

Steiner Academy Exeter

Cowley Bridge Road, Thomas Hall, Exeter, Devon EX4 5AD

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils, particularly in the upper years, are not making enough progress in English and mathematics.
- Some teaching is not stretching different groups of pupils sufficiently to achieve their potential. It is not fully preparing pupils for the demands of GCSE examinations, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are not consistently provided with advice and guidance by teachers that allows them to improve their work.
- Absence is too high for different groups of pupils. Leaders are taking the right action to tackle poor attendance but there is more work to do.
- Some pupils do not take enough pride in the presentation of their work in some subjects.
- A minority of parents are not satisfied with some aspects of the school's work. However, the large majority of parents would recommend the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They know what needs to improve.
- Governors provide an effective level of support and challenge to senior leaders, which is helping to drive improvement.
- Pupils are well behaved in their lessons and around the school site at breaktimes. They treat each other and adults with courtesy and respect.
- Pupils benefit from very positive relationships with staff that encourage them to develop confidence in the classroom.
- Provision for children in the kindergarten is good. This provides a strong start to their time in the school.
- The development of leadership at different levels has led to key improvements since the last inspection.
- Pupils are well looked after by staff. They are known as individuals and receive a high level of support. The support in place addresses effectively a wide range of complex needs.
- The curriculum provides pupils with an exciting, diverse range of interlinked subjects, topics and activities. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to learning because they enjoy it.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, and raise achievement, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in the upper years
 - the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is appropriately rigorous, especially as pupils move up through the upper years, so that they are suitably prepared for GCSE examinations
 - pupils take greater pride in the presentation of their work in some subjects
 - the feedback provided by staff, in line with the school's development plan, enables pupils to improve their work.
- Improve the quality of leadership by ensuring that leaders and governors work closely with the minority of parents who are dissatisfied with some aspects of the school's work.
- Continue to use all available strategies to improve attendance further, particularly the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has undoubtedly moved forward since the last inspection. The principal, ably supported by other leaders in the school, has been quick and decisive in his efforts to tackle various areas for improvement. As a result, safeguarding practice, behaviour and parental engagement are now much improved.
- Leaders know the school well. They have a clear understanding of the unique strengths of the school, characterised by the Steiner philosophy. Just as importantly, however, the principal takes an honest and objective view of what the school needs to do better. He is aware that, although significant progress has been made since the last inspection, there is further work to do.
- The principal is calm and measured in his approach to leadership. He works with others in an open and collegiate way, which garners the respect of staff. He recognises the importance of the contribution to be made by others and his approach is enabling him to steadily build leadership capacity throughout the school. In addition, the principal is using external support to good effect to improve aspects of the school's work, such as the newly implemented assessment system.
- Leaders have nurtured a positive, supportive culture in the school in which pupils are valued for their individuality. Adults are good role models for pupils. Consequently, pupils learn to treat others with respect and courtesy, within a culture that is open, warm and tolerant.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school, such is its breadth. The curriculum successfully cross-fertilises skills and knowledge from different disciplines and subjects. This enables pupils to develop a 'joined-up' view of learning and apply knowledge and skills in different contexts. Thoughtful and inspiring curriculum topics focus on the human experience and interpretation of the world, often through music and movement. Pupils are encouraged throughout the curriculum to imagine, reflect and create, as they seek to understand how human beings interact with their environment.
- Many aspects of the curriculum and wider extra-curricular activities encourage pupils to explore the outside environment and connect with nature. For example, pupils participate in weekly gardening lessons and enjoy forest school activities. Pupils also participate in different residential trips as they move up through the school.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well to support pupils' pastoral needs. Pupils who have complex social and emotional needs benefit from intensive one-to-one teaching assistant support and different kinds of therapy. For example, funding has supported therapies based around drama, play, horse care and art, all tailored to individual pupils' needs. Therapy sessions develop social skills, teamwork and cooperation. Targeted teaching assistant support in lessons is helping some pupils to make better academic progress.
- Additional funding to support pupils' sports and physical education is used well to provide additional swimming lessons for pupils in Years 5 and 6. It has also funded training for members of staff to deliver gymnastics in keeping with the Steiner

philosophy. Funding has also been used to buy new resources and equipment. As a result of these various strategies, pupils are engaging with sports activities to a greater degree and enjoying new opportunities.

