

Inspection of Brighton Waldorf School

Roedean Road, Brighton BN2 5RA

Inspection dates: 29 June to 1 July 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

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love school, finding it calm, supportive and nurturing. You are never far from stunning artwork or the sound of music. Pupils develop strong personal qualities and value the rich range of learning, from botany to woodwork. They behave well.

This school values individuality. One pupil spoke of being 'able to let my guard down and be me'.

The ethos and daily rhythm of school life help those with previously developed anxieties about attending school, or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to settle and grow in confidence.

Pupils like the relaxed, unpressured atmosphere. They are emphatic that they feel safe and free from bullying. A mark of the school's success in this area is that most pupils are not even aware of the quick and effective action the school takes in response to rare issues.

Teachers are helping lower-school pupils achieve more in literacy and numeracy than those who have gone before. However, the quality of education is not strong enough to ensure that all pupils do as well as they could academically. Although rising, academic expectations are not consistently high enough for pupils as they move to the end of kindergarten, through lower, and into middle school.

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

Leaders and staff have taken important steps to improve the school, but there is more to do to secure a good quality of education. Their efforts since the previous inspection have undoubtedly been hampered by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Pupils, and parents and carers, praise the school's success in transferring schooling online during national and local restrictions. Staff report that leaders are mindful of their workload and the toll this has taken.

There are some notable successes. Leaders have successfully improved pupils' behaviour and attitudes during this unsettling period. The kindergarten and promotion of pupils' personal development are also strengths of the school. However, important leadership and management systems and structures to support the school to improve further are not as strong as they should be. Current school improvement plans are not detailed enough to be as helpful a tool as they could be. Strengthening subject leadership is an important priority that is rightly identified by leaders.

Leaders have done much work to set out clearly what pupils should learn and when across subjects. Elements distinctive to the Waldorf curriculum add breadth. However, sometimes subject plans, particularly in the lower school, are either not ambitious enough, or not executed well enough, to ensure that pupils achieve parity with the national curriculum by the age of 11.

Teachers encourage a love of reading, including stories, poetry and non-fiction. The school introduces pupils to a diverse range. Older pupils read challenging texts fluently and recall their favourite books and genres.

The school now begins teaching pupils to read at a younger age than it has in the past. They have introduced a phonics programme and have begun to increase staff expertise. However, the quality of phonics provision and assessment is not high enough to ensure that all pupils learn to read well as quickly as they could. Staff are not fully confident and adept in all aspects of the phonics programme. Their assessment of the sounds pupils know and retain is not precise enough. This means that additional support for pupils who need help to either keep up or catch up with their peers is not sufficiently well targeted. Although the phonics scheme includes reading books, pupils who have fallen behind their classmates are not given the right books to practise the sounds they need to secure next.

Teachers do not share a common understanding of effective and manageable ways to assess pupils' learning. Teachers take various approaches. They use a range of strategies to encourage pupils to retain important knowledge. However, sometimes they place too much emphasis on making an experience memorable without focusing enough on what the important learning points are for pupils to remember.

Children in kindergarten flourish socially and emotionally. Adults skilfully create and sustain the ethos and approach to early years education they believe in. Well-established routines within this nurturing environment contribute well to developing children's confidence and readiness to learn. During ring time, children carefully follow the precise movements and sing with tuneful gusto. Adults introduce children verbally to a rich and growing range of vocabulary.

Pupils learn the value of leading healthy lifestyles. They grow and cook their own healthy and nutritious food and exercise regularly. The school encourages personal expression, for example through art, music, drama and sport. Pupils are introduced to a diverse range of cultures, and they have ample opportunity to develop individual talents and interests. Older pupils are articulate, reflective, and great ambassadors for their school.

In lessons and around the school, pupils are courteous and happy. They have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils have a sound understanding of internet safety. They described how they have learned a lot about this recently, particularly as school moved online for a period.

Ensuring pupils with SEND are able to thrive is a high priority and area of success. The overarching approach to identifying, assessing and supporting pupils with SEND is systematic and effective. Leaders understandably prioritised training for staff in phonics and safeguarding. Staff have had limited training in how best to support pupils with specific SEND in class.

Recent trustee appointments have brought new knowledge and experience regarding effective governance. A system of regular meetings and reporting from school leaders provides helpful strategies to support trustees and leaders to make important strategic decisions. However, partly impacted by the pandemic, these helpful foundations have not yet developed into established and fully effective leadership, management and governance. Quality assurance systems are not robust enough to give leaders and trustees a complete picture of how well, how consistently, or how far intended improvements have actually been realised.

