

# Headstart

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

## Inspection dates

11–13 July 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Sixth form provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher leads a dedicated team of teaching and support staff who work tirelessly for the benefit of the school's pupils.
- Senior leaders are a cohesive and effective team. Together, they hold the total respect of the wider staff.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils very well. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer to them.
- Classrooms are happy places where pupils show good attitudes to learning.
- Staff understand the complex needs of pupils very well. Relationships are strong.
- Senior leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas to develop lacks clarity and is not sufficiently focused.
- The membership and working practices of the governing advisory board need to be reviewed and improved in order for governance to become more effective.
- Teachers and support staff work hard to make learning relevant and fun. Because of this, most pupils enjoy coming to school and make good or better progress across a range of subjects.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils feel safe in school and appreciate the care and attention given to them by staff.
- Leadership of the school's sixth-form provision is strong. Students in the sixth form enjoy a bespoke curriculum which is tailored to their individual interests and aspirations.
- Pupils behave well most of the time. Staff are accomplished at managing behaviour if it falls short of expectations.
- Leaders and those in positions of governance have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Senior leaders recognise that the school would benefit from developing closer links and sharing good practice with other similar settings.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

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

- Revise the systems for, and improve the quality of, the school's self-evaluation, so that:
  - school improvement planning focuses more sharply on the key aspects of provision that need to be improved
  - leaders at all levels have a much clearer understanding of the school's main priorities for improvement
  - those in positions of governance can hold leaders more readily to account for improving the quality of provision, so that pupils' outcomes improve to become outstanding.
- Review arrangements for governance of the school, so that the governing advisory board meets on a more regular basis and its membership includes more of an element of independent impartiality.
- Seek to develop stronger collaborative partnerships with similar schools for the benefit of pupils and staff alike.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher and other senior leaders work together as an effective team. Relationships are very positive. A strong sense of collective responsibility pervades all aspects of leadership and management of the school.
- Leaders at all levels have created an impressive culture of confidence and professional respect between staff. Responses to the staff questionnaire were extremely positive about all areas of the school's provision, including the support given to staff by senior leaders.
- School leaders and those responsible for governance are effective in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The school's curriculum matches the needs of pupils well. This is the case across the school at all key stages. Pupils study a topic-based curriculum at key stages 2 and 3, although pupils also study discrete subjects when required. Pupils in key stage 4 have access to a wide range of GCSE and BTEC National Diploma subjects, which are taught by subject specialists.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum continues to evolve year on year to cater for the specific needs of each different cohort of pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and make good progress in a wide range of academic and vocational subjects.
- The school's extra-curricular offer is well developed. It provides a variety of good-quality enrichment opportunities both on and off the school site. Pupils enjoy their visits into the local community as part of their studies. These include those to support their cross-curricular learning, by taking part in the local carnival, for instance, or to sports centres for swimming and other sporting activities.
- The on-site land-based studies area allows access to a range of domestic and commercial livestock and is a particular favourite with pupils. Staff put this resource to good use when planning the topic-based curriculum in both key stages 2 and 3. The area also serves to support subject-specific activities such as horse care.
- Leaders take their responsibility to promote equalities and to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain very seriously. Respect and tolerance for others are taught through the school's citizenship and personal, social and health education curriculum. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They understand why society needs rules and can equate the law to their own school rules.
- Recent training regarding gender stereotyping was well received by staff and pupils alike. As a result, pupils and staff have a much greater understanding of the uniqueness of individuals and the potential for gender-biased discrimination. This is particularly the case for students in the sixth form.
- As part of this inspection, the inspector was asked to consider the proprietor's recent request to increase the school's age range from seven to 21, to five to 21. In light of the evidence seen during the inspection, the school is likely to continue to meet the independent school standards should this material change be implemented.
- Systems to help leaders evaluate the school's strengths and identify areas for

improvement need to be refined and simplified in order to create greater clarity. This will help leaders and governors to focus sharply on the key issues that need to be improved, so that school improvement planning becomes more effective. This will also enable staff at all levels to have a clearer understanding of the school's improvement priorities.

- School leaders have identified that the school would benefit from stronger collaborative links with similar settings and professionals from other services. This will improve the options staff have for their own professional development, keep leaders up to date with current good practice, and have a positive impact on improving the school to become outstanding overall.

