

The Steiner Academy Hereford

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135672
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	364401
Inspection dates	8–9 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Sue Frater HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	318
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Sylvie Sklan
Principal	Trevor Mepham
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. A total of 11 hours of teaching was observed with 23 lessons visited and 16 teachers seen. In addition, inspectors heard pupils reading and shadowed pupils with disabilities and with special educational needs in lessons. They also met with parents, groups of pupils, staff, governors and the School Improvement Partner. A range of the academy's work was observed. This included pupils' workbooks and documentation such as the academy's self-evaluation form and development plan. Documents relating to safeguarding practices and to the monitoring of teaching, pupils' attainment, behaviour and attendance, were checked. Inspectors also analysed questionnaires that were completed by 88 pupils, 40 teaching and support staff and 121 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The academy is much smaller than most schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average and none of the pupils are learning English as an additional language. A high proportion of pupils, about a third of the number on roll, have disabilities and/or special educational needs, although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below average. Their needs relate mainly to moderate and specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. More pupils than usual leave or join the academy at times other than at age five years.

The academy opened in 2008, when it gained specialist status in the natural environment. It is the first publicly-funded Steiner school in England. The Steiner curriculum involves lessons that follow a rhythmic pattern to meet the needs of the whole child, including academic, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The curriculum is based on an understanding of the relevance of the different phases of child development and sees artistic activity and the development of the imagination as integral to learning. Children from three to rising seven years of age are taught in kindergarten classes, with an emphasis on exploring the natural world through play. The academy has been granted exemptions from the teaching of phonics, reading, writing and information and communication technology in this Early Years Foundation Stage. After kindergarten, pupils are taught in Classes 1 to 10, which are the equivalent to National Curriculum Years 2 to 11. From ages seven to 14 years, pupils are taught mainly by a class teacher who usually remains with the class for the duration of this time. From ages 14 to 16 years, pupils are taught by a range of specialist teachers. The academy met the government's floor targets for academic performance in the last year, when it first introduced the equivalent of five GCSE examinations. The examinations include GCSEs in English language, English literature and mathematics, and a BTEC in ecology studies which is equivalent to two GCSE examinations.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement	3
Teaching	3
Leadership and management	3
Behaviour and safety	3
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

Key findings

- The academy is satisfactory and improving. This is due to the vision and clear direction provided by the Principal and Chair of the Governing Body. Since the academy opened, the Principal has been skilfully managing its change from an independent to a publicly-funded school. He is addressing successfully the challenge of retaining a Steiner education while meeting the requirements for a new academy.
- A special strength of the academy is pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their growing confidence and self-esteem.
- Academic achievement is satisfactory overall. Learning and progress in the kindergarten are outstanding. Attainment in English and mathematics at GCSE was above average in 2010. However, learning and progress vary across subjects and classes for ages seven to 16, depending on the quality of teaching.
- Pupils enjoy lessons that engage them in 'hands on' activities such as investigating, problem solving, and creative and imaginative responses. Not all lessons challenge them to think independently.
- Pupils feel safe at school and their behaviour is satisfactory overall. They behave well around the academy but some pupils disrupt a minority of lessons that do not engage their interests or meet their needs. In addition, teachers do not apply the academy's new behaviour management system consistently.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall. In lessons where teaching is good or outstanding, activities are matched well to the needs of all pupils, including more-able pupils and those with disabilities and special educational needs. This is not the case in all lessons. The marking of pupils' work includes encouraging comments but few 'next steps' to help pupils to know how to improve it.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Most of the improvements have been led very effectively by the Principal, ably supported by a small team of

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senior leaders. To increase the academy's capacity to improve further, a second tier of leaders has been appointed. Robust systems for self-evaluation are in place and identify the most important priorities for the academy's development. The information gathered from the range of monitoring procedures is not evaluated sufficiently to identify specifically which aspects of teaching and learning are in need of further improvement.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, and where leadership and management are no better than satisfactory, may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teaching engages and challenges pupils to make consistently good rates of progress, and reduce the number of lessons that are interrupted by low level disruption, by:
 - sharing the examples of existing good and outstanding practice in matching activities to the needs of all pupils, including more-able pupils and those with disabilities and special educational needs
 - providing increased opportunities for pupils between the ages of seven to 16 years to think for themselves and to apply independent learning skills such as investigating, researching, problem solving and creative and imaginative responses
 - informing pupils how to improve their work in all lessons
 - ensuring the behaviour management system is implemented consistently.
- Develop the monitoring and evaluation skills of leaders and managers at all levels to promote consistently good teaching and learning.

