

The Steiner Academy Hereford

Much Dewchurch, Hereford, HR2 8DL

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good. Pupils achieve well throughout the school, reaching above the expected levels in English and mathematics and in the other subjects that they take in Year 11, despite their later start with the formal teaching of such subjects.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent because of the importance given to these within the school curriculum.
- The academy makes good use of the data it holds about pupils to monitor their progress and is swift to act if any are falling behind.
- Well-targeted individual support means that all pupils achieve well, including those with disabilities and with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium.
- Leadership and management have been strengthened considerably since the last inspection. Achievement is now good because leaders, including the governing body, know the academy well and have focused on exactly the right priorities.
- Teachers' performance is now managed well. Teachers are held accountable for pupil progress. Teaching has improved and is now good overall and achievement is improving throughout the school as a result.
- Behaviour is good overall and sometimes excellent in lessons. Pupils have a strong sense of personal responsibility, and they and their parents say they are kept very safe and nurtured in the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough of the teaching is outstanding. Sometimes teachers do not plan work that challenges and interests all learners in all parts of lessons so that they stay on-task throughout.
- Not all teachers follow the school's behaviour code consistently or deal with isolated instances of low level disruption effectively.
- Attendance is low and a few parents keep their children off school too readily.
- Although most pupils who arrive later in their education at the academy settle quickly, a few take longer to do so. The academy needs to do more to help these pupils feel included more quickly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons and made short visits to other lessons. Over half of these were observed jointly with members of the academy’s leadership team.
- They took account of 139 responses to the on-line Parent View survey, as well as written communications from parents and discussions with individual parents. They talked with two groups of pupils as well as with individual pupils during their lessons.
- Inspectors heard pupils read, talked with them about their work and scrutinised the work in pupils’ books. Students in Year 11, Year 9 and Year 5 were out of school on residential visits during the inspection. Inspectors took account of information held about their progress and of their work in books and about the school.
- Inspectors took account of 18 staff questionnaires. They held discussions with members of the academy’s leadership team, their learning support team and governing body, as well as a representative of the academy’s sponsoring body.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including documents relating to students’ attainment and progress, child protection and safeguarding, the academy’s curriculum, the management of teachers’ performance and the academy’s development planning.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Hughes

Additional Inspector

Kathy Hooper

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Steiner Academy opened in 2008 and was the first publicly-funded Steiner school in England. It is a smaller-than-average-sized school and caters for pupils aged 3 to 16 years. Children within the Early Years Foundation Stage and those within Year 1 are educated in the academy's kindergarten. From ages 7 to approximately 14 years they are taught mainly by the same class teacher, from age 14 to 16 they are taught by a range of specialist teachers.
- The academy follows the Steiner curriculum and approach, focusing on the needs of the whole child, including their emotional, social, spiritual and academic needs. Programmes for each age group take account of the different phases of child development but all emphasise the importance of creativity, physical activity and imagination. Children in the kindergarten follow a programme based on play and the exploration of the natural world. Literacy and mathematical skills are not formally developed until after the age of seven.
- The pupils come from a range of backgrounds but the large majority are White British. The proportions that come from minority ethnic backgrounds are low. Since opening as an academy an increasing proportion have joined the school later in their education. This is particularly so in Years 6 to 11.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is below that found nationally. This is additional funding provided by the government to meet the needs of pupils in the care of the local authority, who are eligible for free school meals or with a parent in the armed forces. The school receives funding for 'catch-up' classes in Year 7. It does not enter pupils for GCSE early or use alternative provision to educate pupils off-site.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is high. The proportion supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational need is below that found nationally.
- The academy has a number of agreed exemptions. It is not required to deliver the National Curriculum programmes of study. It is exempted from the learning and development goals and the assessments linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage. This means the learning and development of these children is not reported on in this inspection report. It is not required to carry out the Year 1 phonics check or to carry out the Year 2 teacher assessments. It is also not required to teach the programmes linked to the end of Key Stage 2 assessments.
- Although the academy does carry out the Key Stage 2 assessments, large numbers of parents have not permitted their children to take these and so data available about pupils' achievements at the end of Key Stage 2 is based on teacher assessment.
- There has been major restructuring of the academy's leadership team and teacher responsibilities over the past year, with a new Principal and a Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator, an Upper School Lead and a Lower School Lead being appointed.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which are the minimum standards set for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan work that takes account of pupils' current achievements so that it is neither too easy nor too hard in any part of the lesson
 - all teachers apply the school's behaviour policies consistently so that where pupils engage in

low level disruption this is dealt with very quickly and pupils are clear that it is unacceptable
– marking makes clear to pupils what is good about their work and how they might improve it.