## **Governance**

- Members of the school's small governing advisory board know the school well. They carry out their statutory duties efficiently to ensure that leaders are held to account for improving the quality of education, and that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The chair of the governing advisory board holds a unique position in her dual role as a governor and as the school's external educational consultant. This arrangement enables the proprietor, who also acts as the executive headteacher, to have some degree of independent advice regarding the quality of provision.
- Recent resignations have left the current governing advisory board with fewer members. Governors agree that recruiting new members to bring a greater degree of impartiality to the make-up of the board would be beneficial. Reviewing working practices will also enable the governing advisory board to meet on a more regular basis. This will give those in positions of governance a better chance of carrying out their statutory duties, as well creating capacity for governors to ensure that leaders are focusing on the right issues to improve the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school complies with all elements of the independent school standards regarding the safety of pupils, including publishing a suitable safeguarding policy on its website.
- The culture to ensure that pupils and staff are kept safe is strong. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose, including checks on staff prior to their employment at the school. All staff are vigilant in their efforts to keep pupils safe and are very aware of the additional risks associated with pupils who have high levels of need.
- Staff know pupils extremely well and are proactive when offering care and guidance to pupils. This means that pupils are able to express their feelings and emotions in a safe and caring environment. Pupils who spoke to the inspector were very complimentary about the levels of care afforded to them by staff.
- Staff training is up to date. This includes appropriate training for the school's designated safeguarding leads and further specialist training for those responsible for the recruitment of staff. Staff are also aware of current government guidance about keeping pupils safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching and support staff are very dedicated and know pupils extremely well. As a result, classrooms are happy places, where pupils and staff interact positively and most pupils are deeply engaged in learning. This is the case in all phases of the school, including in the sixth form. Consequently, pupils make good progress at Headstart, both academically and in their social and emotional development.
- Staff have good subject knowledge which they put to good use across the school. Classroom visits showed staff using their specialist knowledge to deepen learning and motivate pupils through thoughtful questioning. This was the case in a range of subjects, including art, where pupils were challenged to reflect on the quality of their previous work and identify aspects that might be improved.
- Despite their complex needs, most pupils were happy to share their learning with the inspector. Pupils in an English lesson were obviously proud of their work and tackled the initial tasks set for them with enthusiasm. When the inspector returned to the classroom later, pupils displayed high degrees of excitement as they completed the first stage of their writing task, clearly keen to move on to the more complex work that followed.
- Generally, teachers plan learning that suits the needs of individual pupils well, although there were occasions during the inspection when chances to add further challenge to tasks were missed and, as a consequence, learning slowed.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Relationships are strong. These include those between the pupils themselves, who are supportive of each other and show good attitudes to learning most of the time.
- Classroom visits showed a high degree of partnership working, with pupils collaborating together to complete tasks. This included a joint session in the school hall, where two classes came together to learn how to behave in an appropriate manner when holding conversations.
- Bullying is not tolerated at Headstart. A representative group of pupils told the inspector that bullying does not happen, because there is no reason for anyone to bully anyone else at the school. However, they were very clear that they knew that staff would deal with bullying if there were ever any problems.
- Pupils take pride in their work and are proud of the school. They feel confident in school because staff care about them and keep them safe at all times. They appreciate the extra-curricular aspects of the school's curriculum that help to develop their ability to stay safe. These include visits into the local community using public transport, or a recent educational visit from the local fire brigade, for instance.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Despite their complex social and emotional needs, pupils conduct themselves well in classrooms and when they move around the school.
- Staff have high expectations of behaviour, but are flexible in their approach when pupils are finding managing their feelings difficult. Routines and systems to promote good behaviour are sound. Staff are excellent at de-escalating situations when pupils are anxious and their emotional needs are heightened.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. The overall attendance at the school compares favourably with other similar schools nationally. However, school leaders know that some students in the sixth form do not attend as often as they could. Actions to tackle this problem are already having a positive impact on improving attendance.

### Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Most pupils are making good or better progress from their different starting points. This is true across different key stages and within different subjects, including both the academic and the vocational strands of the curriculum.
- Leaders and teaching staff track pupils' outcomes well. They are aware of each individual pupil's progress and intervene with positive effect when required. This is also the case with pupils' social and emotional development, which is seen as equally important.
- The progress of different vulnerable groups is monitored appropriately. However, because of the very small numbers in most year groups and across phases, leaders sensibly focus on the specific needs of each individual, ensuring good or better outcomes for the majority of pupils.
- Staff work hard at providing pupils with opportunities to succeed, both in and out of classrooms. This is especially important when the backgrounds of many of the school's pupils are considered, including those who have had negative experiences in previous schools. Because of this, most pupils are enjoying becoming successful learners once more.
- Classroom visits showed pupils to be making good progress over time, including in mathematics and English. Books and folders show that staff have appropriate expectations of pupils' progress. This is especially the case for pupils who have been at the school for longer periods of time, because staff have had time to assess their individual needs.

