. Garden boxes have also been allocated to allow students to plan and grow their own selection of vegetables and herbs for use in cooking.

Teaching is good throughout the school because all members of staff know the students individually and are acutely aware of what their individual needs are. Most students have a statement of special educational needs and are well supported in class by small class sizes, their teachers and by two well qualified and experienced learning support assistants who work across the school. There is a high ratio of staff to students and in a number of cases this is on a one to one basis. All adults are sympathetic to the students' physical disabilities and encourage them to ask for help if they need it, for example, when writing, using computers or stirring food while cooking. Teachers have worked hard to encourage students to seek help even for the most obvious ways in which they may have difficulty and more importantly not to be afraid or feel silly in doing so.

The school has a satisfactory framework for assessment of pupils' work, but as yet assessment is carried out by teachers using their own systems. Teachers have developed methods by which they can assess pupils, both in class and against standardised tests in mathematics, reading and spelling through a mixture of standardised tests and formative assessment against national curriculum levels. The school recognises it has more to do to make their methods more consistent across the school and more informative, so that visiting staff and specialists have a deeper

understanding of the academic needs of the students. This would also enable the school to track pupils' progress over time. Apart from the headteacher no one has independent oversight of the whole assessment process so that this can be developed and then monitored over time.

Students make good progress at the school very often from low starting points, poor school experiences and interrupted education through exclusions and medical treatments. Typically they are one to three years behind national expectation. All but three have statements of special educational needs and individual education plans to support their learning. On current information at the school, students at Key Stage 2 are below national expectation in reading and spelling. Last summer the school celebrated the first graduates to leave the school with GCSE qualifications. Students achieved passes in GCSE with some doing particularly well achieving above national averages in some subjects. ICT, art and English are particularly strong subjects. Students' work shows an increasing confidence in English, mathematics, science and ICT and there is some good quality art work around the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. When new students start the school, the majority of students are welcoming and friendly and offer thoughtful support to each other. One of the excellent characteristics of the school is the genuine concern that each student, supported by adults, have for each other. The curriculum through RE, geography and personal, social and health education (PSHE) introduces students to the idea of cultural differences and the celebration of these, although the school recognises that there is more to do on developing the pupils' understanding of multicultural Britain. Students are willing and enthusiastic learners, keen to catch up on their missed learning and anxious to be able to acquire the skills and knowledge they need in order to achieve. Attendance, apart from illness and medical treatments, is above average.

The majority of pupils behave impeccably. They are polite, courteous and are developing mature attitudes to life at the school. Pupils love coming to school and state that this is the best place they have been. It is a credit to the school and their parents that students have overcome their own personal difficulties.

Students are very well prepared for future life outside the school and they make a very positive contribution to the school and to each other. The school does all it can to integrate new students into the school and help to settle them to work and play with other students. Students show high levels of tolerance and maturity when challenged by some inappropriate behaviour because of the learning difficulties of others. In their own way they help to forge better relationships and deflate confrontation before it has chance to escalate. Students visit the local community and the school has strong partnership links with neighbouring schools.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of students is good. Students say they feel safe and they are well supervised at all times. They are encouraged to ensure they know how to stay fit and healthy and the school encourages the eating of fresh food including vegetables and fruit. Fruit is served daily. Most days pupils bring their own packed lunch to school and an increasing number are realising the importance of this being a mix of healthy choices. Lunch is cooked by either the youngest or oldest students for the rest of the school on one day of the week. Regular PE and swimming lessons ensure the students stay fit and they also receive regular physiotherapy to help them with their physical disabilities. They are encouraged to ask for help, as well as learn skills in how to manage their own physical disability and make use of the various aids in school, such as crutches and wheelchairs. All students are supported in using equipment safely such as scissors and kitchen knives and staff ensure that with close supervision the task can be completed independently with whatever equipment is appropriate. For example, one boy swapped a knife for scissors to cut meat because he could handle this instrument more efficiently.

Although the majority of students behave extremely well, a few of the youngest students are concerned when behaviour of a few deteriorates and it is difficult to maintain concentration. A few parents have also raised concerns about some of the behaviour in school and the school needs to recognise that it should keep a record of sanctions imposed on pupils for serious disciplinary offences.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has established suitable procedures for ensuring that, prior to taking up their responsibilities, all teaching, non-teaching staff, volunteers, and the proprietorial body are checked for their suitability to work with children and young people.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is housed in an attractive building which has been adapted and converted to a high standard. Facilities are appropriate for the needs of the students to enable them to move around the school with as much independence as possible. There is a lack of specialist facilities such as a dedicated computer suite or science or design and technology facilities but this does not have an impact on the curriculum offered because the school makes such good use of resources in partnership schools. Students are transported off site for these. The outside garden and play area are well adapted to meet the needs of the students so that they can access quiet areas or walk or use scooters which the school provides.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a range of information for parents, carers and others, through its school prospectus, website and information sheets. The majority of parents are positive about the school and many said that they knew their children were making better progress since coming to the school.

Parents do not have access to full details about the academic performance of students and although the school has only recently started entering students for external examinations this information should be made available, if requested to parents, carers and others.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has full procedures in place for dealing with complaints. This is available on request.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain written records of sanctions imposed on pupils for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide academic performance information to parents, carers and others from the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations. (paragraph 6(2)(j)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- develop a consistent and reliable approach to assessing students' performance and progress so that teachers can plan more effective learning experiences and track the progress students make over time.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Stepping Stones School		
DCSF number	9366584		
Unique reference number	134833		
Type of school	Special, for pupils with hemiplegia and other moderate physical and learning difficulties.		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2004		
Age range of pupils	7-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 5	Total: 13
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys:	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 6	Girls: 5	Total: 11
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 10400-14700		
Address of school	Tower Road Hindhead Surrey GU26 6SU		
Telephone number	01428 609 083		
Fax number	01428 609083		
Email address	enquiries@steppingstones.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Neil Clark		
Proprietor	Mr Larry Sullivan		
Reporting inspector	Linda Kelsey HMI		
Dates of inspection	21-22 January 2009		