- Improve attendance so that it is at least as good as the national average.
- Develop further the systems used to ensure pupils who join the academy late settle quickly into its routines and feel part of the academy's community.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is good over time and sometimes better than this because, despite their late start in English and mathematics, pupils have almost caught up with others of their age by the end of Year 6. Almost all Year 11 students achieved 5 GCSE A*-C in 2012 and many at the higher levels. They achieve particularly well in their BTEC environmental science course, which is the equivalent of two GCSEs.
- Older students develop strong independent working and thinking skills as a result of the project work they are encouraged to undertake, and these mean they are well set up for the next steps of their education. The academy's records show students go on to successfully study and achieve wide ranging qualifications at GCSE A level and beyond, often in subjects not previously studied at the school.
- Pupils in Year 1 are well prepared for more formal learning in Year 2 because of the emphasis in the kindergarten on social skills, communication and language and on nurturing curiosity and imagination. They enjoy listening to the stories their teachers tell them and develop good physical skills that help them to quickly pick up handwriting and other skills. They make and create a range of items of which they are immensely proud, explaining in detail how to finger knit or how to 'whittle and smooth' the handles of their skipping rope.
- Pupils in Year 2 take great pride in their emerging writing and mathematics skills, presenting their number problems in colourful ways and carefully forming their letters and numbers. Although a few read simple words and phrases and can manage number problems such as 'double 16', the later start means generally pupils' levels of reading and writing and number skills are behind others of their age at this point.
- By the end of Year 6 most pupils have caught up with others of their age in English and mathematics. This represents good and sometimes better progress from their starting points. Pupils have excellent attitudes towards their reading, which they thoroughly enjoy whatever the level they are at.
- Pupil's artistic and practical achievements are impressive and are reflected in older students' high grades in their GCSE work and their excellent singing and drama work.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium make good progress from their starting points, attaining at least similar results in all of the subjects studied at the school. There is no gap between them and other pupils in the school in either English or mathematics. The catch-up funding is used well to provide extra adult support which helps pupils with lower achievements make more rapid progress.
- Pupils who have disabilities and those who have special educational needs also make good and sometimes outstanding progress, because the academy's learning support department is well trained and individual support well targeted.
- The academy maintains a detailed database about pupils' achievements in reading, number work and in practical skills. These show them to make well over a year's progress each year between Years 5 to 11. This is reflected in the confidence with which they write and read a range of materials, and in the way younger pupils attempt and sound out difficult words and apply their mathematical skills in their craft lessons.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers know almost all of their pupils very well indeed because they progress through the school with them from Year 2 until Year 9. This means teachers in most lessons are careful to plan activities that involve all pupils and that challenge them to extend their thinking and learning further.
- Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and are skilled at enabling them to express their ideas and to share these and improve them together. This means that older students' work reflects this creativity and independence of thought and prepares the way well for their GCSE work.
- Strengths of teaching often include the ways in which teachers probe and check for students' understanding so that they can quickly adjust and add further challenge or slow down the pace slightly where pupils need more time to think about a topic. Occasionally the pace is too slow for higher attainers, because not all teachers have planned work that allows each pupil to progress as quickly as they could. For example, in one mathematics lesson, the higher attainers could already 'double' the easier numbers but still had to write them down, whilst lower attainers were finding the work a real challenge.
- The quality of discussion in all classes is particularly a strength, seen for example, when a small group of Year 10 students discussed the advantages of being able to 'see' auras, when discussing different religious beliefs, or when Year 6 pupils compared the characters of Charlemagne and Alfred the Great. Teachers skilfully used examples and questioning to help pupils develop their ideas and deepen understanding further.
- Occasionally in the longer lessons, pupils do not stay on task throughout and become restless, and a few teachers are not quick to pick up on this despite the need to do so being clear in the school's behaviour policy. In these lessons the teaching requires improvement because not all the time for learning is used well.
- Some excellent examples of marking were seen in books, but not all teachers yet use marking consistently to help pupils to understand what is good about their work and what they need to think about next in order to achieve even more.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils develop a very high degree of regard for others and of self-awareness as they progress through the school. Children in Kindergarten, for example are inquisitive and very positive about their learning, showing much spontaneity. They play well together, building up role plays and making things together.
- All welfare and safety requirements are met for children within the Early Years Foundation Stage and children here benefit from the consistently safe and nurturing environment they experience.
- Older pupils look after each other and have great empathy for others' points of view. They listen carefully to each other as 'desk partners', offering constructive suggestions as to how ideas or work might be improved.
- Most pupils who enrol in the school later than Kindergarten settle in very quickly and are happy in the school. A very few however say that they still feel 'a little bit' outside and wish the school could help them to feel 'more at home more quickly'.

