



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

STEEPHILL SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Steephill School

Full Name of School	Steephill School		
DCSF Number	886/6024		
Registered Charity Number	803152		
Address	Steephill School off Castle Hill Fawkham Longfield Kent DA3 7BG		
Telephone Number	01474 702107		
Fax Number	01474 706 011		
Email Address	head@steephill.co.uk		
Head	Mrs Caroline Birtwell		
Chair of Governors	Mr Edward Oatley		
Age Range	3 to 11		
Total Number of Pupils	123		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (61 boys; 62 girls;)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	0	5-11: 94
	3-5 (EYFS):	29	11-18: 0
Number of Day Pupils	123	Capacity for flexi-boarding:	nil
Number of Boarders	Total:	0	
	Full:	0	Weekly: 0
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection Dates	30 Nov 2009 to 01 Dec 2009		

PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule* for INTERIM inspections. The inspection is a two day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in March 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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INSPECTION EVIDENCE

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Steephill School was founded as a day school for boys and girls in 1935 by Miss Eileen Bignold in her family home in the village of Fawkham, south of Gravesend in rural Kent. It became an educational trust and registered charity in 1989 following the founder's death. The school currently has 123 pupils aged 3 to 11, of whom 61 are boys and 62 girls; of these pupils, 29 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for pupils up to age 5. Pupils live in the surrounding area and come from families with business and professional backgrounds. A small but increasing proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, in most cases of Asian origin. Three pupils receive support with fees from the school. The number of pupils is similar to that at the time of the last inspection, but the proportion of full-time staff has increased significantly.
- 1.2 Pupils are admitted without selection. Standardised tests show that the range of the pupils' abilities is wide but is, overall, above the national average; in view of the small cohorts, it varies from year to year. Twenty-four pupils receive support for learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) but no pupil has a statement of educational need. Two pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). The school aims to provide all pupils with an education that allows them to reach their full potential and to provide good quality education for individuals, within a relaxed but working environment. Most pupils move to local selective schools at 11+.
- 1.3 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

Early Years Foundation Stage Setting

<i>School</i>	<i>NC name</i>
Nursery	Nursery
Lower 1	Reception

Main School

<i>School</i>	<i>NC name</i>
Upper I	Year 1
II	Year 2
III	Year 3
IV	Year 4
V	Year 5
VI	Year 6

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 Pupils progress well throughout the school. They make excellent use of language, expressing themselves clearly whether explaining parts of speech or relating historical events such as the plague to biology. They write well for a range of audiences, producing interesting and imaginative fiction. They apply mathematics to practical problems and use graphs to convey results in science. They use their wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively. They achieve well, obtaining results in national tests at age 11 over the last three years which have been high compared with all maintained primary schools. Most pupils are successful in examinations for selective schools at age 11. Almost all pupils are fully engaged in their work, work well with their peers, respond well to questions and are prepared to think for themselves. Outside the classroom, the choir is successful in local music festivals and pupils have won prizes in school competitions in art.
- 2.2 Teaching is good overall and it is frequently outstanding. Pupils say how much they appreciate the help they receive from staff. The best teaching has clear objectives, a bright and lively pace, uses excellent questioning to develop the pupils' thinking, builds strong links with other subjects, and uses simple resources well. Occasionally, time is wasted by irrelevant activities, the task is insufficiently challenging, or ideas are not drawn together coherently at the end. Much marking provides clear guidance as to how to improve but this is not done consistently. The school uses assessment data to track each pupil's progress. Pupils with LDD or EAL are well supported, with careful screening and good use of individual educational plans. The curriculum is enhanced by the provision of both French and Spanish, and by an increasing emphasis on creative and problem-solving activities. The school has a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), with a particular focus on democracy and government. Pupils enjoy the varied range of clubs and other activities at lunchtime and after school.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.3 Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate highly developed personal qualities. They show considerable self-esteem and self-confidence, for instance performing a poem they have written in assembly. They take responsibility for themselves and their learning. Pupils express their views sensibly and listen carefully to others. They value the environment highly and enjoy collecting 'green points' for practical recycling. Many pupils take responsibility whether as prefects, house captains and deputies, or by joining the school council. Older pupils provide practical support to younger pupils. Pupils show considerable concern for others as individuals and for the community as a whole, in part through the PSHCE programme. They have strong opinions as to what is right and wrong. Behaviour is excellent and pupils take a particular pride in having developed 'The 5 rules of acceptable behaviour.' They have a relaxed and welcoming attitude to pupils from different cultures. The school has recently invested in substantial resources to support pupils' knowledge of other cultures and religions.
- 2.4 Both pupils and parents are extremely positive about the high standards of behaviour and pastoral care. Teachers provide strong role models and relationships are excellent. The importance of good behaviour is stressed in assemblies. Form