- Pupils who need to catch up in English and mathematics in Year 7 are well supported by additional funding. They receive bespoke support from trained staff who successfully build pupils' confidence. As a result, pupils make the progress required to catch up. Progress is carefully monitored to ensure that when pupils have caught up, support is withdrawn and targeted elsewhere. This approach prevents pupils from becoming overly dependent on support.
- The leadership of teaching is not yet ensuring that pupils in the upper years are sufficiently well prepared for the demands of GCSE examinations. As the school is in its infancy, there are currently no pupils in Year 11. However, current Year 10 pupils are not yet making the progress necessary to succeed in the GCSE examinations, particularly in English and mathematics. This is because teaching is not sufficiently rigorous and expectations of pupils are not high enough.
- The school's relationship with parents has improved since the time of the last inspection. This is because leaders have made greater efforts to communicate with parents and keep them informed about their child's education. As a result, the large majority of parents would recommend the school. However, there is a minority of parents who are not satisfied with aspects of the school's work, including leadership and management of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection, mainly as a result of the external review recommended at the time. Governors bring a range of experience and skills to the role. They have ensured that any skills gaps, in relation to finance and safeguarding, for example, have been filled. Governors are enthusiastic and committed in their work; they passionately believe in the Steiner ethos and the unique advantages offered by the school. However, they take a considered, balanced view and recognise that aspects of the mainstream system also make a positive contribution to pupils' experience of school.
- Governors now provide a greater level of challenge to the principal and other senior leaders as a result of the external review. They are more confident and curious, so that they ask the necessary questions. They have also used training to good effect to ensure they ask the right questions. A positive relationship exists between governors and the principal because it is based on honesty, trust and transparency. The principal is open about the school's weaknesses so that governors have a clear understanding of the school. They know what needs improving and are persistent in their efforts to secure this improvement.
- Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They visit the school regularly and are an integral part of the life of the school. However, governors understand that their role is strategic rather than operational; they know when they need to be 'hands-off'. As part of their strategic role, governors have helped to shape the school's five-year development plan.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Since the last inspection leaders have tightened up safeguarding procedures. The school has received external audits, leaders have been trained and external agencies have been used effectively to support this work. As a result, the correct practices and procedures are in place. Staff have all received appropriate training in child protection; they know what to do and who to speak to should they have any concern about a child. Referrals are monitored closely by the designated safeguarding lead. She works effectively with the wider school safeguarding team and external professionals to secure the appropriate support for pupils.
- Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are complete, comprehensive and up to date. Staff and visitors are clear about the school's expectations of their conduct and behaviour.
- The school site is secure and entry to the site is monitored. Pupils are able to enjoy stunning grounds, some of which are wooded. Risk assessments are in place for use of the outside environment and there is a high level of staff supervision at breaktimes.
- The vast majority of pupils report that they feel safe and well looked after in school. Pupils who spoke with the lead inspector said that there is 'barely any bullying'. They also said that there were plenty of staff they could speak to if they had worries or concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in the upper years, are not high enough. This means that pupils are not always challenged to think deeply about their learning. As a result, different groups of pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching is not developing pupils' mathematics and English skills sufficiently, particularly in the upper years. Pupils have not been provided with enough opportunities to practise and develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics. However, the recently appointed head of mathematics is taking action to intensify and make more rigorous the teaching of mathematics. Nevertheless, changes are too recent for impact to be visible. Although there is a strong emphasis on creative writing in English, pupils do not have enough opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. Neither are they sufficiently able to practise and develop technical grammar skills.
- Pupils do not have a clear enough understanding of how to improve their work. This is because teachers do not consistently provide guidance and advice which helps pupils identify and learn from their mistakes. As a result, the pace of pupils' progress is limited.
- The recently introduced assessment system is enabling staff to better monitor the progress of different groups of pupils. The system is straightforward and well designed to enable staff to gauge progress in a Steiner context. The system is providing staff with useful information about progress. However, because it is relatively recent, and the

school relatively new, there is not yet enough benchmarking and comparative data to enable the system to be fully effective. Consequently, the assessment system is not yet having a full, direct impact on leaders' ability to boost pupils' progress.

