

Steiner Academy Exeter

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

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have failed to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils. Significant lapses in safeguarding practice continue to put pupils at risk.
- Leadership is dysfunctional at all levels of the school. Leaders do not work together in the best interests of pupils.
- Governors have failed in their duty of care towards both adults and pupils. They have failed to take swift action to address known safety issues.
- Leaders fail to fulfil their statutory obligations in relation to the special educational needs (SEN) and disability code of practice. The identification of and support for these pupils is inadequate.
- Leaders fail to promote equalities effectively. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are disproportionately excluded from school. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is misspent, having no impact on their achievement.
- Attendance is low. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have failed to shape a curriculum that combines the Steiner approach with the requisite academic learning that pupils need to succeed in their studies.
- Teachers are unable to meet the individual needs of pupils who need specialist, tailored support. Reasonable adjustments are not being made for these pupils.
- Teaching is inadequate. Staff do not consider progress in mathematics, reading and writing to be fundamental to the educational well-being of pupils. Consequently, their progress in these key areas is extremely poor.
- Teachers fail to plan learning based on what pupils already know and can do. Learning often lacks purpose, and pupils quickly lose interest and their behaviour deteriorates.
- Leaders' and teachers' management of poor behaviour is inadequate. Disruption to learning is routine.
- The leadership of and provision for children in the early years (Kindergarten) is inadequate. Teachers' supervision and behaviour management of children is unsafe. Learning and progress is poor.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, governors and leaders must secure the safety and well-being of pupils by:
 - completing the investigation into the serious incident from July, identifying systemic weaknesses and drawing up a detailed action plan to address these
 - reviewing all the information that the school holds on vulnerable pupils in order to identify and provide immediate child protection support for those who need it
 - reviewing all staff personnel records and completing suitability checks, as required
 - ensuring that staff in the Kindergarten receive immediate support in behaviour management and clear direction on the use of physical interventions.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - completing the planned strategic leadership review so that roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear
 - ensuring that all improvement plans include specific targets, against which the impact of actions can be judged
 - establishing a programme of whole-school monitoring and review for safeguarding, SEN, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance
 - ensuring that all leaders have the training, time and professional support to perform their roles effectively and in line with legal requirements
 - reviewing the curriculum, especially in the lower school, to ensure that it builds academic progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that the school complies with the SEN and disability code of practice by working with outside agencies to:
 - review the SEN policy to ensure that it complies with statutory expectations and reflects best practice
 - urgently evaluate the current provision for all pupils on education, health and care (EHC) plans, and take immediate action to ensure that their needs are met
 - review the provision for all pupils on the school's SEN register to identify whether their needs have been accurately identified, and ensure that their needs are met effectively
 - ensure that the early identification of pupils who have SEN improves
 - work in partnership with parents and families, so that they are fully involved in

supporting their child's education.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and, by doing this, raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that all teachers from Class 1 upwards systematically plan learning that enables pupils to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that learning activities in the early years (Kindergarten) are purposeful and matched against agreed learning and development goals
 - holding all teachers to account for the quality of their work and the impact it has on pupils' progress
 - improving teachers' assessment of pupils' progress and ensuring that this informs their teaching
 - establishing an effective whole-school behaviour policy with agreed rewards and sanctions and ensuring that this is applied consistently by all staff.
- Improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and for those who have SEN and/or disabilities, so that it is at least in line with the national average.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how the use of this funding may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leadership is dysfunctional at every level in the school. The principal does not work effectively with governors (who are also the trustees) and has kept them at arm's length from what is happening in the school. The governing body itself has been divided and members do not work together in the best interests of pupils.
- Those with leadership responsibility are not held to account for their roles. Therefore, significant aspects of the school's provision are inadequate. This is having a damaging effect on all pupils, especially vulnerable pupils.
- The capacity for school self-improvement is absent. Leaders now know that a strategic overhaul of all the school's policies, processes and practices is required. However, they are entirely reliant on external support to bring this about quickly and safely.
- Leaders fail to promote equalities effectively. They have failed to prepare and publish information to demonstrate their compliance with their public sector Equality Duty and have failed to prepare and publish clear and measurable objectives to achieve the core aims of this duty.
- Leaders have not tackled the view, held by a significant minority of teachers and parents, that all the difficulties that the school faces are caused by those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have not ensured that reasonable adjustments are being made to the school's procedures, criteria and practices, including the implementation of its behavioural policy. Out of 23 pupils excluded in 2017/18, 15 were on the school's SEN register. The school was not able to demonstrate that it had assessed and reviewed its policies to understand why a higher proportion of children with SEN and/or disabilities were being excluded.
- Leaders do not have the expertise to understand how the needs of pupils with specific emotional and behavioural difficulties can be met. These vulnerable pupils are often dealt with by being removed from the classroom or excluded from the school. This creates more distress and dislocation for those who need continuity and specialist support.
- Leaders' oversight of behaviour is ineffective; it is having no evident impact on embedding a culture of good behaviour across the school.
- Leaders have misspent the additional funding they receive to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. They are unable to account for whether this funding has had any impact on the achievement of these pupils.
- The curriculum is designed along the established principles of Steiner education, with pupils in Year 2 to Year 9 being taught principally by their class teacher. The main lesson each day is intended to provide an intensive study into a specific topic area. This is supplemented by afternoon lessons that are largely creative or active in nature. However, teachers lack the experience and subject knowledge to build academic knowledge and understanding through this approach. As a result, pupils' progress in core areas of knowledge is limited, and their reading, writing and mathematical skills

