

Inspection of London Steiner School

9 Weir Road, Balham, London SW12 0LT

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 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 are inquisitive and enjoy learning a broad range of subjects. However, there is not enough effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), or for those who fall behind in reading.

Pupils and adults alike get on well with each other. They and their parents and carers describe the school as one big family. Pupils feel safe and secure. They know that if bullying should occur, staff will deal with it quickly. From the time children enter the early years kindergarten, staff teach them to be kind and respectful. Pupils give a warm welcome to new pupils who join the school and to visitors. They behave well throughout the school day.

Pupils value the fact that everybody is and feels included. They learn about people's differences. For example, pupils did research on famous athletes, including those with disabilities and transgender sportspeople.

Staff organise many enrichment activities. These make a strong contribution to promoting pupils' personal development. Staff have planned an ambitious teaching programme to cover the statutory requirements of personal, social and health education (PSHE), and the new relationships and sex education (RSE). However, teaching staff sometimes omit these aspects of the curriculum. Leaders have not held teachers to account on this.

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

The proprietors made sure that staff addressed all the unmet standards identified at the previous full inspection and subsequent monitoring inspections. All standards are now met. Leaders have also made some improvements to the curriculum.

The school's ethos is to prioritise the development of pupils' language and communication skills. From the start of the early years, adults support children to develop a love for reading by regaling them with stories every day. Children learn lots of poetry, which they recite by heart. Staff encourage pupils to read at home.

Staff leave the formal teaching of reading until after the kindergarten, when pupils start Year 2. Leaders have introduced a phonics scheme into the lower school curriculum. The aim is to improve the standards of reading. There are, however, limited opportunities for pupils to practise reading texts that match the sounds they know. Most pupils become fluent readers around the time they start Year 4. Weaker readers do not receive effective support. This is because most staff have not undertaken specific training in the teaching of phonics. They do not have the skills to help weaker readers to catch up effectively.

Leaders and staff show strong fidelity to the Steiner curriculum. The school's curriculum meets the requirements of the independent school standards. The

curriculum offers pupils a wide range of subjects and enrichment activities. Subject plans are well-sequenced. Teachers have the necessary knowledge and training to teach most of the curriculum effectively. In the early years, staff prepare children well for their future learning. For example, children learn about plants, and they practise gardening. This serves as a secure stepping stone to their later study of botany.

Teachers assess pupils' work regularly. They use this to identify and address any pupils' misconceptions. The curriculum helps pupils to build on prior knowledge and make links between different subjects. They develop a secure understanding of how their learning relates to contemporary and historical life.

By Year 6, the school's curriculum aligns with the content and ambition of the national curriculum in writing, mathematics, science and German. For example, pupils use sophisticated vocabulary in extended pieces of imaginative writing.

Owing to staff changes, reviews of the needs of pupils with SEND have not taken place. Teachers and support staff do not have updated guidance and training on how to deliver bespoke support for pupils with SEND. This means that these pupils do not routinely receive the help they need.

Pupils move on to secondary school successfully. Parents of older children who previously attended this school spoke positively about the transfer to secondary school. They typically said that their children were well prepared for learning at secondary school.

Pupils pay close attention in class. In general, low-level disruption is infrequent. Pupils take pride in their work. Their handwriting is exceptionally well-formed and neat. Children in the early years share resources and play well with their classmates.

Singing is a strong feature of daily school life. Pupils sing songs in English, German and Hebrew. Pupils are taught to consider moral issues. For example, pupils researched and then presented their arguments on whether it is more important to build social housing or to protect the environment on a piece of green land in a built-up urban area. Pupils raise money to support charities, such as those that support cancer sufferers. They collect food items and deliver them to a local hostel for homeless people. Older pupils spent a day visiting all the businesses in the neighbouring industrial estate. They learned about a range of industries and potential careers they can pursue in the future.

The proprietors consider the welfare of staff. They have made changes to reduce staff workload. Staff work together closely. They look out for each other's welfare.

