

Inspection of South Devon Steiner School

Hood Manor, Dartington, Totnes TQ9 6AB

Inspection dates: 30 November to 2 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

School leaders have led the school through significant changes since the previous inspection. They have tackled past failings well. Leaders' expectations have risen significantly. This has contributed to pupils getting a good start and end to their education. However, there is more to do to ensure that pupils' journey through the school is consistently strong.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and value the support that staff provide. Pupils know who to go to if they have a worry or concern. Most pupils attend well, except for a small number who are persistently absent. Leaders are not tackling this swiftly enough.

Pupils feel that behaviour across the school is mainly strong. They have confidence in staff to deal with any issues. Bullying rarely occurs. Staff support pupils' personal development well. Pupils have an increasing understanding of the world beyond school. This helps them develop tolerance and respect for views different from their own.

Pupils, staff, parents and carers appreciate the school's approach to education. Pupils value the sense of community that permeates the school. The overwhelming majority of parents are positive about the school. However, there is some dissatisfaction about the support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive.

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

School leaders, overseen by trustees, have brought about much-needed improvements since the previous inspection. They have ensured that the independent school standards are met in full. Leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They have an accurate evaluation of the school. Leaders have been able to target the areas of the school that require the most attention. They have raised expectations significantly, both of staff and pupils. As a result, there is a collective view that the school is on a trajectory of improvement.

Leaders' efforts to improve the quality of education are still in the early stages, but green shoots of improvement are emerging. The recent staff restructuring, focused on giving more pupils access to specialist teachers, is taking root. Staff feel that leaders support them well and consider their workload and well-being.

Children in kindergarten get off to a strong start to their school life. Adults provide meaningful opportunities for children to develop well. The indoor spaces are well organised, with resources readily available. Activities sustain children's attention, so they see them through to completion. The kindergarten leader and her team have high expectations for children. They keep a close eye on children's progress and adapt the curriculum accordingly. Staff provide a curriculum that prepares children successfully for their transition to the lower school.

Sixth-form students are well prepared for the courses they are enrolled on. Students pick courses with a clear view of what they hope to achieve in life after school. Staff have expert knowledge of the curriculum. Students achieve well as a result. Through a bespoke careers programme, students make informed decisions on their next steps. Students know what they want to do in the future and know what they need to do to reach these goals.

Between the kindergarten and the sixth form, inconsistencies exist. Teachers' use of assessment information is not yet embedded, particularly in subjects where recent changes to the curriculum have taken place, for example mathematics. Teachers know how well pupils are learning the school's curriculum. However, they are not yet consistently using this information to adapt the curriculum for pupils. In subjects such as science, teachers' use of assessment is far stronger. They adapt the curriculum with greater precision.

Leaders have recently introduced a different approach to how they teach pupils to read. The new phonics programme is embedding well. Pupils' knowledge of letters and the sounds they make is building. Even so, the books that staff provide for pupils to read are not consistently well matched to pupils' reading ability. As a result, some pupils struggle to read unfamiliar words that contain sounds they do not yet know. Teachers identify those pupils who need more support, including those with SEND. However, this extra support is not precise enough to tackle the gaps in pupils' knowledge.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has improved many aspects of the provision for pupils with SEND. Teachers are increasingly aware of how best to meet pupils' specific needs and track their progress closely. Most of the time, teachers set appropriate targets for pupils, but this is not yet consistent across the school. Staff have had specific training on supporting pupils with dyslexia. However, they have limited strategies to support pupils with speech and language difficulties.

The school is calm and welcoming. Pupils behave well. They are adamant that bullying is rare. Pupils told inspectors that they have confidence in staff to sort out incidents of poor behaviour, should they occur.

Leaders provide pupils with a rounded view of the world around them. They support pupils to gain a strong understanding of the views and opinions of others. Pupils' knowledge of different cultures and people who hold different beliefs is strong. Pupils celebrate diversity within their school and beyond. Respect and tolerance are commonplace values. The school promotes morality, helping pupils know right from wrong. The school's relationships and sex education curriculum helps pupils learn age-appropriate content, such as contraception and consent. Pupils know how to lead healthy lives, including the benefits of physical activity on their bodies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that checks on staff are complete before they commence employment, including the necessary overseas checks on staff who have lived or worked abroad.

Leaders provide training for staff to help them fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities well. They know who to pass concerns on to, however minor they appear to be. Safeguarding leaders monitor concerns closely to see if there are any patterns or trends that may indicate pupils are at risk of harm. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, particularly when securing help for pupils and their families. Trustees oversee safeguarding well.

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

- In phonics, teachers provide pupils with books and interventions that are not precisely matched to their needs. Some pupils struggle to read books they have been asked to read, and interventions do not support them to catch up well enough. Leaders need to ensure that reading books and interventions help pupils to read unfamiliar words with increasing accuracy and fluency.
- Leaders do not ensure that teachers consistently adapt the curriculum based on their knowledge of what pupils know and understand. As a result, pupils do not routinely receive the appropriate challenge or support to help them know more and remember more. Leaders need to ensure that pupils consistently access a curriculum that builds on their prior knowledge.
- Leaders' actions to improve the poor attendance of a small number of pupils are not swift enough. Persistent absence continues longer than it should. Leaders need to implement their attendance policy more quickly, so these pupils attend more regularly.
- Pupils with SEND do not consistently get the precise support they need. Leaders need to ensure that staff have the knowledge to support pupils with SEND well, particularly those with speech and language difficulties.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	113603
DfE registration number	878/6029
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10201947
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	205
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Rudolf Steiner School (South Devon) Limited
Chair	Rob Worthington
Headteacher	Jeff van Zyl
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,706 to £9,324
Telephone number	01803 897377
Website	www.southdevonsteinerschool.org
Email address	enquiries@sdsteiner.org
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 April 2019

Information about this school

- South Devon Steiner School was founded by a group of parents in 1980. The school's approach to education is based on the Rudolf Steiner philosophy.
- The school is based in a former manor house and other buildings on the same site approximately 3 miles north-west of Totnes, Devon.
- The school is exempt from completing the early years foundation stage profile at the end of the academic year when the child reaches the age of five.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school's previous standard inspection was in April 2019. It was judged to be inadequate. Since then, the school has had two progress monitoring inspections.

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.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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 the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education (PSHE). For each deep dive, inspectors met with senior leaders, subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with trustees to discuss the independent school standards and how they ensure that these are met in full. This evidence contributed towards part 8 of the independent school standards.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders responsible for supporting pupils' personal development, careers guidance and pupils' attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for part 3 of the independent school standards. Together, they considered policies, registers and key documents, such as checks and risk assessments.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader to consider the systems in place to keep pupils safe. He also checked the school's single central register and some personnel files. This evidence contributed towards part 4 of the independent school standards.

- The lead inspector met with the SENCo to determine how well the school supports pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors conducted a detailed tour of the site and premises to consider part 5 of the independent school standards.
- The lead inspector evaluated the school website, policies and specific documents to determine how well the school meets parts 6 and 7 of the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Nathan Kemp, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dale Burr

Her Majesty's Inspector

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