

Inspection of Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

1 Douglas Avenue, Exmouth, Devon EX8 2AU

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education is a place of inspiration for the pupils who attend. Pupils have often had negative experiences of education and engagement in the world around them prior to attending. One pupil described the school as 'paradise'. Others agree, saying that they are in a place where they can communicate, feel heard and feel visible. Pupils value the incredibly strong relationships with adults.

Leaders prioritise pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Adults are aspirational role models, whether they are hearing or deaf members of staff. They encourage pupils towards independence and active participation in society. Staff are well informed about what successful inclusion should be for a deaf young person. Pupils are fully accepting of the diverse needs of their peers. They are encouraged to extend this to diversity and cultural awareness in a much wider sense.

Everyone has high expectations of behaviour. Pupils respond exceptionally well to these. Pupils are highly respectful of the support that staff put in place when they experience challenge. Pupils trust adults and feel safe. There is a culture of openness and sharing around concerns and worries. Pupils do not have any concerns about bullying.

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

Leaders and staff are highly ambitious for all pupils. Leaders have made significant changes that have had a positive impact. These include a leadership restructure and appointments to the staff that have increased the balance of expertise and knowledge to meet the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) that pupils have. This also supports the progression towards a bespoke and aspirational curriculum. This curriculum development is building on the improvement work that has been ongoing over recent years.

The use of curriculum pathways and a focus on British Sign Language (BSL) and deaf studies mean pupils are in a place where they can learn with much greater success. This work is not yet fully established as a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum across all subject areas. However, where leaders have focused their work, there is a clear impact on how well pupils learn.

BSL and deaf studies is the fundamental part of all pupils' learning. It enables them to fully access the rest of their education. It is through BSL and deaf studies that pupils learn to communicate and become aware of themselves as learners and deaf individuals. Through a multilayered approach by skilled members of staff, pupils learn English as an additional language to BSL. The development of phonics (with the use of visual phonics by hand) gives pupils the skills they need to read and write in English. This enables them to learn in other subjects because they can read, comprehend and record their learning in English, as well as use BSL.

Pupils who need a focus on early communication get the precise support they need. Leaders use education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform individualised targets towards ambitious outcomes. Joint working with the therapy team ensures that learning and achievements beyond the academic are well provided for. Leaders check this work to ensure it is of a high quality and meets the needs of the pupils. Leaders are proactive in their work to strengthen the provision for all pupils. They make effective use of the information contained in EHC plans to inform future development and training needs. As a result, staff are enhancing their knowledge and expertise to meet the increasingly complex needs of the pupils in the school and college.

Leaders have designed areas in school to support a total communication way of learning and interacting. Pupils make use of these areas to enjoy books, socialise and support themselves and each other to stay regulated. This epitomises the nurture, tolerance and respect that pupils, some of whom can demonstrate some high-risk behaviour, have for each other and the staff.

Many of the students in the college start post-16. They follow one of three pathways to support their preparation for adulthood. Leaders build flexibility into the pathways. This makes sure that there is ambition for students' outcomes as they prepare for their next steps. Students take part in work experience and employer encounters with a network of accessible employers established by leaders.

The governors and trustees share the ambition of school leaders. They know the strengths of the school and know where aspects need to develop further. Staff feel very well supported. They say that leaders are respectful of workload in this period of change. Staff describe a shared commitment and determination in helping pupils achieve the best possible outcomes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know and understand the procedures for keeping pupils safe. Systems for recording and reporting concerns are robust. Leaders check that records of concerns are accurate and reported in a timely manner. They check that actions make the required impact, and challenge this where appropriate. The welfare team works with external agencies to provide the right support for pupils and their families. Safer recruitment processes are well established. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff.

Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe and being risk aware. Leaders prioritise aspects of this to address the increased vulnerabilities, such as relationship education and behaviour when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Although leaders have now ensured a balance between subject expertise and SEND knowledge in the development of the curriculum, there is still work to be done to embed this to help pupils learn and remember more over time. Leaders need to ensure that the work started in core subject areas, such as English and mathematics, continues to strengthen and that the wider curriculum is fully established in line with this.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113654
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10241229
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tony Alexander
Principal	Sylvan Dewing
Website	www.thedeafacademy.ac.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education is a non-maintained special school for moderately, severely and profoundly deaf pupils. Pupils also have a range of additional special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The majority of pupils are learning English as an additional language. Many have delayed use of their first language, BSL.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The youngest pupil currently on roll is in Year 4.
- The school has moved to a purpose-built campus since the previous inspection.
- There have been significant staffing changes, including a leadership restructure.
- Pupil numbers have increased, along with the complexities of pupils' needs.

- The majority of pupils are residential pupils for at least some of their week at school.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the assistant principals, other senior leaders and a representative from the local authority. In addition, an inspector met with members of the governing body and board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication, English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector also looked at the BSL and deaf studies curriculum.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors were, at times, accompanied by independent BSL interpreters.
- Inspectors met the designated safeguarding lead and welfare team, checked the single central record of adults working in the school and looked at safeguarding records.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class, around school and at breaktimes, and held discussions with leaders about pupils' wider development.
- Inspectors gathered parents' views by considering responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and by talking to parents before school. They also evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

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