are well behind what would be expected at this stage of their education.

- The curriculum at key stage 4 is relatively narrow, providing pupils with few choices for their GCSE study. However, this is developing as the school expands and more subjects can be offered.
- The quality and breadth of careers advice and guidance is limited in scope. Older pupils have met with representatives from post-16 institutions, and pupils from Year 9 upwards learn about different types of jobs and roles in society. However, there is no impartial advice and guidance and no information about different future pathways such as apprenticeships. Older students are not provided with guidance about the qualifications they may need to move on to certain professions in the future.
- A significant proportion of parents raised concerns with inspectors about the quality of leadership in the school prior to this September.
- Since September, the school has been actively led by the vice-principal and an additional consultant vice-principal. They have taken immediate steps to ensure that external advisers review key aspects of the school's provision. They have been open and honest with parents about the failings at the school. However, given the scale of improvements that are necessary, they too require external support to fulfil their leadership functions effectively.
- Inspectors recommend that the school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governance at this school has been in disarray for some time. Governors do not work together under a common vision and cause, as they hold differing views as to what is in the best interests of the pupils at the school. Consequently, some governors have resigned in frustration at being unable to change the practice of the board. There have been three chairs of governors in the last few months alone. This has added to governors' failure to make effective decisions and to discharge their statutory duties.
- Governors have been entirely ineffective in holding senior leaders to account for their work. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors are not provided with crucial information about safeguarding, exclusions and attendance, teacher performance and pupil progress. As a result, they do not know how the school performs in comparison with other schools nationally, how ineffective teaching is or how poor the provision is for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- Governors have failed in their duty of care towards staff and pupils. Despite being informed in March of this year that teachers were subject to regular physical assaults by younger pupils, governors did not address this. Instead, minutes show that they sympathised with staff but expressed the view that 'there is a limit to what the school can do for very challenging pupils'. This is a complete abdication of their responsibilities.
- Governors have failed in their statutory duties to ensure that the impact of key policies is reviewed, and to update and ratify these as a result. These include policies relating to children who go missing, exclusions, attendance, staff discipline and appraisals.
- Some governors have rightly expressed their frustration at the pace at which leaders

take on their requests for change. For example, the recommendations from their investigations into one formal complaint have not been addressed a year later, and they have been excluded from some staff appointments despite assurances that this would change.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders' oversight of safeguarding is inadequate. Despite having a large team of staff dedicated to safeguarding the welfare of pupils, crucial information about vulnerable pupils' well-being is not brought together to build a coherent picture of the needs of the individual child. Record-keeping is poor and referrals to the local authority have not been made quickly enough. During this inspection, inspectors found two very serious cases where children had not been adequately protected by the school. Referrals were immediately made to the local authority.
- A recent serious incident has been inadequately investigated by senior leaders. While immediate steps have been taken to deter pupils from leaving the school site, the underlying systemic causes for this significant breach in safeguarding practice have not been identified and corrected. As a result, pupils in the Kindergarten are restricted to their own area as it is still not safe for staff to take them outside onto the wider school site.
- Staff in the Kindergarten use physical interventions regularly and inappropriately with children. They pull children up from the floor, carry them across the room and force them to sit upright. Staff report that this is common practice and that incidents of physical restraint also occur and are not reported.
- Across the school, the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not being met. This is having a significant impact on the welfare of these pupils and placing them at risk of harm.
- The processes used to recruit and check on the suitability of new staff do not meet statutory requirements and therefore they put pupils at potential risk of harm. The school was unable to evidence that all staff had been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service. Recruitment records show that previous employment history is not adequately checked, and job applications are not always expected. Some staff have been appointed because they are known by the school and not because they have been thoroughly appraised to check that they have the necessary skills and experience.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Many teachers at the school lack the training and experience that are necessary to support good learning and progress.
- Teachers fail to plan learning that is purposeful and takes account of what pupils already know and can do. As a result, pupils' work shows that they tend to drift along through their lessons without making any sustained academic progress.
- Teachers do not give priority to the systematic teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. Many lack the skills and the subject knowledge to do this.