time is well used by staff for individual pastoral support. Pupils feel able to approach a range of staff about a problem, believing it would be speedily resolved. The school has a well-developed house system for academic and sporting competition, and pupils value the merit badges they receive. The school has detailed anti-bullying and safeguarding policies which are supported by appropriate training. It also has suitable arrangements for sickness, fire precautions, and health and safety. However, it has not been keeping monthly back-ups of the admissions register, but arrangements to do this have now been put in place.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.5 Governors bring a broad and valuable range of experience to their support and oversight of the school, and have particular expertise in education. They visit frequently and discuss key school priorities in their meetings. Division of responsibility enables governors to give attention to particular areas of school life; individuals oversee the curriculum, learning support, child protection, health and safety and catering. Reports about these areas, together with detailed reports from the head teacher, give governors a clear picture of issues facing the school and to take proper responsibility for financial, welfare and health and safety issues. Their careful planning enables the school to make good use of its accommodation.
- 2.6 School leadership is open, consultative and responsive. It combines a clear vision of what the school should become with a willingness to involve all staff in its implementation. Many issues are usefully resolved at whole staff meetings, with subject leaders and other staff contributing to effective development planning. Arrangements for academic leadership and monitoring are much improved since the last inspection; for example, coordinators oversee curricular arrangements throughout the school and are in turn monitored by senior management. Staff appreciate arrangements for induction, appraisal and professional development. Pupils benefit from committed and capable teaching and non-teaching staff. Recruitment checks on staff are completed correctly, and some procedures have recently been further strengthened.
- 2.7 Parents are extremely positive about the school and raised few concerns. They praised the many opportunities to be involved in the school, the ease with which they can raise issues and the trouble that is taken to resolve them. They are pleased with their children's progress and the teaching they receive. They appreciate the wide range of information the school makes available. The school is currently increasing opportunities for parents to learn about aspects of the curriculum. The quality of reports is good. The school has a proper procedure for responding to complaints.

3. MAIN SCHOOL: ACTION POINTS

(a) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 as subsequently amended, with the exception of those indicated below.

Under Standard 3 (Welfare, health and safety) it must:

- ensure that the admissions register is backed up each month [Regulation 3.(9)].

(b) Recommended action

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements to improve the good quality of education it already provides:
1. ensure that all teaching is as good as the best, in particular providing sufficient pace and challenge to all pupils; and
 2. ensure that marking always shows pupils how to improve their work.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

- 4.1 This setting is very effective in knowing each child. The good teaching and caring environment fulfil the setting's aim to make each child feel part of the community but important as an individual. The children's work is evidence of the good progress they are making. Strong links with the community and with parents help to ensure that children have the best start to their education. Since the previous inspection, improved planning for mathematics and better assessment systems have helped meet the needs of the children.
- 4.2 Leadership and management are good. Children are very well safeguarded, supported by experienced, caring staff concerned for the children's well-being, who ensure that risks are thoroughly assessed. Policies provide invaluable guidance, promote equality and eliminate discrimination. However, they are not always maintained to a sufficient standard that ensures that children's needs are met. Regular monitoring of the work of the setting successfully identifies targets for further improvement. In addition, close coordination and regular discussion, although not including regular self-evaluation, ensure that development plans reflect requirements for further improvement. This has led to the development of a well-resourced outdoor classroom and valuable additional resources for ICT. In addition, regular assessments and practical recording systems provide an important monitor of children's progress, leading to completion of children's EYFS profiles. Excellent links are maintained with a cluster group, with other settings and parents, some of whom provide invaluable support for activities. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the setting.
- 4.3 The quality of the provision and outcomes for the children are good. The reasonable balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities means that children are effectively helped to learn and develop in all areas of the curriculum. They make particularly good progress in communication language and literacy so that by the end of the Reception year around half of the children are achieving above average for their age.
- 4.4 The learning environment is stimulating, including numerous children's creations and photographic reminders of activities such as cooking cakes. Planning is effective, ensuring that each child, regardless of abilities, is offered a comprehensive learning experience. Children are keen to join in, can work independently and thoroughly enjoy their learning. However, planning does not consistently give sufficient detail about how the next steps in learning will be approached for individuals or groups of children. Staff know the children extremely well, but occasionally children, particularly the more able, are not sufficiently challenged in their learning, limiting their progress. Key people successfully promote the welfare of children and ensure that children are safe, for example, explaining the importance of taking care on the icy playing field. Healthy meals are provided and children understand why they should wash their hands and how to eat their lunches using the right equipment.

5. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE: ACTION POINTS

(a) Compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements

- 5.1 The school's provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and no action is required.

(b) Recommended action

- 5.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage setting should take the following action to improve still further the good quality of its provision:
1. ensure that planning:
 - extends the learning opportunities through the Early Learning Goals to meet the needs of those pupils who are ready to move on;
 - caters for different abilities of children, particularly the more able.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

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 registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Ian Newton
Mr Terry Fawell
Mrs Sybil Warner
Ms Sue Vale

Reporting inspector
Junior Team Inspector (Former Head, ISA)
Early Years Lead Inspector
Early Years Team Inspector