- Pupils across the school demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to become involved in class discussion and share their views. This is because teachers question pupils effectively. They ask questions that prompt pupils to reflect and thoughtfully consider. Pupils engage with teachers' questioning because the topics are interesting and appeal to them.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to plan interesting topics and tasks. Often planning draws on knowledge and skills from a diverse range of subjects and disciplines. For example, in one observed Year 10 history lesson, the teacher seamlessly linked a history topic with the study of ancient languages. Pupils were being taught about the Act of Supremacy, an act of Parliament which made Henry VIII the head of the Church of England. This topic enabled the teacher to introduce the word 'iconography', the study of visual Christian symbols and art. Pupils considered the linguistic roots of the word and the connection to ancient Greek. Pupils were engaged with the teaching because of the effective way the teacher had planned the lesson.
- Pupils benefit from positive relationships with their teachers. The classroom environment is a safe, secure space where pupils feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their views. This is because there is a high degree of mutual respect between staff and pupils.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants. These relationships are also characterised by mutual respect. Assistants help to build pupils' confidence through an effective combination of careful questioning and encouragement.
- The large majority of pupils who responded to the pupil survey issued during the inspection agreed that they enjoy their learning and teachers help them to do their best. Furthermore, the large majority of pupils agreed that teachers listen to what they have to say in lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The supportive, empowering nature of the school's culture helps pupils to thrive. The school has a 'family feel' to it because staff passionately believe that their obligations to pupils go beyond the classroom. Staff feel responsible for pupils' wider experience of school and recognise the importance of nurturing the 'whole child'. In turn, pupils pick up on this and know that staff are there for them.
- Staff have made a positive difference in supporting pupils who have had unhappy and unsettled experiences at previous schools. Many of these pupils have complex social and emotional needs, and support has been put in place to help them feel valued. As a result, some pupils who have never enjoyed school and frequently did not attend now

feel they belong. Some other pupils in this position, however, are still persistently absent and not fully integrating into school.

- Pupils are confident and self-assured. This is because the school builds their self-esteem. Pupils learn that it is 'ok' to be themselves and share their views, while respecting the views of others at the same time. This is why pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning in lessons.
- The school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils respect the environment, inside and out, so that inspectors did not see any litter, vandalism or graffiti. Pupils respect each other's personal space and move appropriately around the school site.
- Pupils who receive alternative provision are well supported. Their social and emotional needs are provided for so that their confidence and self-esteem improves. This, in turn, increases their engagement with learning and their academic progress.
- The school's distinctive ethos and curriculum support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education well. A celebration of spirituality, the seasons, the natural environment and festivals that mark key events is woven into curriculum topics and activities outside of lessons. Pupils are repeatedly prompted to ask 'why?' and consider the purpose of things. These activities develop their curiosity and natural inquisitiveness.
- Themes such as religion, tradition and modernity also support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Furthermore, they teach pupils about British values such as democracy and the rule of law. However, some of the pupils who spoke with the lead inspector were not able to relate what they had learned to topical current affairs and important global events.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are a delight! They are pleasant, friendly and courteous to visitors and clearly feel comfortable around each other and staff. As one pupil said to the lead inspector, 'There are no friendship groups because everyone's friends.'
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors were very positive about their school experience. They reported that there was very little bullying and when it did occur it was dealt with effectively.
- The large majority of parents who responded to the Parent View online survey agree that behaviour is good in the school and that bullying is dealt with effectively. The response to the pupil survey issued during the inspection was also positive with regard to these issues.
- The school's behaviour management system has helped to improve behaviour significantly since the last inspection. Pupils are clear about what is expected of them. They understand and respect the sanctions that are in place to secure good behaviour. The school is undoubtedly a calmer and more orderly place now because of the effectiveness of strategies introduced to manage behaviour.
- The attendance of different groups of pupils is below average. This year's figures match last year's, although both years are an improvement on the 2014/2015 academic year.

In the upper years this is because some pupils have complex needs which prevent them from attending school. It is also because some parents do not have the same high expectations of attendance as staff. This makes the improvement of attendance difficult for staff, although they are using all available tools at their disposal. For example, pupils are rewarded for good attendance and leaders repeatedly stress the importance of good attendance in school newsletters. Furthermore, staff work closely with the education welfare officer and initiate legal proceedings when necessary.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills are not sufficiently well developed in the upper years. This is because the teaching of certain fundamental skills in preparation for GCSE examinations is not rigorous or systematic enough.
- Different groups of pupils are not sufficiently stretched and challenged in their learning. As a result, pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. This is because some teachers' expectations of what they can achieve are not high enough. Consequently, pupils are not presented with enough opportunities to extend or deepen their learning. The most able pupils are provided with some opportunities to deepen their thinking, such as specialist numeracy and literacy sessions. However, overall, pupils are not routinely challenged frequently enough across their various subjects.
- Some disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, are not making comparable progress to their peers in some year groups. The school's assessment system is helping to prioritise the performance of disadvantaged pupils. However, improvement strategies are not yet ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make consistently rapid progress across all year groups.
- Pupils do not always take enough pride in the presentation of their work, particularly written work. Presentation suffers because handwriting and use of space are not as neat and ordered as they should be.
- The social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. This support is enabling pupils to grow in confidence and engage more proactively with their learning. However, the school's assessment information shows that these pupils are not yet making comparable academic progress with their peers.
- As pupils move up through the school they gain understanding of a broad range of diverse and specialised areas of knowledge. For example, history topics consider the crusades, the Vikings and the spiritual importance of Lindisfarne. Biology topics contain creative elements such as poetry writing; one pupil's work contained a poem with the title 'Heart and Soul'. In English, pupils have the opportunity to study the nature of Greek tragedy.
- Pupils develop craft skills to a high level. These include wood, metal and textile work. Pupils are taught to use traditional tools safely and to work with materials in ways that harmonise with the natural environment. One pupil produced a leather binding for her journal and worked through all the necessary processes to finish the leather to the required standard.