Main report**Achievement**

- Achievement is satisfactory and improving. Pupils' learning and rates of progress in the lessons and workbooks seen are satisfactory overall, although inconsistent across subjects and classes. Pupils say, and inspectors found, they make most progress in English and mathematics, particularly from age 14 upwards, because they are informed how to improve their work to reach their expected GCSE grades. They enjoy the more challenging work in these year groups. Pupils make less progress in lessons that are not adapted to their individual needs. For example, less-able Year 6 pupils find it difficult to understand the tasks that are set for the class in mathematics.
- Attainment overall in five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was above average in 2010. It was particularly strong in English. The academy's data indicate that current pupils also are on track to attain above average standards.
- The academy has developed robust procedures for measuring the levels of attainment of pupils at ages 11 and 14 in English and mathematics. They are comparable with National Curriculum levels. The academy has been granted

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permission, through its Funding Agreement, to offer the Steiner Curriculum in place of the National Curriculum. Consequently, National Curriculum measures of attainment at age 11 are well below the national average. Pupils' progress accelerates and, by age 14, the academy's data indicate that pupils' attainment compares well with the nationally expected levels in English and mathematics.

- When asked if they enjoy their learning, pupils say it depends on the classes and lessons. They enjoy lessons that engage them in 'hands on' activities as in games, eurythmy (the art of movement), Spanish, handwork and drama. They particularly enjoy the investigation and research aspects of the BTEC work. While these features of the academy's specialist subject are beginning to improve learning, not all lessons challenge pupils to think for themselves or engage them in developing independent learning skills such as investigation, research and problem solving. This impedes the engagement and progress of boys in particular, who attain less well than girls at GCSE. Much of the pupils' learning is through narrative. Consequently, their literacy skills are better developed than their numeracy skills.
- Learning and progress in the kindergarten are outstanding. This is due to the teachers' very effective observations and assessments which inform the next steps in learning for individual children. Through independent investigation, problem solving, and creative and imaginative play, children make especially good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the natural world, in their physical development, personal and social development and skills in speaking and listening. Children are immersed in the rhythm and rhyme of language, including verse, song, and stories, and this provides a firm foundation for learning to read. While their attainment in reading by the age of six years is well below the national expectation, as it is by age 11, pupils' attainment in GCSE English is above average.
- The learning and progress of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Individual support in reading and spelling enables the pupils to make good progress in these aspects. There is limited individual support for mathematics and progress in this subject is not as good as in English. Unlike in the kindergarten, lessons for ages seven to 16 are not all sufficiently adapted to meet individual needs, particularly for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and more-able pupils. Thus, learning and rates of progress vary for different groups of pupils.

Behaviour and safety

- The behaviour and safety of pupils are satisfactory. Behaviour around the academy is generally calm and orderly and, noticeably, pupils get on well with each other. Behaviour in lessons is variable and depends on the extent to which the teaching engages the pupils. A minority of lessons are interrupted by low level disruption. This is confirmed by the academy's own records over time and in discussion with the pupils. It is also evident in the questionnaires completed by pupils, staff, parents and carers.
- The academy has introduced a new policy to improve behaviour and there are good examples of where the procedures have supported individual pupils effectively. Very few pupils are excluded. However, the inconsistent application

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- of the policy by staff reduces its effect in lessons.
- Pupils are safe in school. Pupils say they feel safe and this is confirmed by the questionnaires that they and their parents and carers completed. The large majority of pupils agree that the academy deals well with any cases of bullying. A few parents and carers expressed concerns that bullying is not dealt with effectively. Inspectors found that the academy follows appropriate procedures. Pupils say they can turn to most, although not all, adults with any concerns and they are confident that any issues will be addressed appropriately. Pupils appreciate the fact that the staff know them well in this smaller than usual academy. They say they like the 'family' atmosphere.
 - The academy has worked hard to improve pupils' attendance, particularly in dissuading parents and carers from taking pupils on holiday during term time. Consequently, attendance has improved significantly and is now above average. Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.

Teaching

- Teaching is satisfactory and improving, although inconsistencies remain. In just over half the lessons observed the quality of teaching was good and, in the kindergarten, outstanding. In these lessons pupils made better than expected progress. Teaching was satisfactory in just under half the lessons observed and no inadequate teaching was seen. Parents praise the 'dedication' and 'enthusiasm' of the teaching staff.
- Key strengths in the quality of teaching include: positive relationships between teachers and pupils, good subject knowledge, effective planning for the extended main lesson of the day, and clear modelling of expectations. In lessons where teaching is good, there is a brisk pace of learning with pupils using a range of visual, auditory and practical skills. In the kindergarten, teachers work closely as a team to provide a wide range of opportunities to engage children in investigating, problem solving, and creative and imaginative play. As a result, children make rapid progress and develop as self-motivated, independent learners.
- Satisfactory lessons tend to be less well planned, with lengthy exposition by the teacher, and with all pupils working at the same pace on the same task. Much of the time is spent listening to the teacher with few opportunities for pupils to respond independently or for teaching assistants to support specific pupils. This slows the pace of learning and too often leads to pupils engaging in low-level disruption.
- The use of assessment to match activities to the range of children's needs is good in the kindergarten where teachers use aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. For ages seven to 14, teachers have only pupils' reading and spelling ages, and basic number test results, to guide them in pitching work at the right level of challenge. Insufficient strategies are provided to support them in addressing the needs of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Pupils' books are marked with encouraging comments but there are few pointers to the 'next steps' to help pupils to improve their work. This is not the case in GCSE classes where the examination criteria provide effective guidance. The completed questionnaires show that about a third of

