



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Steephill School

March 2019



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School's Details

School	Steephill School			
DfE number	886/6024			
Registered charity number	803152			
Address	Off Castle Hill Fawkham Longfield Kent DA3 7BG			
Telephone number	01474 702107			
Email address	secretary@steephill.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline Birtwell			
Chair of governors	Mr Edward Oatley			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	129			
	Boys	66	Girls	63
	EYFS	36	Juniors	93
Inspection dates	26 to 28 March 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Steephill School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged between 3 and 11 years. Founded in 1935, the school is now a charitable trust administered by a board of governors.
- 1.2 The school, which does not select pupils on academic ability, admits children into the early years setting from the age of 3 years.
- 1.3 Since the last inspection there have been no significant changes.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to develop a high awareness of good conduct, a determination to succeed and a love of learning within pupils.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils come from a range of professional and business families living within a 15-mile radius of the school, about half of whom represent minority ethnic groups. Nationally standardised tests provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 15 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include physical disabilities, hearing impairment and dyslexic-spectrum specific learning needs, all of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for three pupils, whose needs are supported by teachers. The school has identified 38 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 **The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 **The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 **The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- High levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning are evident in pupils' work.
 - Pupils are excellent communicators.
 - Pupils' thinking skills develop at a rapid pace as they progress through the school.
 - Pupils display excellent attitudes to learning.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding.
 - Pupils exhibit excellent standards of behaviour.
 - Pupils are able to work together extremely effectively in all age groups of the school.
 - Pupils show excellent understanding of the impact of decisions they make on their own and others' success and well-being.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to:
- Continue extending the opportunities for pupils' use of ICT across the curriculum to all age groups in the school.

The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils make very good progress in relation to their starting points from a non-selective entry. Nationally-standardised test data show that pupils' progress is at a level consistently above the average for those of similar age in all schools. Pupils achieve very good success in competitive entry examinations to local selective maintained and independent schools. This is because the school helps pupils to prepare for these by providing high quality teaching and individual support, which also raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem. In discussions with inspectors, pupils who had joined the school in the past few years said that they felt the teachers really cared for them and that made them want to work hard and achieve. They said that the teachers made learning fun and that they challenged them to do harder work. The combination of imaginative and engaging lessons with dedicated and caring teaching which engenders confidence and the spirit of enquiry in the pupils, in the context of a culture where it is safe to answer and ask questions in lessons, enables all pupils to achieve excellent results and to feel well prepared for their transition to secondary school.
- 3.6 High levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning are evident in pupils' work and in their discussions with inspectors. Pupils show accomplished skills in information gathering and research, such as that seen in effective mind-mapping of the life of Florence Nightingale, as well as discernment in their research on recent storm events. Younger pupils showed high levels of understanding on electrical safety in a science lesson. All pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that the teaching helps them to learn and make progress, and this was confirmed in lesson observations. Pupils learn to think for themselves because teaching encourages this by frequent use of open questioning techniques. Pupils' presentation of work, seen both in displays and in pupils' workbooks throughout the school, was exemplary. Linguistic skills were also

very strong, as seen in a Mandarin lesson with older pupils conversing animatedly via live video link with their teacher in China. Pupils feel confident to try new things and challenge themselves to develop their skills in all subjects, due to the gentle support and encouragement and very high expectations given by staff at every stage.

