

# Headstart

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

<b>Inspection dates</b>	8-10 October 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress, including in English and mathematics, in spite of the impact of their learning and behavioural difficulties. This is because of good teaching and the use of an effective curriculum.
- Almost all pupils make a substantial effort to behave well in school. When they find this difficult, staff members support them effectively and help them to concentrate on their learning.
- The proprietor has provided a good range of facilities and equipment that are used well to enable the pupils to do well in school.
- The school provides a caring and purposeful working atmosphere where pupils and staff respect one another, and where pupils can work in a good humoured and enjoyable learning environment.
- Leaders and managers are focused and diligent in making sure that teaching is strengthening and that pupils have good opportunities to achieve their potential. They have maintained the effectiveness of the school from the last inspection and are aware of what is needed to raise the quality of the school's effectiveness to outstanding.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- Some teaching is not yet as good as the best.
- There is room for improvement in the behaviour of some pupils.
- Information about the pupils and their progress is not used as well as it could to help them with their learning and personal development.
- Not all premises and accommodation regulations are met. Facilities for students to shower are not provided for the secondary department.
- Marking of books does not always provide pupils with guidance about how to improve their performance.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice. The inspector observed 10 lessons taught by seven different teachers. He looked at pupils' work and held meetings with the headteacher, the proprietor, staff members and pupils.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of pupils' progress, monitoring reports of teaching and learning, records of lesson observations, and staff training records.
- Sixteen questionnaire responses from staff were evaluated.
- The inspector met with the parents and carers of three pupils and spoke to the representative of one local authority that places pupils at the school.

## Inspection team

John Gush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### 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.
- It provides for up to 30 students aged between seven and 18 years who are experiencing social communication and social interaction difficulties and who present with challenging barriers to learning. Most are diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders and all have not managed in their previous school settings. Many pupils start at the school late in their school career.
- Some students with additional complex needs and extreme anxiety have their own accommodation within the school.
- There are currently 24 male and female students aged between nine to 18 years on roll. Thirteen of these are looked after. All except one have statements of special educational needs and are almost all are referred and funded by their local authority.
- The school makes use of alternative provision operated by two separate organisations to extend the range of the curriculum for some of the older pupils. In addition, all pupils make use of the local leisure centre and swimming pool.
- The school opened in 2000 and was last inspected in September 2010.
- The school's main aims are to build students' self-esteem and self-awareness so that the students re-engage in learning and gain the necessary independence, qualifications, vocational and social skills to integrate successfully into society.

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

- **The school must meet the following independent school standards:**
  - The proprietor must ensure that suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education (paragraph 23A(1)(c)).
- Ensure that teachers have the best possible opportunities to help all pupils achieve at their personal best by:
  - ensuring that all teaching is regularly evaluated so that all teachers' lessons are as effective as the best
  - making sure that teachers' marking always provides pupils with the guidance they need to improve
  - enhancing the school's capacity to analyse of the information collected on pupils' academic achievement so that all possible opportunities are taken to enable them to improve.
- Develop more effective analysis of pupils' behaviour in order to ensure that staff members can provide better opportunities to help pupils to improve their behaviour and to reduce the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
- Continue to develop plans to extend the use of its outdoor facilities so as to broaden the range of curriculum options for younger pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Pupils' achievements are good. Pupils make good progress towards their targets in all subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils experience a wide range of impediments to learning and they are able to make the progress they do as a result of good teaching and an effective curriculum. Pupils who are new to the school and have experienced disrupted education due to their learning or behavioural difficulties re-engage quickly and make up lost ground well.

With careful and well-prepared support from teachers and assistants, almost all pupils take part actively in their lessons and most enjoy their learning. They take pride in their work, much of which is effectively displayed in classrooms and around the school, and they contribute well in presenting what they have learned. All pupils learn to use information and communication technology (ICT), which is effectively used throughout the school to extend learning, especially in literacy and numeracy. Pupils in Key Stage 4 take GCSEs or Entry Level Functional Skills Awards and they achieve well in English, mathematics, science and art.

In Key Stage 5, pupils work towards BTEC awards where they take advantage of the rural setting of the school and achieve well in a range of mostly land-based vocational subjects. Some pupils attend alternative provision situated away from the school and this effectively extends their achievements. For some, this involves taking relevant courses at a local agricultural college, whilst others take part in supported work experience on a farm. These activities extend pupils' experience and help to prepare pupils for moving on to other settings when they leave school.