After leaders were prompted to take some limited action during the inspection, all of the independent school standards and associated requirements have been met, including in early years. Leaders have taken appropriate steps to improve accessibility in line with the school's three-year plan. The school's safeguarding policy is thorough and detailed. It is published on the school's website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff take prompt and appropriate action in relation to safeguarding issues. The designated safeguarding lead is proactive in consulting with local safeguarding partners and referring more serious concerns on for more support. Leaders and staff notice, record and act on a range of matters relating to pupils' well-being. This developing overview ensures that minor indicators of concern are not overlooked and that opportunities to intervene or offer support are taken. Staff are alert and responsive to increased vulnerabilities linked with the pandemic.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school has introduced a new phonics programme and approach which are benefiting some pupils. However, teachers are not sufficiently skilled in the use of the programme to ensure that all pupils not covered by exemption learn to read in a timely manner. Assessments of pupils' developing reading ability do not focus sharply enough on which sounds pupils have learned and retained. Some pupils are given reading books that are too difficult for them and do not offer focused opportunities to practise the sounds they need to master next. Leaders should continue to develop staff expertise in the teaching and assessment of phonics and ensure that books precisely match pupils' current phonics stages in order to prevent unnecessary delays in pupils learning to read.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have evolved the curriculum, seeking greater parity with the ambition of the national curriculum, without losing the school's distinctive ethos and approach. Leaders' work is resulting in increasingly coherent subject plans aimed at teaching pupils relevant subject content in a logical and coherent way. This work is not complete, and leaders rightly continue to refine it. Also, existing plans are not consistently followed as leaders intend in

content and/or depth across classes, to ensure pupils achieve as well as they should. Leaders should continue their current work to crystallise exactly what they intend pupils to learn and when across subjects in a logical and coherent sequence. They should also ensure that these intentions are shared by teachers and implemented effectively in order to improve pupils' learning.

- Teachers are willing and keen to improve the quality of education, but sometimes lack confidence regarding new education approaches advocated by leaders. There is not a consensus about the purpose of assessment and the best or most helpful ways of assessing pupils. Teachers do not share a common understanding of how to help pupils remember important content across the curriculum. Leaders should further develop staff competence and confidence in teaching all parts of the new curriculum so that this is successfully brought to fruition across the school and bears the fruit intended.
- Notwithstanding the important improvements leaders have secured during an extremely challenging period, weaknesses in leadership and management capacity and processes are a potential barrier to further timely improvement. Leaders themselves have identified a need for greater capacity in terms of subject expertise and leadership. Trustees understand the principles of effective governance, but are yet to establish fully effective governance and accountability systems. Important improvement plans and quality assurance systems have remained undeveloped in the face of competing demands on leaders' attention and energy. The proprietor should ensure that suitable leadership and management systems and structures are in place to assure a good or better quality of education for pupils.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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	114661
DfE registration number	846/6016
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10193096
Type of school	Waldorf (Steiner) School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	149
Number of part-time pupils	20
Proprietor	Brighton Waldorf School Ltd Council of Trustees
Chair	Thais Bishop
Headteacher	Damian Moonicie
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,600 to £8,550
Telephone number	01273 386 300
Website	www.brightonwaldorfschool.org
Email address	enquiries@brightonwaldorfschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	5 to 7 March 2019

Information about this school

- Brighton Waldorf School adheres to the International Waldorf Steiner curriculum developed by the Austrian philosopher Dr Rudolf Steiner.
- The school is exempt from some aspects of the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage. This applies to the younger children within the school's kindergarten. Children may attend the kindergarten from the age of two.
- Some children in the kindergarten attend part time. Some older pupils also attend part time on a 'flexi-schooling' arrangement. Parents who have decided to electively home educate their children for part of the week can apply to the school for this provision.
- The school provides a breakfast and after-school club. It also runs sessions for parents and younger children to attend together.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The school's previous full standard inspection took place in March 2019. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection was conducted on 18 September 2019.
- The school has a 'school director' rather than a headteacher. In keeping with Steiner tradition, there is also a 'college of teachers'.

Information about this inspection

We 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 had conversations with the school director, and the teaching and learning lead, throughout the inspection. Inspectors also met with the chair of the college of teachers, other leaders, staff, pupils and trustees. One inspector listened to pupils read to familiar adults and one inspector joined kindergarten children on their daily walk.
- To understand the quality of education provided by the school, inspectors looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). They did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHE and geography. To explore each subject, inspectors spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils, and examined curriculum plans for the

subject. They also looked at pupils' work and visited lessons related to these subjects.

- Inspectors took account of the views expressed in 26 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There were no returns from pupils or staff, although inspectors spoke with a wide range of both during the inspection.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors considered evidence about the school's compliance with the independent school standards. They also scrutinised the school's arrangements for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Gordon

Ofsted Inspector

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