

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

50 Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4NF

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet good. Teaching requires improvement because there remain inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school.
- Outcomes for pupils in mathematics are not good enough.
- While pupils are kept safe, their views are not documented well enough.
- Previous weak teaching means that pupils, especially the most able, are still catching up. Consequently, they are not achieving the standards of which they are capable.
- Pupils do not understand what they need to do in order to improve their learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The inspirational leadership of the new co-principals has been instrumental to the success of this rapidly improving school.
- Staff are passionate, highly motivated and determined to ensure that the momentum of improvement is maintained to equip pupils with the very best education.
- Relationships between staff and pupils in the school are impressive. Strong relationships allow pupils to build trust with adults. This helps them feel safe and secure.
- Governors and trustees play an active role in the school. They challenge and support leaders effectively to ensure that pupils' needs are being well met.
- Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. Pupils are aware of what is acceptable behaviour. They have positive attitudes to school. They enjoy their learning and the opportunities they are given.
- The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies. These close partnerships ensure that the school provides pupils with the best possible support for their academic and emotional development.
- Significant changes to the curriculum ensure that learning is bespoke to meet pupils' individual needs successfully.
- Parents are delighted with the quality of education and care that their children receive.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that it is consistently good across all year groups and subjects.
- Improve outcomes in mathematics and for the most able pupils.
- Ensure that pupils fully understand how to improve their work.
- Ensure that pupils' views are well documented in any internal investigation undertaken by leaders.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- 'Inspirational leadership', 'leaders are passionate and ambitious' and 'a magical place to work' are just three of the many positive comments expressed by staff to inspectors about the work of the recently appointed co-principals. The rapid improvements evident in the quality of education and care in a short period of time illustrate leaders' strong capacity for further improvement.
- Leaders are ambitious and resilient. They confront challenges with passion and determination. Together, they work tirelessly to drive forward the necessary improvements. Since the time of the previous inspection, leaders have focused their efforts on improving aspects of the school's performance. Therefore, developments are slightly ahead of those in the further education college for post-16 students.
- Middle leaders have the skills and expertise in the areas they lead. They are outward-looking and find innovative ways to find solutions to problems, for example providing high-quality training and coaching for staff to improve the recording of pupils' progress against the targets in their education, health and care plans.
- Staff share the same aspirations and commitment to improve the life chances of every pupil in the school. Staff talk openly about the 'passion' and 'sense of purpose' they have under the current leadership. All staff know what they are working towards. As one member of staff said, 'There is now a sense of purpose which is shared by all.'
- Communication between leaders and staff is highly effective. Daily briefings are informative and structured around pupils' needs. Staff describe how they have a voice. They welcome how leaders listen to their views and suggestions to support pupils better.
- Staff receive high-quality professional development and coaching to improve and develop their teaching practice. Nonetheless, leaders, including governors, are not afraid to make difficult decisions if staff do not meet their high standards.
- The school offers a curriculum which suits the individual needs of pupils. The introduction of the 'Equals' curriculum for complex learners is helping to bridge gaps in pupils' learning, for example by placing a strong focus on the development of pupils' key skills in communication, language and mathematics. However, mathematics outcomes remain too low. This underachievement is because of a legacy of weak teaching which is yet to be removed completely.
- Pupils' experiences of social, moral, spiritual and cultural education are planned for carefully by staff. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of British values; for example, they learn about the importance of equal opportunity for all. This good understanding was exemplified recently when older pupils presented their campaign for British sign language (BSL) interpretation on local news to the local council chamber. They want important news broadcasts to be accessible to all deaf people. As a result, the motion has been sent to the cabinet and the pupils are awaiting a response.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences which enhance their learning. 'WOW Wednesdays' give pupils opportunities to participate in enrichment activities, such as drama with a local theatre group, Paddleboat, Tae Kwon Do and a range of arts and

crafts.

