

Inspection of Peak Forest

First Steps Together, Stockport Road, Hyde SK14 3QF

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 October 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join this school with previously negative experiences of education and often long periods of absence. Typically, pupils are welcomed into an environment that allows them to settle quickly, feel safe and attend more frequently. Pupils forge positive relationships with staff and with each other. Pupils feel happy. They trust that there is someone that will help them if they have a concern.

The school is ambitious for pupils academically and it is in the process of improving the quality of education it provides. However, the curriculum has not been finalised in all subject areas. This limits the range of subjects that pupils can study and hinders how well they can learn.

Pupils benefit from the clear expectations and routines that staff set for their behaviour. When pupils struggle to regulate their own behaviour, they receive individualised support. In the main, this helps them with specific social and emotional needs so that their behaviour improves.

Pupils enjoy some of the activities that the school provides for them beyond the academic curriculum. For example, taking part in outdoor learning activities and looking after the school chickens. However, the school's programme for wider development is in its infancy. It is not sufficiently coherent or wide-ranging to ensure that all pupils access high-quality enrichment experiences.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school aim is to support pupils who have significant challenges and gaps in their learning so that they re-engage in education. Some aspects of this vision have been realised. For example, the school provides opportunities for pupils to access specialist support and services that are helping to support pupils' engagement and learning. However, some aspects of the school's provision remain underdeveloped. The school has not been able to provide the full range of subjects that it intended to. In addition, teachers' subject-specific knowledge and curriculum thinking is more well developed in some subject areas than in others. In some subjects, the important knowledge that pupils should learn is still being identified and ordered. This limits the breadth of knowledge that pupils learn and hinders how well they build their knowledge over time.

In some subjects, teachers use their subject-specific knowledge to deliver the curriculum well, selecting appropriate learning activities. However, the schools' systems for assessing pupils' progress are not consistently embedded. The school does not make sure that teachers know pupils' starting points and what gaps exist in their knowledge. This limits how well teachers can support pupils to build on their prior knowledge.

The school has started to gather important information about pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This information is shared with staff

and, sometimes, it is broken down clearly with helpful strategies to inform their teaching. However, this information can lack detail or is outdated. Some staff do not find this information helpful when supporting vulnerable pupils, including those with SEND. This limits how well the delivery of the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of some pupils. In addition, the school does not routinely identify and address gaps in pupils' reading knowledge on entry to the school. This means that some pupils are not supported as well as they should be to access the curriculum.

Typically, pupils' behaviour and attitudes become more positive when they join the school. Staff and pupils know and understand the clear rules and systems that are in place. Personalised adjustments are carefully made to meet pupils' individual needs. However, the school does not use the information that it gathers about behaviour as effectively as it could to target swift support for some pupils.

The majority of pupils have increased their rates of attendance from low starting points on entry to the school. However, too many pupils remain persistently absent from school. This prevents them from fully benefiting from all that the school has to offer.

Pupils receive lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE), where the school ensures that they are prepared for life in modern Britain. For example, pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe, including online. However, the range of activities that the school plans to provide to support pupils' wider development is in its early stages of development. It is not as coherently designed as it should be to ensure that all pupils gain a robust understanding of the wider world.

The school has devised an effective careers programme for pupils. It has audited the current level of provision and has thought through the activities that will be put into place throughout the year to enhance and develop the information, advice and guidance that pupils receive.

During a period of rapid expansion, the proprietor has effectively trained and supported a new staff team to focus on the development of the curriculum and to provide considerable social and emotional support for vulnerable pupils. The school fulfils its responsibilities under schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. However, as a result of inconsistencies in the design and delivery of the curriculum, the proprietor has failed to ensure that the education provided by the school impacts as positively as it should on all pupils. The school does not meet all of the independent school standards ('the standards') set out for the quality of education provided.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor has not carried out all of its statutory responsibilities. Some unmet standards mean that pupils do not receive an acceptable quality of education. The proprietor should ensure that it fulfils its statutory responsibilities so that all the standards are met consistently.
- The school has not ensured that the curriculum is broad enough to give pupils the full range of educational experiences that are set out in the standards. This limits the education that pupils receive. The school should ensure that the curriculum provides more breadth of educational experiences so that all pupils gain the foundational knowledge that they need to progress in the next stages of their education.
- In some subjects, the school has not identified the essential knowledge that teachers should teach or the order in which it should be delivered. This prevents some pupils from building their knowledge securely. The school should ensure that teachers are clear about the key knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn from their different starting points.
- The school does not identify and address the gaps that pupils have in their reading knowledge. This hinders how well some pupils can access the curriculum and learn. The school should ensure that pupils are given the support that they need to read fluently and accurately.
- In some subjects, teachers are not given key information about pupils' needs and abilities to devise and teach the curriculum well. This hampers how well pupils can build on what they already know in an age-appropriate way. The school should ensure that it assesses pupils' starting points swiftly and accurately so that staff have the information that they need to deliver the curriculum as intended.
- The school does not use the information that it gathers about pupils' behaviour as effectively as it should to make improvements. This limits how well the school identifies patterns and trends in pupils' behaviour and how effectively it can provide targeted support. The school should use the information that it gathers about behaviour more strategically to inform the support that it provides for pupils.
- Too many pupils are regularly absent from school. This means that they do not benefit fully from the specialist curriculum and support that the school provides. The school should ensure that it refines and develops the attendance strategies that it has in place to further increase rates of attendance for all pupils.
- Pupils do not have sufficiently coherent and well-designed enrichment experiences. This limits their understanding of the wider world and how well they are supported to develop their talents and interests. The school should formalise and enhance the programme of activities that it provides for pupils' wider

development so that all pupils benefit from wide-ranging enrichment opportunities.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	150682
DfE registration number	357/6008
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10366311
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	11 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Proprietor	First Steps Together Ltd
Chair	Matthew Bonilla
Headteacher	Natalie Ogden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,000 to £70,000
Telephone number	07940558506
Website	www.firststepstogether.uk
Email address	n.ogden@firststepstogether.co.uk

Information about this school

- The school was registered by the Department for Education (DfE) on 29 May 2024.
- This is the first standard inspection of the school.
- The school is located at Stockport Road, Hyde SK14 3QF.
- The school is an independent special school. It caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and autism. All of the pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered to admit up to 32 girls and boys, aged between 11 and 14 years old. There are currently 20 pupils on roll.
- The school is currently operating beyond its registration agreement with the DfE. The school has admitted pupils above the registered age range.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

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

Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and staff. An inspector spoke with the chair of the proprietor body and the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the standards. As part of this, an inspector made a tour of the school's premises accompanied by school leaders.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and

considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors scrutinised documents, such as school policies, risk assessments, school improvement plans and behaviour and attendance records.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in a range of other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's staff surveys. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Amanda Downing, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(a) full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age (construed in accordance with section 8 of the Education Act 1996), which gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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