- 3.7 Evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' work shows communication skills increase steadily as they progress through the school. Pupils make appropriate use of vivid language in their work, as seen in very accomplished topic presentations by older pupils on historical figures such as Mary Seacole and Adolf Hitler. The youngest children expressed their ideas in class very cogently, as observed in a lesson involving co-operative work and play. Pupils with SEND were seen to make rapid progress in their use of English, due to close support, planning and skilled encouragement from staff. Examples of exceptionally expressive and emotive poetry abounded in pupils' work and many pupils were deserving winners in both local and national writing festivals and competitions. In the early Years and Year 1 the children communicate with one another and with their teachers extremely well, gaining much from initiatives such as their regular Forest School experience, where they were observed to listen and co-operate with ease and confidence. These early building blocks provide the foundation for pupils to develop their communication skills rapidly as they move throughout the school. Older pupils are able to express themselves thoughtfully with confidence but without any hint of arrogance, due to numerous opportunities for all pupils to perform in assemblies, productions, speech and drama and general knowledge competitions. Leadership has ensured that energetic and inspiring teaching, combined with a creative curriculum, contributes to the development of pupils' excellent communication skills.
- 3.8 Pupils display very competent numerical skills from an early age. They develop very good problem-solving skills due to the school's focus on the application of mathematical skills to real-life contexts, and progress in lessons is swift, due to creative and well-paced lessons. Younger pupils were seen working with joy and determination to solve practical number pyramid problems both individually and collaboratively. Other pupils were seen to make particularly rapid progress in their understanding of angles. Older pupils showed inspectors how they used spreadsheets competently to sort and calculate totals for different lists of items. Pupils state that they enjoy their mathematics lessons and that they feel challenged and excited by the work that they are given; for example, in a Year 2 lesson they were tasked with proving the Easter Bunny wrong about the proportion of sweet colours in the bag. They are keen to solve the problems they are given and demonstrate high levels of knowledge about graphs and how to use them. They are enthusiastic about being entered for the Primary Maths Challenge each year, and the success they achieve is due to imaginative planning and an appropriate level of support and challenge for pupils of all abilities. Pupils also apply their numeracy knowledge, skills and understanding to other subjects as they progress through the school. They use their skills in science to quantify investigation results and explained how they worked out the change that was due in a charity cake sale. Pupils who had more recently moved to the school commented that their confidence in mathematics had improved rapidly, due to the patient and enabling teaching throughout the school.
- 3.9 Pupils make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning in other areas. They described to inspectors how they are able to conduct their own internet research and how teachers' expectations and guidance has helped them to learn how to select and filter information to obtain valid and useful results. Some excellent examples of research outcomes were seen in pupils' work, such as extremely detailed brochures for a world trip produced by older pupils, complete with travel arrangements and information about the best attractions to visit in the various countries. Inspectors also saw evidence of very effective humanities research on classroom displays and in workbooks, as well as excellent digital artwork by younger pupils. Older pupils' work on stop-motion animation included some highly-accomplished short films which displayed excellent imagination, planning and technical ability. Children in EYFS used programmable toys effectively in their play, but there was less evidence of their use of ICT in other areas of learning. Pupils expressed great confidence and enjoyment in coding. The school's leadership and governors have ensured that high-quality ICT facilities and teaching are provided to enhance pupils' learning.

- 3.10 Pupils' study skills show increasingly accomplished levels of development as they progress through the school. This was seen in younger pupils' practical electricity research and in their ability to find a word in a glossary rather than asking the teacher for assistance. Pupils described how they are taught to think for themselves and to plan their own work. Pupils delighted in showing inspectors work which involved considerable discernment and the exercise of positive choice in their topic work, such as a Victorian advertisement for a new invention, the lightbulb, which displayed excellent understanding and an ability to empathise with the people of the time. The introduction of philosophy into the curriculum by the school's leadership has enabled pupils to analyse and hypothesize about new ideas, which they were observed to do eagerly.
- 3.11 Pupils are successful in achieving recognition for their endeavours in a wide range of academic, sporting, artistic and cultural endeavours locally, regionally and nationally. Pupils' achievement in all subjects is excellent and their efforts bring regular success in external competitions. The list of their achievements is particularly notable for the size of the school. Pupils' success-rate in gaining entry to highly-selective maintained and independent schools since the previous inspection has been high. Many older pupils achieve first aid qualifications and pupils described to inspectors how their successful participation in activities such as 'Bikeability' helps them to stay safe and grow in confidence.
- 3.12 Pupils' attitude to learning is excellent. Nearly all pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that they believe the school helps them to become more confident and independent. Pupils were observed to be enthusiastic learners throughout the inspection visit, showing great independence and determination to succeed. They co-operate with one another, are collaborative and reflect on their learning, as seen in a mathematics lesson with younger pupils, who delighted in finding different ways to solve the same problem. The 'resolution tree' display in the hall is one example of how the school encourages self-reflection, but in all lessons that were observed pupils were attentive, respectful and showed responsibility for their own learning. They explained clearly that teachers expected them to be the authors of their own success and also expressed their willingness to make mistakes, in the firm belief that this promotes the best learning. The school is successful in its aims to encourage a determination to succeed and a love of learning within pupils, supported by kind and attentive staff members who are excellent role models.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' levels of self-knowledge and understanding are very high. They demonstrated considerable ability to be self-reflective, for example in discussions, when they explained precisely what they knew their learning and achievement targets to be, as they had derived these themselves through thoughtful scrutiny of their work. In the end of term production, pupils showed great confidence and eloquence in their performance. Almost all pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that feedback and marking helped them to improve. Pupils described, for example, how they felt their resilience had improved over the past year, as they felt they were now far more willing to attempt new tasks without fear of failure. Their self-discipline and resilience is seen both in the classroom, where younger pupils reviewed their progress in mathematics very effectively, and in pupils' patient and good-natured queuing for lunch. In interviews, they all said that teachers help them to become more resilient and to persevere even when things are hard. They cited the recent matches where they had lost many times but had finally won their last fixture; pupils explained that they did not mind losing as long as they kept improving. This self-understanding is fostered by dedicated staff who encourage pupils to develop into confident young people, by inculcating an ethos which targets the development of pupil's self-esteem and self-confidence.
- 3.15 Pupils show a clear understanding that the decisions they take affect their own success and well-being. They also showed that they understand how important it is to be able to work with others, and that

opportunities for new learning can often be the benefit of this. Pupils are given numerous opportunities to develop their decision-making skills from activities such as their time in woodland learning through to their various responsibilities in class from Year 1 onwards. The school Council meet regularly and feel that they can affect what happens in the school, for example the replacement of the plastic bags in the lunch hall for paper ones.

