

Steiner Academy Frome

Deep Lane, Corsley, BA12 7QF

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Staff pay unwavering attention to meeting the needs of each pupil. Pupils therefore achieve well, academically and socially. In English and mathematics, the standards reached by the oldest pupils are typical for their age.
- The teaching is good. It is responsive to how the individual pupil is learning, and gentle in guiding them to new experiences.
- The principal has created a strong culture of learning amongst staff and pupils. His attention to monitoring and evaluation is commendable. He uses information effectively to improve teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Pupils carry their innate love of learning, exploring and thinking throughout the day.
- Pupils are well cared for. They behave well and work confidently with their teachers and each other.
- The governors are fully focused on monitoring and challenging the school's performance.
- There is a good Early Years Foundation Stage. Children in the kindergarten classes thrive in an atmosphere of care and trust. They acquire a firm foundation of skills and highly positive attitudes to learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Mathematics teaching is not providing enough challenge for the more able pupils.
- In mathematics, pupils are not always encouraged to explain their ideas and think more deeply.
- The marking of pupils' books is not always helpful in offering guidance on how to improve.
- Pupils do not receive enough guidance on how to stay safe when using internet technology.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, observed children in the kindergarten and made short visits to other lessons. Ten of these observations were carried out jointly with either the principal or the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors took account of 100 responses to the on-line Parent View survey, as well as written communications from parents and discussions with a group of seven parents. They also considered the responses of 26 staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors talked with two groups of pupils as well as with individual pupils during their lessons. They heard two groups of pupils read. Inspectors scrutinised work in pupils' books, in addition to looking at books in lessons.
- Inspectors held discussions with members of the school's leadership team and governors. The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including documents relating to pupils' attainment and progress, child protection and safeguarding, the school's curriculum, the management of teachers' performance and the school's development planning.

Inspection team

Jonathan Palk, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Malone

Additional inspector

Marion Hobbs

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Steiner Academy Frome opened in September 2012, as the first Steiner free school. It has 160 pupils aged from four to ten years old, and is of a similar size to most primary schools. The Steiner Academy Frome will eventually cater for pupils aged four to 16 years, as part of its planned growth.
- The school presently occupies the site of a village primary school at Corsley. In September 2014, the school is moving to its permanent site in Frome.
- The percentage of pupils supported through the pupil premium is below average. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and pupils with a parent in the armed services. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is typical of the majority of schools nationally. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background.
- Children continue in the Early Years Foundation Stage of their education for two years. They start in Class 1 when they are in National Curriculum Year 2.
- There is no requirement for the school to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study. The school follows the Steiner curriculum and approach. There are exemptions from some of the statutory learning and development goals for children in the kindergarten. The Steiner Academy Frome is exempt from the requirement to administer the screening check in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) for pupils in Years 1 and 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of mathematics, particularly in providing challenge for the most able pupils, by:
 - refining the assessment of pupils' mathematical understanding and their ability to use their knowledge of number and computation to solve problems in a variety of situations
 - increasing the range of experiences within mathematics lessons, including the use of graphs and mathematical geometry
 - encouraging pupils to reflect on and demonstrate their mathematical understanding.
- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.
- Provide more training for pupils, with their parents, on how to stay safe when using electronic communication devices such as mobile phones and computers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- A high proportion of children exceed the expectations of the early learning goals at the end of the academic year they turn five.. They make good progress in all areas of their learning. The children develop highly positive attitudes to learning under the guidance of the skilled adults. They become confident in exploring their ideas, develop good expressive skills and cultivate an interest in everything around them. They experience a wealth of relevant experiences, mostly self-chosen, but always expertly supported.
- When pupils start in Class 1, National Curriculum Year 2, their writing and knowledge of letters and sounds are behind by about a year compared to national expectations. Pupils quickly draw level by the time they join Class 4, National Curriculum Year 5. The pupils acquire a great deal of experience using pencils, crayons and paintbrushes and quickly take to writing a neat and cursive script. Similarly, their familiarity with reciting numbers and with manipulative play ensures they make rapid progress in Class 1, developing their basic number work.
- Work in lessons and pupils' mathematics books indicates that standards in calculation skills are close to expectations. However, in Year 5, the depth and application of a range of skills are less than typically shown by pupils of this age. A focus on number rather than its application limits what the more able pupils can achieve.
- Writing skills are taught systematically and effectively. Pupils have a good imagination and their stories show the benefits of having being immersed in books, fables and stories from an early age.
- Pupils are competent readers and enjoy reading for pleasure. They have good artistic skills and express themselves well through drawing, music, dance and craft.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported well. The additional staff are skilled in providing high quality support to improve pupils' communication and fluency in reading and writing, which results in them making good progress.
- There is no discernible gap between the achievement of pupils supported through the pupil premium and others. The additional funding for these pupils is used well to ensure they experience the same breadth of experiences as other pupils, through the purchase of reading books, extra music tuition and by taking part in outdoor learning. The needs of these pupils are well understood and additional support is offered in literacy and numeracy through funding additional teaching assistants.