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the pupils do not know how well they are doing at school, and a quarter of pupils do not agree that adults explain how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

- Leadership and management overall are satisfactory and promote satisfactory and improving outcomes for pupils. The introduction of a leadership structure is at a relatively early stage and represents a change from the previous collegiate structure. The improvements in the academy's work since its opening have been expertly led by the Principal, who is ably supported by the governing body, Vice-Principal, bursar and senior teacher. This includes the effective management of the health and safety of pupils during the building of the new school. All safeguarding requirements are met. The effective strategic planning group is aware of the need to increase capacity in the leadership team to sustain improvements in behaviour, teaching and learning. To this end, a 'middle' management group of phase coordinators has been appointed. Development of the monitoring and evaluation skills of the leadership team is at an early stage.
- The governing body and Principal have shared successfully their vision for an outstanding academy with the whole school community. Central to their aims is the inclusion of all the academy pupils in developing and learning through Steiner education. The emphasis on physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual development encourages pupils to value themselves and each other. In this, the academy promotes equality and tackles discrimination appropriately. The nurturing of self-esteem and confidence supports all pupils well, especially those with disabilities and special educational needs. However, there remain gaps in the academic achievement of different groups of pupils, for example boys and girls, and less and more able pupils.
- Senior leaders are bringing about improvements through robust procedures for self-evaluation and decisive action to address weaknesses in teaching. Procedures include lesson observations, staff appraisal, and analysis of pupils' academic performance, behaviour and attendance. Information gleaned from monitoring identifies the most important priorities for the academy development plan, mainly assessing pupils' progress and staff training. However, it is not evaluated sufficiently to inform specific actions to secure consistently good teaching and learning. Given the improvements made since the academy opened, the robust systems now in place, and the review of leadership and management, the academy has the capacity to improve further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Steiner Academy Hereford to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 121 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 318 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	84	74	27	22	3	2	0	0
Q2 My child feels safe at school	97	80	18	15	3	2	0	0
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	92	76	23	19	4	3	0	0
Q4 The school meets my child’s particular needs	95	79	18	15	4	3	0	0
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	91	75	24	20	2	2	1	1
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	91	75	25	21	1	1	1	1
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	62	51	48	40	6	5	1	1
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	51	42	51	42	13	11	1	1
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	59	49	40	33	7	6	4	3
Q10 The school helps me to support my child’s learning	79	65	35	29	5	4	0	0
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	77	64	33	27	6	5	2	2
Q12 The school is well led and managed	82	68	28	23	3	2	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The achievement of all pupils. ■ Behaviour and safety. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The effectiveness of leadership and management. <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Steiner Academy Hereford, Hereford, HR2 8DL

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your academy. The inspectors enjoyed seeing you at work and talking with you. The following is what we found.

- Your academy provides you with a satisfactory and improving education.
- A particular strength is your growing confidence and self-esteem.
- Your achievement is satisfactory overall. Your learning and progress in the kindergarten are outstanding. Your attainment in English and mathematics at GCSE is above the attainment of pupils in most schools. However, you told us and we agree, that your learning and progress vary, depending on the quality of teaching. We have asked the academy to ensure that your learning and progress are more consistently good across subjects and classes.
- You told us that you enjoy lessons that engage you in 'hands on' activities such as investigating, problem solving, and creative and imaginative tasks. Not all your lessons challenge you to think independently in these ways.
- Your behaviour is satisfactory and you feel safe in the academy. You and your parents told us and we agree, that you behave well around the academy but some of you disrupt lessons that do not engage your interest.
- Teaching varies and is satisfactory overall. You find some of your lessons too difficult or not challenging enough. We have asked the academy to ensure that all your lessons interest and engage you, and meet your needs. We have also asked the academy to ensure that all teachers help you to know how to improve your work and that they apply the behaviour slips consistently.
- The Principal and senior teachers are putting suitable systems in place to make your academy even better.

You can help by making sure you all behave in lessons. We hope you enjoy your wonderful new school building and we wish you success as you continue to develop and learn.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector

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