- Pupils' art work is of a high standard. Pupils are able to experiment in a range of forms and mediums, producing vibrant, dynamic paintings and puppets among other items. This is because the teaching they receive nurtures their creativity and imagination.
- By the time pupils are ready to leave the school, they have become well-rounded, responsible citizens who are willing and able to make a positive contribution to their community. They are optimistic, cheerful and confident, in part because of the strong oral tradition that has empowered them to share and exchange views with others.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have a good understanding of provision in the kindergarten. They capitalise on strengths and remedy weaknesses swiftly with a sense of purpose.
- Leaders have an unwavering focus on developing children's social and emotional skills. Systematic staff training ensures that adults are confident and proficient in helping children to develop these skills well from the moment they join the school.
- Safeguarding is effective. Children are taught effectively, through imitation and well-established routines, about how to keep themselves safe. As a result, they know how to move around classrooms carefully and navigate the potential hazards posed by obstacles and different surfaces outside. Children also know how to use scissors and knives for cutting food with dexterity and confidence, under the supervision of well-trained adults. Adults are aware of the school's safeguarding procedures and know how to raise and report concerns.
- Relationships between adults and children are strong, based on mutual respect, kindness and acceptance. As a result, children behave well and use good manners. They are happy, curious and inquisitive; children enjoy being in school.
- The wide curriculum offer enables children to experience a variety of different activities. For example, children have opportunities to cook, finger-knit, role-play and construct objects using small and large apparatus. They engage with these interesting activities in the well-designed inside and outside areas, supported by knowledgeable and caring staff.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive carefully considered, and sensitively delivered, bespoke provision that supports their social and emotional development. This is also the case for disadvantaged children supported by the early years pupil premium funding. Quiet spaces and trained teaching assistants help children to feel included and part of the kindergarten community. Parents also identify this feature of the provision as a strength.
- Adults have a good understanding of individual children's different needs. This is because they carefully observe children's interactions, learning and development of skills. They make detailed notes which are used to discuss children's attainment and progress, and inform the good quality of teaching.
- Leaders acknowledge that transition between the kindergarten and the lower school could be developed further through the reinforcement of certain skills. This would enhance children's readiness for the next stage of their learning so that they 'hit the ground running'.

School details

Unique reference number	139661
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10033138

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	333
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Lena Marveo
Principal	Alan Swindell
Telephone number	01392 757371
Website	www.steineracademyexeter.org.uk
Email address	admin@steineracademyexeter.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The principal has been in post since the school opened in 2013.
- Steiner Academy Exeter is currently a smaller than average all-through school because the school is still in the process of recruiting pupils to fill the different year groups. The school is continuing to grow at a rapid pace.
- One pupil attends alternative provision at the Central Devon Academy.
- The most recent published contextual information indicates that the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average.

- The most recent published contextual information indicates that the number of girls in the school is higher than average.
- The most recent published contextual information indicates that the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The most recent published contextual information indicates that the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is well above the national average.
- The most recent published contextual information indicates that the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive support is well above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the behaviour coordinator, the kindergarten coordinator and the senior leader responsible for safeguarding, special educational needs and additional funding. Additionally, inspectors had discussions with pupils, representatives of the governing body, parents and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation, progress information, the school development plan and information about the school's assessment and performance management systems. In addition, attendance, exclusion, pupil premium and behaviour information was considered. Safeguarding records were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work from different year groups and observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtimes.

Inspection team

Steve Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Aaron Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Bragg	Ofsted Inspector

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