The pupils who left the school in the previous year have made appropriate transitions, and are taking courses at local further education colleges.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Good**

Pupils' behaviour is good, reflecting the improvement pupils make from when they join the school. Nonetheless, some of the younger pupils continue to demonstrate impulsive behaviour and struggle to control outbursts of frustration and anger. Staff are knowledgeable about their difficulties and use effective strategies to support pupils and to help them better manage their behaviour. Pupils' behaviour is good rather than outstanding because there is still room for improvement and for a greater reduction in the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour.

Pupils say that they enjoy school; most attend well and are punctual to their lessons, which confirm this. Staff use agreed strategies well to support pupils' behaviour. Lessons regularly conclude with an evaluation of learning and behaviour targets. Pupils respond well to the school's incentive scheme and enjoy the positive response to their efforts. Parents and carers appreciate the frequent contact they have with the school and, in particular, the regular Friday phone call from their child's tutor. They are very positive about the impact the school has on their children's learning and behaviour. One parent commented on the self-confidence her daughter is showing for the first time and another commented that he sees real improvement and that 'getting him off to school' in the mornings is no longer a problem.

The school makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. All the staff members promote an ethos of understanding and mutual respect very well and this helps the pupils to become more self-confident. Through their personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship lessons, and through the half-termly cultural days, pupils gain a good awareness of other cultures, hearing stories from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. For instance, pupils have recently celebrated World Peace Day as part of a whole school study of life in South Africa. These activities, and the very attractive wall displays pupils

make in connection with them, promote their awareness of other cultures and help them to develop an attitude of tolerance.

Pupils learn about British institutions and services through citizenship lessons, as well as through visits from the community police liaison officer and to the local fire station. Older pupils gain additional awareness of their local community through their alternative provision placements. Pupils also develop very good relations with the local community through taking part in the village carnival and supporting local charities. The school has developed an effective policy to ensure that, whenever it is appropriate to introduce political issues, balanced views are promoted.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

The quality of teaching is good and it has enabled pupils to make good progress over time in their academic subjects. It is not outstanding because some teaching is not as effective as the best. The best teaching combines high expectations and very effective methods to inspire pupils to achieve their highest potential. In a sports science lesson, for example, pupils made excellent progress learning the parts of the respiratory system and making working models of their lungs. A horticulture lesson for younger pupils enabled the class to share ideas about the shape and content of a new vegetable garden while developing their ICT skills by manipulating the images they took of their plot. Most teaching uses effective methods to help pupils make the most of their abilities, especially in literacy and numeracy. Some teaching, however, does not fully engage the pupils' interest or motivate pupils as well as it might, and in these lessons pupils behave less well.

Pupils' abilities are assessed when the pupils start at the school, and regularly thereafter. Teachers almost always use these assessments well and develop a good knowledge of what the pupils need to do to make progress. Almost all teachers make good use of their subject knowledge, and their understanding of challenging and complex learning needs, to enthuse and inspire pupils. Across the school, teachers regularly make use of ICT to stimulate learning. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly and, at its best, marking is well used to identify strategies for improvement. However, some marking less good and teachers do not always make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work. Very good tutorial arrangements mean that every day tutors receive information about their pupils' progress and behaviour in all their lessons. They use this to motivate and encourage them to improve their performance.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The school has developed a good curriculum that enables pupils to take advantage of the rural environment of the school whilst incorporating all the National Curriculum subjects. It makes good use of schemes of work including those for personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and religious education to ensure that pupils' learning progresses well from year to year. In Key Stage 5, pupils focus on work skills, including continued development of functional skills in communication, literacy and numeracy, and choose from a range of vocational options including land-based and equine studies, construction, media and sports science. These are effectively supplemented by the use of alternative provision, including supported work experience, which extends their range of skills and awareness and helps to prepare them for the next stage in their lives. The curriculum overall is well used to enable pupils to make good progress over time. The school is developing plans to extend the use of its outdoor facilities to broaden the range of curriculum options for younger pupils.