- Teachers do not monitor pupils' progress during lessons effectively enough. They do not pick up that some pupils are finding the work too hard, while others are sailing through it and becoming bored. Consequently, pupils become disengaged. Poor behaviour in lessons is common.
- Teachers rarely consider the specific needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. They are usually set the same work as other pupils regardless of the specific learning difficulties they have. These pupils also make poor progress.
- Where teaching is effective, for example in art, teachers have strong subject knowledge and plan learning activities against a clear objective. They monitor pupils' work closely, making timely interventions and encouraging pupils to be self-critical and self-motivated. There is a purposeful, calm atmosphere in these lessons because pupils enjoy what they are doing. Over time, pupils perfect a range of artistic skills that result in some exceptional pieces of artwork.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils, especially those in the Kindergarten, are not safe owing to the lack of vigilance from their teachers and the inappropriate way they are sometimes handled. Poor child protection arrangements mean that vulnerable pupils are not supported well, and concerns are not referred quickly to external agencies.
- Those pupils who spoke to inspectors had mixed views about bullying. However, almost a quarter of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire reported that bullying was not dealt with effectively at the school.
- Many pupils are self-confident, and their teachers encourage them to direct their own learning. However, this is only successful when the learning is purposeful and engaging.
- Older pupils know how to be safe and can describe appropriate measures for keeping themselves safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Teachers' management of behaviour is erratic. Pupils frequently become disinterested and go off task in lessons. When this happens, classrooms become unruly and little real learning takes place.
- The supervision of pupils during outside breaktimes is poor. While adults may be present, they do not actively monitor behaviour nor intervene when 'rough play' can tip over into actual physical aggression. Adults appear oblivious to the potential risks involved in such activities.
- Both parents and teachers raised serious concerns about the management of behaviour across the school. These views were supported by inspectors' observations. Few

teachers have the skills to support pupils who have emotional and, therefore, behaviour difficulties. They were often observed to exacerbate such behaviours rather than soothe and de-escalate them. Teachers' lack of expertise in this area is a significant weakness, and this is having a direct impact on the education and well-being of these pupils.

