

Inspection of Bristol Steiner School

Redland Hill House, Redland Hill, Bristol, BS6 6UX

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 June 2023

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

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including those who join the school mid-year, settle quickly because staff provide effective pastoral support. Pupils are happy and safe. They are proud to attend. They enjoy the specialist curriculum on offer. A highlight for many pupils is eurhythm, which is an art of expression, involving stylized movement in response to music. They say it develops their coordination, physical and mental fitness and inner confidence. There is a strong family feel at this small, inclusive school. For example, older pupils enjoy reading Spanish books to younger children.

Pupils enjoy drawing, weaving, woodwork, forest school and extra-curricular activities such as chess club. Often, staff move up the school with pupils, and this allows pupils and staff to sustain relationships over time. When pupils fall out, staff help them resolve any disagreements well.

In the main school, pupils usually learn a broad range of subjects. However, over time, some pupils have not learned everything they should have. Some gaps in pupils' knowledge persist. In the kindergarten, many children enjoy the regular daily rhythm, with a blend of child-led and teacher-led activities. However, the experiences children have in kindergarten vary in quality.

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

The proprietor, headteacher and other school leaders have a sharp understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In recent times, they have needed to resolve a number of complicated issues relating to the school's operational systems, staffing and curriculum. Leaders are working with success to bring about steady school-wide improvement. The proprietor has ensured that many new school policies are in place. Leaders' higher expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic achievements are being made explicit. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the minimum requirements set out in the independent school standards.

Leaders have undertaken significant work to revamp the curriculum. Consequently, the curriculum now sets out what pupils must learn, and when they should learn it, across 'main lesson' sequences of work and all other subjects and areas of learning. Staff's implementation of a whole-school assessment system is beginning to pay off. Pupils learn Spanish very well because the staff who teach them have strong subject knowledge.

However, there are some weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum across classes, including in the kindergarten. Some staff, including those who support pupils, do not have sufficient subject knowledge in the subjects they teach. In the main school, teaching does not always build on what pupils already know and can do. At times, sequences of work do not include the most essential or demanding knowledge that pupils need to learn at the right time. In the kindergarten, some staff's expectations of what children, including those of statutory school age, can achieve are not consistently high. Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of

curriculum quality in the kindergarten. Inconsistencies in the quality of children's experiences persist.

Leaders have established an agreed way to teach phonics and early reading. Books that pupils read usually match the sounds that they know already. In some cases, pupils who have extra support to learn phonics receive precise and high-quality support. However, not all staff have sufficient expertise in the teaching of phonics.

Leaders have started a comprehensive programme of work to identify and assess pupils' individual special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Training is taking place to ensure that staff have the right skills and knowledge to implement teaching approaches to support these pupils. However, the implementation of these approaches for some pupils with SEND is inconsistent. This means that pupils, including in the kindergarten, do not always get the precise support they need to learn well.

In the main school, pupils attend well. In the kindergarten, leaders' stringent work to ensure that pupils of statutory school age attend full time is starting to make a positive difference. In the main school, pupils are usually attentive in lessons. When pupils are overly chatty, staff's reminders get pupils back on track with their work quickly. However, in kindergarten, some staff do not provide enough support when children need help to regulate their behaviour.

The curriculum teaches pupils about equalities and diversity well, including the protected characteristics. There is a strong focus on teaching about seasonal and cultural festivals. Pupils learn about democracy and the rule of law. Teaching ensures that pupils know how to make sensible choices and understand right and wrong. In the kindergarten, pupils who are of statutory school age benefit from additional responsibilities and routines.

Staff are very positive about the support and care leaders provide. There is a strong sense of teamwork. Leaders consider staff workload when making decisions. Parents and carers are very positive about the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All the required checks are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. The safeguarding policy is up to date and on the school's website as required. The proprietor fulfils its duties to ensure that staff complete safeguarding training. Staff are confident in what action to take should they suspect a pupil is at risk of harm. They make detailed records of any concerns they have. Leaders are vigilant when making referrals about concerns and when working with external agencies. Pupils feel safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There are weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum in the main school. Teaching does not always build on what pupils know and understand already. Some pupils, including those with SEND, do not get the precise support they need. Leaders must ensure that teaching builds on what pupils know and can do, so that all pupils learn all the knowledge they should across the curriculum.
- Some staff do not have sufficiently strong subject knowledge in the subjects they teach. Some sequences of work do not demand enough of pupils, in line with the school's curriculum. Leaders must ensure that all staff have strong subject knowledge in the subjects they teach so that pupils learn the full curriculum and are well prepared for their next stage of education.
- Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the curriculum in the kindergarten. The quality of experiences that staff provide and children receive varies too much. Some children do not learn as well as they could. When a small number of children cannot regulate their behaviour, staff do not address this swiftly. Leaders must ensure that they have stringent oversight of the kindergarten to ensure and assure themselves that children in all classes across the kindergarten have consistently effective experiences and teaching.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	109345
DfE registration number	801/6011
Local authority	Bristol City
Inspection number	10267599
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Waldorf School (Bristol) Limited
Chair	David Hussey (Interim Chair)
Headteacher	Lorraine Swords
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,814 to £8,460
Telephone number	0117 933 9990
Website	www.bristolsteinerschool.org
Email address	headteacher@bristolsteinerschool.org
Date of previous inspection	26-to-28 March 2019

Information about this school

- The proprietor aims to provide a curriculum that is in keeping with Steiner education principles. The school is affiliated with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. This group provides advice for Steiner Waldorf schools.
- The school is made up of a kindergarten and main school classes. The kindergarten is for children aged three to six years old. Pupils start at the main school in the September following their sixth birthday.
- There are six classes, three mixed-age classes in the kindergarten, and three classes in the main school, two of which are also for mixed ages. Class 5 is a single-age class for the equivalent of national curriculum Year 6 aged pupils.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- More pupils than usual leave or join the school at times other than typical transition times.
- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2019 and was judged to be good.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the school leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator and other staff.
- An inspector also met with two trustees, including the interim chair of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, Spanish 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 work.
- Inspectors also reviewed other curriculum areas, such as art, geography, woodwork and eurythmy.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation and discussed safeguarding with leaders and other staff.

- In making their judgements, inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. They also looked at the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.
- An inspector held a telephone call with a member of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship who has worked with the school on curriculum development. She also contacted the Bristol local authority safeguarding team.

The school's proposed change to the age range of pupils.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is unlikely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The school has requested a change to its age range to extend its upper limit from 11 to 14. Schemes of work are now in place that demonstrate how teaching will develop pupils' skills and knowledge from age 11 to 14. There is adequate classroom space to accommodate the three extra proposed classes.
- However, while the proprietor currently meets part 8 of the standards under the current age range, leaders and managers do not currently have capacity to extend the age range of the school. Part 8 of the standards is not likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

The school is unlikely to meet the following standards:

Part 8. Quality of leadership and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Information about the material change inspection

- The material change inspection was commissioned by the DfE to look at the school's proposed changes to its age range. This was the school's first material change inspection. In assessing whether the school is likely to meet the standards, the inspectors met with leaders, had a tour of the premises and scrutinised documentation provided by the school.

Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Marie Thomas

His Majesty's Inspector

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