- 3.16 Pupils have an extremely well-developed sense of spiritual understanding and appreciation for the non-material aspects of life. They explained with great clarity that although money can make life easier, it cannot bring true happiness. They described that true friendship is far more vital than the possession of material objects. They explained that money could be spent wisely or inappropriately and that helping others and building relationships should come first. The ethos of the school places emphasis on personal reflection and empathy with those less fortunate than themselves.
- 3.17 The pupils' moral understanding and behaviour is exemplary; this was exemplified by how well the older pupils were seen to look after the younger ones. Pupils' exhibited outstanding behaviour; this throughout the inspection visit, and across all age and ability groups. They have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and respect the rules and systems that exist in the school. They were able to explain, convincingly, why rules are so important to keep everyone safe. They also understand that rules can be changed if they are not appropriate, and described how they could use forums such as the school council to effect this change. Pupils described how important it is to learn good behaviour and respect when young, as this will benefit them in later life and future careers. High levels of tolerance and consideration for others from all pupils occur during lessons and break times, and staff supported this by exemplifying high standards of behaviour and respect. The school is successful in its aim to develop a high awareness of good conduct in pupils, because there are very high expectations from both staff and from the pupils themselves.
- 3.18 Pupils work together extremely effectively throughout the school. The youngest pupils shared the most highly desirable toys with evident understanding and empathy for each other. Older pupils explained the importance of working together to achieve goals, such as the relay race on sports day, when even those who are not running are still part of the house team supporting the sprinters to achieve their best. They described, avidly, how winning is not the prime objective of a match and that applauding the opposition's efforts shows sportsmanship and respect. Nearly all pupils who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that they believe that the school supports them in their development of teamwork and social skills. From nursery to Year 6, pupils were observed to have formed excellent relationships with each other. They work and play together happily and older pupils delight in looking after the younger children at playtimes and as classroom monitors. This was exemplified at lunch time where a prefect was seen helping the youngest children to change into their indoor shoes. Pupils take pride in each other's achievements, as seen at the end of the school production where everyone clapped and cheered other cast members enthusiastically. They take great pleasure in helping others and working together to achieve success. They are supported in this by having regular opportunities to work together during the school day.
- 3.19 Pupils show great willingness and pro-activity in helping others. Older pupils are revered by their younger peers, as observed during the visit, as they assumed responsibility for guiding, advising and mentoring their younger peers. They encourage fair play and nominate rewards for younger pupils who demonstrate excellent social skills during the lunch break. Younger pupils described, to inspectors, their respect for their older peers. Pupils spoke about their enthusiasm to be involved in charitable fundraising events. They described how they had worked together, for instance, to bake cakes in school for a charity coffee morning and also how they had raised funds by organising a raffle and selling soap they had made to provide guide dogs for the blind. The school fosters a real sense of responsibility for the wider community through its encouragement and provision of opportunity, for charitable work.
- 3.20 Pupils enjoy and benefit from the rich diversity of racial, cultural and faith backgrounds found within the school. Relationships are natural, warm and friendly, regardless of faith or cultural differences.

Pupils explained how living and working within such a diverse school population meant that their understanding of each other's beliefs was high. They displayed outstanding respect and tolerance for each other and an abhorrence of radical or extremist thought. Pupils understand the importance of British values and they have the ability to express different views with respect. Initiatives such as the annual International Day provided by the school, combined with regular speakers from a variety of cultures, along with detailed religious education and personal, social and health education curricula, mean that the school's leadership and governance are successful in promoting pupils' understanding of one another.

- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They described the impact of e-safety teaching in school on their own use of ICT. They explained clearly to inspectors how to keep themselves safe when working online or when playing outside. Nearly all parents and every pupil who responded to the inspection questionnaire stated that the school helps them to know how to stay safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are able to carry out their own risk assessments with increasing detail as they progress through the school. For example, older pupils were observed assessing the inherent risks associated with a physical education lesson, deciding which apparatus needed safety mats and where 'spotters' should be placed. They are guided in this as teaching incorporates proactive encouragement and education into risk management where appropriate.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Kerry Lord	Reporting inspector
Dr Kenneth Young	Compliance team inspector (Bursar, GSA School)
Mrs Hilary Wyatt	Team inspector (Head, ISA School)