Staff do not systematically put plans into action. They have ambitious plans for teaching the statutory requirements for PSHE and the new RSE programme. However, delivery is uneven. Individual teachers decide if and when they want to teach some subject content. They do not routinely follow the agreed plans. During the inspection, some staff had not completed the latest safeguarding training.

Leaders had not checked that all staff had done this training. By the end of the inspection, all staff had completed the required training. These inconsistencies occur because there are no clear lines of leadership and accountability.

Parents are very positive about the school. They highlighted how well the staff nurture their children's emotional welfare and creativity. Parents also appreciate the strong communication and ongoing dialogue they have with staff.

The proprietors ensure that they maintain the premises to a good standard. They are diligent in complying with health and safety requirements. Their accessibility plan complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

In this small school, staff know all pupils and parents well. Staff share important information about pupils. They report promptly to the safeguarding leaders any changes in pupils' behaviour or other concerns they may have. Safeguarding leaders have established links with external agencies and make referrals when needed.

Pupils learn about risks and how to avoid danger. Curriculum plans show staff's intention to teach pupils about healthy relationships later this year.

At the start of the inspection, the safeguarding policy was not available on the school website. It was uploaded during the inspection, and it conforms with current statutory guidance.

Information for the school and proprietor

- Few teachers have the expertise to teach phonics. Pupils who fall behind in their reading or who struggle to decode do not always receive effective support. This means that they do not catch up as quickly as they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff are trained to teach phonics. This will help them to support all pupils in learning to read fluently as quickly as possible.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is not strong. This means that pupils with SEND who need extra help do not routinely get the right support. They cannot benefit fully from the school's curriculum. Leaders should ensure that they review the specific needs of pupils with SEND and train staff in adapting the curriculum to meet all pupils' needs.
- Not all staff fulfil their roles and commitments well. They are not held to account by leaders for failing to do so. This includes the delivery of the planned PSHE and RSE programmes. Trustees should review the leadership and management structure of the school. They should ensure that everyone is clear about what is expected of them, and that they are held to account for the delivery of their responsibilities.

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	101073
DfE registration number	208/6344
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	10204288
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Proprietor	The Waldorf School of South West London Ltd
Chair	Sue Peat
Headteacher	None
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,000 to £9,600
Telephone number	020 3417 3190
Website	www.londonsteinerschool.org
Email address	office@londonsteinerschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	27 to 29 November 2018

Information about this school

- London Steiner School provides Steiner-based education for boys and girls aged three to 14. The school is located in a residential area of Balham, London SW12. The school has an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The kindergarten provides early years education for children in the Nursery and Reception Years. Pupils in Year 1 are also taught in the kindergarten. Pupils enter the lower school in Year 2 (class 1) and leave on completion of Year 9 (class 8).
- Since the previous standard inspection, there have been several changes. These include:
 - a drop in the number on roll from 78 to 47
 - a reduction in the number of teachers
 - a change in the age range of pupils, which is currently three to 11
 - the amalgamation of lower school classes into three classes of two-year age groups each
 - the appointment of a new chair of the trustees in July 2021.
- The school has no headteacher. The 'college of teachers' provides oversight of pupils' learning. The work of the college is overseen by the trustees.
- The school's previous full standard inspection was in November 2018. Subsequently, monitoring inspections took place on 4 July 2019, 21 January 2020 and 10 February 2021.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

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 did deep dives in these subjects: reading, German, PSHE and RSE. These involved discussions with leaders and teachers, visits to lessons, looking at examples of pupils' work and discussions with pupils. Inspectors also considered other subjects as part of the inspection.

- Inspectors spoke with the chair of trustees, the curriculum leader, the leader for safeguarding and health and safety, the deputy safeguarding leader and the teacher of German.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding and the checks carried out prior to the appointment of staff. Inspectors also looked at records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors took account of written responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They spoke with parents, including in the playground, and considered correspondence sent to the school for the attention of inspectors. There were no responses to the staff's and pupils' surveys.
- Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentary information to check on the statutory requirements of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Nick Hitchen

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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