- Pupils say that behaviour is good and that bullying is extremely rare. If it were to happen then they are confident that it would be handled very well by staff. They feel staff keep them very safe and help them also to take personal responsibility. They have a very good understanding of different forms of bullying and of the different risks involved, including those linked to social networking and cyber bullying.
- Almost all pupils behave well and often better in lessons and around the school. However occasionally in lessons where the pace of the lesson is not as well-judged to meet their needs, a few become restless and staff do not always deal with this as quickly as they should.
- Attendance is low, although it has improved recently. However the academy has identified the need to work with parents who too readily keep their child at home, so that they understand the impact this has on their child's learning.
- Pupils are happy and have a great enjoyment of learning. This is clear in all of their lessons but particularly in their themed main lessons, music and singing and craft and movement activities which make a huge contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The leadership and management are good

- The newly restructured leadership and management team is very ably led by the Principal and the teaching and learning co-ordinator. It has brought a rigour into the way the academy now checks on teachers' performance and pupil progress and ensures pupils are achieving as much as they could.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is also good; leaders here ensure that children have firm foundations for their later learning and, in particular, that their language, physical and social skills and their knowledge of the world are developed well.
- Not all of the measures the academy has put into place have yet had their full impact. For example whole school planning, behaviour and marking policies are relatively recent and are not yet consistently applied to best effect by all teachers.
- The leadership has maintained a careful balance between the Steiner vision's principles and practices and meeting its duties as a state school. Leaders now hold accurate and comparable data as to how well pupils are doing and can demonstrate this readily, although the lack of Key Stage 2 standardised assessment task data means they have had to work hard to moderate this.
- The pupil premium funding, catch-up funding and the available support for pupils who have disabilities and special educational needs has been targeted well on individual support and additional visits and experiences. There is clear evidence that these pupils make at least as much progress as others from their different starting points and that many catch up because of this.
- The curriculum has been broadened and will be extended further next year as the leadership makes new GCSEs and further qualifications available, including for lower attainers. There is an excellent emphasis on key skills, ensuring students leave with high achievements in literacy and numeracy, but also in broader scientific, creative and thinking skills and in their personal development.
- The new systems of managing teachers' performance have excited teachers who are keen to know how they can improve, to share good practice and to help pupils learn even more. Leaders

have addressed teaching that was poorer at the last inspection and teaching is now good and improving as teachers' understanding of pupils' achievement levels deepens.

- The academy works extremely well with parents who have often deliberately chosen this approach to their child's learning and are strong advocates for it. However a few do not support the academy by sending their child to school every day, even though they are not unwell. A very few families of newer pupils say that they feel their children, and indeed they themselves, could be helped by the school to settle in even more quickly when they first arrive.
- The academy sponsor provides good support and advice both in terms of the Steiner vision but also to improve teaching, learning and achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are hugely committed to the academy and have challenged the leadership very well to ensure that it meets its duties and that teaching continues to improve.
- They are very clear as to their responsibilities and have ensured that all safeguarding and child protection requirements are met, but also that the academy continues to deliver its Steiner vision alongside its requirements as a state sector school.
- Governors have had to take some hard financial decisions to ensure that the academy is on a secure financial footing. They have managed to do this whilst still helping the academy to improve so that is now a good and indeed improving school. Governors monitor all funding appropriately, including that for the pupil premium.
- They have recruited a very strong leadership team that has clear capacity to take the school forward even more. They challenge the leadership well to demonstrate how the Academy's results are improving and to manage teachers' performance effectively. Governors know where teaching is strong or needs improvement and what is being done to bring this about.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135672
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	406622

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non maintained
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sylvie Sklan
Headteacher	Steve Cox
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2011
Telephone number	01981 540221
Fax number	01981 541237
Email address	info@steineracademyhereford.eu

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