

Inspection of South Devon Steiner School

Hood Manor, Dartington, Totnes TQ9 6AB

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Early years provision	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school's curriculum teaches pupils to be reflective and confident young people. Pupils gain the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. For example, pupils learn about healthy lifestyles and online safety. Class discussions and debates are used well to enable pupils to explore differences in society. Over time, pupils develop a deep respect for one another.

From Kindergarten to the sixth form, pupils study a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils confidently participate in music and drama performances. They produce hand-crafted items they proudly gift to friends and family. Each year, pupils represent the school at the Steiner Waldorf Olympic Games. Pupils are well prepared socially and emotionally for their next education stage. Year 11 and Year 13 leavers go on to further and higher education or employment. Pupils learn to work with others, lead teams and solve problems. Their life skills are enhanced by educational visits, residential and work experience opportunities.

Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection. Most pupils enjoy school. They are motivated to learn. The warm relationships between pupils and staff help children in Kindergarten to settle quickly. Daily routines are well established. This helps pupils to feel secure and focused. Parents describe their children as being happy and safe at school.

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

Children in Kindergarten quickly learn how to complete the morning routines. For the younger children, there is awe and wonder in these activities. For example, finding the star-shaped core inside the apple. Storytime and 'ring time' ensure children regularly explore rhythm, rhyme and new words. These activities develop children's understanding and use of a rich and varied vocabulary. The oldest children in Kindergarten speak in complete sentences successfully.

Children leave Kindergarten with some phonetic awareness. They recognise the initial sounds of words. In the lower school, teachers have a secure knowledge of early reading strategies. They ensure reading books and text used in class match pupils' phonics knowledge. Learning resources are adapted appropriately to help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) complete the same activity as their peers. By the time students enter upper school, they can analyse and discuss a wide range of texts well.

Pupils' personal development forms the basis of the school's ambitious curriculum. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain and fundamental British values. In lessons, pupils explore challenging content, such as drug use. Some of the more complex issues that pupils could face in wider society are taught well.

Teachers use assessment effectively in most subjects to identify and close gaps in pupils' knowledge. This is particularly helpful to support pupils who join the school

from other settings. Staff record and regularly review support for pupils with SEND. Teachers ensure pupils secure their knowledge of important curriculum concepts before moving on to new learning. Learning is broken down into small, achievable steps, such as when making a wooden frame or sewing a bag in handwork and craft. In these subjects, pupils know, do and remember more of the school's curriculum.

Nevertheless, the school's implementation of the curriculum and use of assessment information is less well-developed in a few subjects. The personal, social and health education curriculum and assessment methods are being refined to check the depth of what is taught. In Kindergarten, the children's experience of the early year's curriculum is sometimes limited by what staff think children can and cannot do. When this occurs, children do not secure a deep knowledge of curriculum content.

Careful consideration is given to pupils' preferred career paths. Interviews with staff and work experience help inform pupils' subject choices. Pupils are well-supported by skilled staff to study for qualifications such as GCSE mathematics and English. Sixth-form students become independent and resourceful learners as they complete the New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The school monitors pupils' behaviour to identify areas for improvement. For example, in physical education, pupils learn how to manage their responses when playing competitive games. Staff are developing their knowledge of how pupils communicate their feelings with behaviour. This work is in its infancy in Kindergarten.

The proprietor body knows the school's strengths and areas for development. They assure themselves that agreed systems and processes are implemented through a range of activities. This includes checks against the independent school standards. Staff say the systems and processes introduced by the school help them to manage their workload. They feel that changes are made for the benefit of the children. Staff are proud to work at South Devon Steiner School.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects, teachers do not use assessment to reflect on and adapt the curriculum sufficiently well. This means sometimes pupils cannot build on prior learning. The school needs to ensure teachers use assessment to reflect on and adapt the curriculum so that pupils know and remember the curriculum's essential knowledge.
- In some areas of learning in the early years, the curriculum does not guide teachers precisely enough about what knowledge should be taught. Where this

occurs, children do not secure sufficiently deep knowledge. The school needs to identify the essential knowledge they want children in the early years to know and remember over time.

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	113603
DfE registration number	878/6029
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10286383
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	253
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Rudolf Steiner School (South Devon) Limited
Chair	Rob Worthington
Headteacher	Jeff van Zyl
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,657 to £10,878
Telephone number	01803 897 377
Website	www.southdevonsteinerschool.org
Email address	enquiries@sdsteiner.org
Dates of previous inspection	30 November to 2 December 2021

Information about this school

- South Devon Steiner School was founded by a group of parents in 1980. The school's approach to education is based on Rudolf Steiner philosophy.
- The school is exempt from completing the early years foundation stage profile at the end of the academic year when the child reaches the age of five.
- The school does not use 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the education manager, deputy education manager, senior leaders, staff, pupils and trustees, including the chair of trustees.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, handwork and craft (design technology) and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. This evidence contributed towards parts 1 and 2 of the independent school standards.
- The inspectors also observed pupils during social times, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development, careers guidance and pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for parts 3 and 7 of the independent school standards. Together, they considered policies, registers and key documents such as checks and risk assessments.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first. This evidence contributed towards parts 4 and 8 of the independent school standards.
- The lead inspector conducted a detailed tour of the site and premises to consider part 5 of the independent school standards.
- The lead inspector evaluated the school website, policies and specific documents to determine how well the school meets parts 6 and 7 of the independent school standards.

- The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. She also took into consideration the responses to the survey for staff. There were no responses to the survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Carrington

His Majesty's Inspector

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