The quality of teaching is good

- The adults in the kindergarten are skilful at providing the resources children need to challenge their thinking and ideas, and also to sustain their imaginative play. The assessment of the children's development across all areas of their learning is all-embracing. The staff place particular emphasis on children working closely with others to secure effective relationships. This ensures children love being in school and develop independence and resilience early on.
- The children are guided to develop new skills by teachers who demonstrate and use those skills themselves. This was evident when children worked in the garden and made dough for the daily snack time, showing an appetite for copying the adults precisely.
- Throughout the school, the use of story, rhyme, song and drawing provides an effective stimulus for pupils to consolidate and extend their learning. For example, in Class 2, the story of the three musicians provided a relevant backdrop for pupils to use their three times table, thereby enabling them to complete division sums.
- Teachers establish and maintain high quality relationships with pupils. This is recognised by parents and the pupils. Pupils respond well to a firm but guiding hand. The pace of pupils' learning is never forced by the teacher, but is effectively supported through regular discussions about their work, before and during lessons. Time is given to ensure that one skill is acquired

before moving on to the next. Teaching assistants play an effective role in this process.

- Teachers are skilled at helping pupils express their ideas, sharing and improving them together. At times, and particularly in mathematics lessons, teachers do not question pupils deeply enough to check how well pupils' ideas or thinking are developing.
- Pupils say that their discussions with teachers about their work and teachers' comments help them see what to do next. Adults' discussions with pupils are informative. This is not always captured sufficiently in teachers' written comments in order that pupils could, if they wanted, refer back to the points made.
- Teachers check regularly on pupils' progress towards the aims of the Steiner curriculum and assess pupils' social, emotional and spiritual development. As a result, teachers are alert to when the pupils are ready to learn new skills and help them to express themselves and their ideas. Lessons are adjusted daily for individual pupils in response to this regular checking.
- The assessment of mathematics is accurate but largely focused on the content of the Steiner curriculum. This does not ensure that teachers' expectations of more able mathematicians are high enough. This is particularly the case when providing challenge through problem solving and investigations, and using other methods of calculation. Extension activities focus on manipulating harder numbers and do not extend pupils' understanding enough by developing a variety of approaches to computation.
- Teaching of reading is effective. Strategies to help pupils learn to read are well matched to the needs of the pupil. The daily reading session combines well with intensive reading for those who may be struggling to acquire knowledge of how sounds link to letters.
- There is judicious use of tests in reading, spelling and mathematics to ensure that an eye is kept on how well pupils are progressing.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to boosting the learning of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; one-to-one reading and small group work activities are particularly effective. Teaching assistants find imaginative ways of supporting those with complex needs, which helps these pupils to find their focus.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good. They are confident and happy in school, which they describe as 'a big family'. They consider that pupils' behaviour is 'generally good'. They know the boundaries and that the principal will not tolerate any form of bullying. Pupils say that they do not experience any bullying. Adults deal swiftly with any incidents of name calling or unintentional physical contact.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. They feel safe. Procedures and routines are well understood. Pupils have a good understanding of road safety and how to stay safe at home, but have less awareness of how to stay safe when using the internet.
- Pupils have a strong sense of themselves, an inner confidence that matures as they move through the school. They work well with each other and their teachers. They have strong and developing awareness of the values of working collaboratively. Occasional exuberance and excitement may get the better of them, but a combination of teachers' high expectations and their sensitivity to their peers helps them re-establish good behaviour.
- Attendance was average last year. The pattern is one of improvement. Pupils want to be in school and the competition for places ensures unauthorised absence and applications for holidays in term time are reducing.