### Sixth form provision

**Good**

- The school's sixth-form provision is good. Leaders of the sixth form have high expectations and are totally dedicated to ensuring students' success. Communication between the school's senior leadership team and leaders of the sixth form is strong. When students move up into the sixth form, they benefit from the same good quality of provision they have experienced lower down the school.
- Leadership of the curriculum is a particular strength. Students are able to follow a mix of academic and vocational subjects closely aligned to their own interests and aspirations.

Most students also continue to study mathematics and English at an appropriate level.

- Much of the learning is undertaken on a one-to-one basis. This ensures that most students make sustained, and in some cases rapid, progress over time. Most leave the sixth form and go on to further education and training.
- Classroom visits were particularly informative and enjoyable in the sixth-form provision. The inspector witnessed very good engagement in learning during lessons. This was the case in a sports theory session where one student exclaimed excitedly how he, 'never knew that!' after making connections when learning about the respiratory system.
- The quality of careers information and guidance is very good and includes visits to employment fairs and local colleges when appropriate. Leaders work hard to improve the chances of students finding employment when they leave Headstart. Meaningful work-experience opportunities are eagerly sought. Staff are willing to go the extra mile in ensuring the success of this important aspect of preparing students for life after leaving the school.
- Students enjoy their time in the sixth form. They behave well, although can become excitable when encountering visitors to the school. Staff are adept at ensuring that interruptions to learning are kept to a minimum when this is the case.
- In the recent past, a small minority of students did not attend the sixth form often enough. Leaders are aware and are already taking action to rectify this, including working with parents or carers when necessary. Early indications show that leaders are now successfully addressing this issue.

## School details

Unique reference number	134148
DfE registration number	845/6051
Inspection number	10020900

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 21
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Nicola Dann
Chair	Jane Syred
Headteacher	Caroline Belchem
Annual fees (day pupils)	£20,000–£60,000
Telephone number	01424 893803
Website	<a href="http://www.headstartschool.co.uk">www.headstartschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@headstartschool.co.uk">admin@headstartschool.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	8–10 October 2013

## Information about this school

- Headstart is a small independent day special school located on a farm on the outskirts of Ninfield, near Battle in East Sussex.
- The school's main aims are to build pupils' self-esteem and self-awareness so that they take ownership of their learning, gain accredited qualifications and vocational skills, and acquire the necessary social skills to integrate successfully into society.

- The school provides for up to 50 pupils aged between seven and 21 years of age. Most have communication and interaction needs. Some have social, emotional and mental health needs. Currently there are 47 pupils on roll.
- At the time of the inspection, 13 pupils attending the school were in the care of local authorities. Most pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan. Many pupils have histories of disrupted schooling prior to joining Headstart.
- The last standard inspection took place in October 2013, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all of the independent school standards were found to be met.
- Since the last inspection, the school has increased its age range from seven to 18 years, to seven to 21 years. It has also recently opened a second site. Both these changes were previously approved by the Department for Education.
- No alternative provision is used by the school.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a number of classroom visits during the inspection. During all visits the inspector was accompanied by senior leaders. During classroom visits, the inspector assessed the quality of pupils' work and talked to some of them about the progress they were making.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and as they moved around the school. This included during transitions between classrooms and the school's on-site outdoor learning area.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders; the chair of the governing advisory board, accompanied by one other governor; a group of teachers; and a small representative group of pupils.
- Telephone conversations were held with the proprietor, three different parents, and a representative of one of the many local authorities who place children at the school.
- The inspector took into account the nine replies to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and the accompanying free-text messages. He also took into account 30 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards. Minutes of meetings of those responsible for governance, the school's own self-evaluation, development planning and information about pupils' outcomes were also taken into consideration.
- The inspector was also commissioned by the Department for Education to consider the school's recent application to make a material change to its registration. Namely, to increase the age range of pupils from seven to 21, to five to 21.

## Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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