Careful attention is paid to the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational needs. The curriculum, and the way that it is implemented, ensure that statement requirements are fulfilled. Occupational therapy and speech and language therapists provide expert interventions for the pupils, as well as advising teachers and tutors. The school makes use of support from an educational psychologist to develop appropriate learning and behaviour strategies, and a clinical psychiatrist provides expertise regarding mental health conditions.

Physical education (PE) takes place in the school's gym as well as at the local leisure centre and swimming pool. It is supplemented by the regular tasks involved with feeding and caring for the sheep, pigs and poultry, which pupils enjoy. The provision has a good impact on improving individuals' health and fitness. Regular outings, such as to museums and local places of interest, extend the pupils' knowledge and interest in their locality and in the world at large.

The regular use of cross-curricular links support learning well and make the pupils' experience more meaningful. For example, during the inspection written and verbal literacy was consistently reinforced in all activities, and mathematics skills were developed during construction work. Older pupils have clear ideas about future college placements and receive valuable advice about the future through lessons, the review process and visits from advisers.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. It is characterised by a high level of commitment to pupils' well-being and care, and all the regulations for independent schools are met. It is not outstanding because, although the behaviour management policies are clear and effectively implemented, with all incidents of difficult behaviour carefully recorded, procedures to analyse behaviour in order to find all possible ways to improve it overall and to reduce incidents of inappropriate behaviour are not yet fully developed. The school has recently purchased new software to simplify recording and analysis, but it is not yet fully operational. Effective strategies to counter bullying are in use, and the dangers associated with the use of the internet are effectively raised. The manner in which these policies and strategies are put into practice, together with effective and vigilant supervision, ensures that pupils are safe in school.

Pupils experience the school as a supportive and caring environment, and confidently place their trust in their teachers and tutors. They say that they feel safe and secure in school. Parents and carers very much appreciate the efforts that the school makes to support pupils' development.

Staff recruitment is carried out in a thorough manner and the required single central register is correctly maintained. Effective arrangements are made to ensure the suitability of the alternative provision used by the school for the Key Stage 5 pupils. Staff training in child protection and first aid is thorough, and is regularly updated within the recommended timescales. This includes suitable training, at the appropriate higher level, for the designated safeguarding officer. Pupils' safety is a high priority, with fire drills and health and safety checks rigorously implemented. Risk assessments, including those for visits outside school, are thorough. Arrangements for educational trips are well planned and clearly recorded. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained.

Pupils are very well supported to adopt a healthy lifestyle. This covers not only an awareness of the importance of eating and exercising well but also relationships education for older pupils.

### **Leadership and management**

**Good**

Leadership and management are good and all but one of the independent school regulations are met. They are not yet outstanding because outcomes are not outstanding. In addition, although extensive information is collected concerning pupils' progress and behaviour, arrangements to analyse this information and to discern all possible opportunities to enable improvement are not yet fully developed.

The headteacher is supported well by the proprietor, whose active involvement with the school is valued and appreciated. Conversations with staff and responses to the staff questionnaire indicate that the vision of high expectation and ambition for development and improvement of the students' outcomes is thoroughly shared throughout the school community.

Effective self-evaluation carried out by the headteacher informs development and improvement planning. This has led to consistently good student outcomes, and also to the school increasing its numbers and developing its premises. Performance management of staff, and in particular the effective observation of teaching and learning, has been central to maintaining student outcomes. The safe operation and effectiveness of the alternative provision placements are carefully monitored.

Regular and effective meetings with local authorities, parents and carers, and other relevant agencies take place where issues concerning individuals' progress and well-being are considered. The meetings are productive and beneficial. A commissioning officer from one local authority commented on the high quality of the school's liaison with all those connected with the pupils and referred to the school's very positive focus on outcomes for the pupils.

The proprietor has provided adequate school facilities in a range of converted agricultural buildings that are situated in extensive grounds. Classrooms are of a suitable size and are well resourced with a good range of equipment to support learning, including computers and interactive whiteboards. New facilities, which will enable pupils to develop skills in motor mechanics, are nearly completed. However, there is currently no provision for older pupils to shower after physical education on the school premises.

All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others through the school's website, brochures and extensive parent information pack. The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements and is effectively implemented.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134148
<b>Inspection number</b>	422760
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/6051

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special school
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–18 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	24
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Nicki Dann
<b>Chair</b>	Nicki Dann
<b>Headteacher</b>	Shelley Mathias
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	September 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£15,000–£45,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01424 893803
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