- Attendance is low in comparison to national figures, and the numbers of pupils who are regularly absent is high. These figures are not demonstrably improving. Pupils who have SEN and those who are disadvantaged are more frequently absent than other pupils.
- Exclusions increased significantly over the last academic year. Leaders have disproportionately excluded pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This unfair treatment is in direct breach of the SEN and disability code of practice.
- The behaviour of older pupils is sensible and cooperative. They work well together in class and sustain their concentration through challenging tasks.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- For the last three years, the progress that pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 has been consistently poor. This is the case for pupils of all prior ability levels. Last year, just one pupil reached the expected level in mathematics. The standards they reach in these subjects are well below the expectations for their age.
- Current pupils are making little progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers do not give equal weight to pupils making strong academic progress when compared to their artistic and creative development. Any curriculum plan to build secure progress over time is not working. Pupils demonstrate little application of basic grammar techniques in their writing, and their spelling ability is well below where it should be in each class. Mathematical errors persist from one age group to the next. This undermines the start that pupils make to their GCSE years.
- The school's first group of GCSE pupils graduated in 2018. They studied a limited range of GCSEs owing to the developing provision at this key stage. Only half of these pupils had key stage 2 scores from which to measure their progress. However, the progress they made was well below what would be expected, particularly in English, and especially for the most able students. The only subject in which these pupils excelled was art.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make inadequate progress across the whole school. This is because teachers are not supported well and do not have the skills to meet their needs.
- Although progress for pupils over time is inadequate, as soon as pupils start Class 9 (Year 10), their progress accelerates, despite having gaps in their knowledge. This is because teachers use the detailed assessment frameworks and syllabuses from the GCSE qualifications to plan and structure learning more effectively.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Leadership of the early years is inadequate. Leaders are unable to evidence the progress that children make from when they start in Kindergarten to when they leave. Leaders have not provided staff with the training, development and support that they need to look after children with complex needs. Staff morale is low.
- The safety and welfare of pupils in the Kindergarten is a significant concern. Adults frequently manage behaviour by using inappropriate physical handling. This, and the use of physical restraint, is not recorded and therefore not reported to senior leaders.
- There is a void of support for children who have SEN and/or disabilities. Their needs are not understood and there are instances when they are mistreated by the adults who are responsible for their care.
- The atmosphere in some Kindergarten classrooms is frequently loud and chaotic. Children engage in risky behaviour, such as vaulting from five-foot apparatus onto wooden flooring and hurling wooden blocks around. Adults' awareness of risk is poor, and their supervision of such activities is completely ineffective.
- In some of the settings, teaching is particularly poor. Teachers avoid interacting with children and keep any communication to a minimum. This is particularly damaging for those children who have speech and language difficulties. Senior leaders agree that the Steiner approach to teaching pupils at this age should not involve such extremes of disengagement.
- Observations demonstrated that most of the children start Kindergarten with the skills and abilities that are at least typical for their age. However, the lack of structured learning opportunities means that they make poor progress from these starting points.
- More effective provision provides some children with appropriate learning activities. Some teachers use songs to stimulate children's language development. Where this happens, learning is promoted.

School details

Unique reference number	139661
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10080584
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	418
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Andrew Quayle
Principal	Alan Swindell
Telephone number	01392 757371
Website	www.steineracademyexeter.org.uk
Email address	admin@steineracademyexeter.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 June 2017

Information about this school

- On 26 September, the Department for Education’s regional schools commissioner sent a ‘Minded to terminate’ letter to the school’s trustees.
- The school is exempt from delivering the literacy and mathematics requirements of the early years foundation stage. It is also not required to administer national tests at the end of key stage 1. The school’s funding agreement requires it to admit its pupils for national testing at the end of key stage 2 (Class 5) and key stage 4 (Class 10).
- The school’s website describes the school’s aims as striving ‘to balance the creative, the active and the academic... to develop children to their fullest potential as motivated, confident, self-reliant and responsible individuals with a life-long love of learning and a strong sense of the contribution they can make to society’.
- The school’s website is not compliant with the statutory requirements for an academy free school. In particular, information for parents on the impact of SEN and additional funding lacks detail and does not explain how it leads to improved outcomes for these pupils.
- The school has one pupil on its roll who is currently educated for one day each week at

'Choices' alternative provision.

- Since June, the school has bought in targeted support from Devon County Council. Local authority officers have conducted reviews of SEN provision and the safeguarding arrangements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place without notice to the school. It was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and was deemed a section 5 inspection during the first day.
- The inspection was carried out following a number of complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether leadership and management are effective, whether the needs of pupils who have SEN are being met, and whether pupils are safe at the school.
- Inspectors observed learning in 32 parts of lessons across the main three phases of the school. Two of these were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also reviewed learning in pupils' workbooks.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors and a parent governor, the principal, the vice-principal and the acting vice-principal, and with those senior leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, SEN, behaviour and attendance.
- Meetings were also held with teaching and assessment leaders and groups of teachers and teaching assistants. Inspectors also spoke to teachers and teaching assistants during the course of their observations in the classroom.
- The lead inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke formally to two groups of pupils. They also spoke to many more pupils in classes or at playtimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered the 253 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire. They also considered 47 written letters from parents during the course of the inspection and two messages sent directly to Ofsted. Inspectors spoke to parents directly as they dropped off and collected their children at the start and end of the school day.
- Inspectors considered 32 questionnaires returned by members of staff, in which they gave their views as to the quality of education and safety of pupils at the school.

Inspection team

Philippa Darley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nathan Kemp	Her Majesty's Inspector
Caroline Dulong	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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