The leadership and management are good

- The passionate and experienced principal is ambitious for the school. He is tenacious in driving forward the Steiner educational philosophy while being open to other viewpoints.
- The principal takes a very personal interest in the progress of each pupil. The staff are

thoroughly committed. They provide a high level of care for pupils and their families. The numerous testimonials and the strikingly high satisfaction rate on Parent View bear testimony to parental approval with leadership and management.

- From the outset, key decisions were taken to recruit well-qualified teachers who bring a wealth of experience of teaching in the maintained and the independent school sector. Cohesion in teaching styles is secured through regular training and continuous professional development in Steiner teaching methodology.
- The needs of the pupils help to shape the curriculum, which is broad and balanced. The subjects offered are well integrated into all lessons. The typical blend of academic learning, arts and crafts, outdoor learning and ethics and spirituality is enhanced with the teaching of Mandarin and Spanish.
- The kindergarten teachers display good levels of shared accountability for the high quality learning environment and maintain a detailed and formative track record of children's learning and development.
- There is very well managed support for the teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, from a knowledgeable special educational needs coordinator. The extensive training offered to teaching assistants, through a network of conferences and experts in the field, contributes to the good quality of the support they offer in lessons. The continuous tracking of the pupils' progress and careful monitoring of the effectiveness of therapists ensure that behaviour management plans and individual education plans help staff to meet the pupils' needs well.
- The designated safeguarding officer has a good understanding of his role in working with partner agencies to safeguard pupils at risk. Policies are thorough, monitored regularly and procedures followed. Staff training in safeguarding is up to date. The school is looking at extending training to ensure staff are further aware of the approaches to use when managing those who express very challenging behaviour.
- The school has followed the advice and guidance of the Department for Education adviser by moving quickly to develop rigorous and regular assessment systems. After just four and a half terms, the school is still on a journey to establish clear and appropriate targets for each cohort of pupils. Staff are working rapidly with other Steiner schools to secure these goals. As part of the school's development, plans are in place to strengthen the recording of pupils' mathematical skills.
- Pupils entitled to the pupil premium funding have been carefully assessed. In relation to academic achievement, there are no gaps to close. However, funds are used well to ensure that there is no diminishing of self-esteem or aspiration.
- The school sport funding has been committed to training staff to teach a broader range of physical education skills. The impact of this in improving the range of well-taught physical education skills is not yet evident.
- Advisers from Christchurch Canterbury University have helped underpin robust systems for appraising staff. There is a regular programme of lesson observation and staff feel well served by the professional development programmes.
- The principal deals quickly with teacher underperformance, using a combination of regular coaching support and by applying the Teachers' Standards. His judgements on the quality of teaching generally matched those of inspectors. Staff value the feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching, although records show that leaders do not always focus enough on the learning seen in lessons.
- Local networks are developing well and the local authority has supported the school in providing training to staff in teaching disabled pupils and those pupils with special educational needs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Despite the many pressures consequent on becoming a free school, the governors have not deviated from their clear strategic priorities. This is very much down to the excellent working relationship between the governors and the principal. There is a comprehensive range of checks and balances in place. The school's performance, including staff performance, is questioned and challenged through debate and is well informed by external reviews and first-

hand experience, such as classroom observation and canvassing parental views. Recent appointments have strengthened the governing body. There is strong representation of parents and expertise from business, social care and special educational needs.

- The governors maintain a rigorous check on how the school is using public funds, including the pupil premium, to ensure value for money.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138383
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	430679

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy Free School
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Guy Marson
Headteacher	Trevor Mepham
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01373832804
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