- Leaders have ensured that additional funding is spent wisely. For example, pupils have the opportunity to engage in a range of sporting activities such as curling, footgolf and archery. Such activities improve pupils' fitness and increase their confidence and self-esteem.
- Since the previous standard inspection and the appointment of the co-principals, there has been a determined focus on improving pupils' learning and achievement. Leaders, together with staff, are fully committed to ensuring that pupils catch up and eliminate their significant gaps in learning, including BSL, writing and mathematics. Nonetheless, leaders acknowledge that there remain areas to improve in teaching and learning such as improving pupils' outcomes and ensuring that pupils, especially the most able, make the best progress.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong. The governors and trustees responsible for the governance of the school have the skills and expertise to support school leaders in implementing their vision. Governors know the school well. They are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses. They hold leaders firmly to account for the quality of care and education that pupils receive. They do not accept the underperformance of staff and take decisive action if standards are not met.
- Governors and trustees are committed to the pupils and also the well-being of staff. Together with school leaders, they make sure that staff are supported and take care of themselves. Support is readily available and governors and trustees provide staff with effective supervision and coaching. Staff appreciate the consideration of their well-being. This was summed up by a member of staff who commented, 'I can't express how much support management provide, this has really helped, knowing we have the support; this is a real family.' Consequently, staff morale is high.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school makes sure that all statutory requirements for protecting children are met. Relevant policies are up to date and published on the school website. Leaders, including governors and trustees, ensure that the required checks are made on staff recruited to work in the school.
- Staff receive high-quality training in all aspects of safeguarding, including child sexual exploitation, and radicalisation and extremism. This training means staff have the confidence to take the action required should they spot any concerns about the safeguarding of a pupil. This minimises risk and keeps pupils safe.
- Not all internal investigations considering concerns about staff are robust. Inspectors found that the pupil's account is not always at the heart of the investigative process. On one occasion, the pupil's account was not used to understand what had occurred. During the inspection, the leadership team took immediate action to address this shortfall. Parents who spoke with inspectors were confident that their children are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection but is not yet consistently good. Pupils, and especially the most able, are not making the best possible progress. While pupils are catching up, the pace of improvement is not quick enough to remove the remaining gaps in pupils' learning.
- Pupils' work shows there remains too much variability in teachers' expectations, especially in mathematics. For example, pupils do not understand mathematical language in order to successfully complete calculations and problem-solving activities.
- There are inconsistencies in the appropriateness of activities planned for pupils. Where teachers plan tasks which precisely meet pupils' needs, pupils achieve well and make good gains in their learning. For example, older pupils were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the recent events on Brexit. They were able to communicate and share their views with regards to the implications for them as British citizens. However, where activities do not precisely meet pupils' needs, learning stalls and this hampers the progress they make.
- At times, pupils do not understand their learning targets. This lack of understanding is because teachers do not communicate targets in a way that pupils understand. Therefore, pupils do not understand how to improve their work.
- Subject knowledge of staff is secure. For example, there is increased staff confidence in the use of pupils' first language, BSL. As a result, in a range of subjects, pupils use BSL effectively, alongside English. The increase in staff and pupil confidence in the use of BSL significantly reduces pupils' isolation and frustration at not being able to communicate.
- Increased monitoring, training and guidance by the co-principal for education and middle leaders are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. There is evidence of some strong practice. For example, teachers' questioning to probe and challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their knowledge and understanding continues to improve as staff become more confident in their practice.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils report that they feel safe in school. They know that they can share their worries or concerns with staff when they become anxious or upset and are confident that staff will act quickly to solve their concerns. This helps reduce pupils' anxious behaviours.
- Pupils understand the importance of keeping safe. Personal, social and health education is a strength of the school. Pupils receive careful guidance and support in a variety of ways, including how to keep themselves safe, techniques to reduce their anxiety, and strategies to increase their levels of independence. In addition, older pupils receive travel training, so they can use the bus independently to travel in Exeter and go shopping.

- School leaders are active in ensuring that the personal development and welfare of pupils is at the core of their work. The work of therapists is fundamental to pupils' academic success. Pupils' holistic needs are carefully assessed, and therapists work with individual pupils. This work is proving successful in meeting pupils' physical, emotional and social needs. This was exemplified in a report that inspectors viewed written by a senior therapist. The therapist commented, 'Since October 2018, the difference in pupils is amazing. The energy is almost palpable.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have a good understanding of what is acceptable behaviour. In addition, they know the behaviours that are not tolerated by any member of staff, such as bullying, physical harm or inappropriate personal comments.
- Pupils are well mannered, courteous and polite. This was exemplified many times during the inspection, for example by pupils making inspectors feel welcome by signing or saying hello, smiling and opening doors.
- Pupils are confident that bullying is extremely rare and that, when it happens, staff sort it quickly. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour has 'really improved' because the school rules have changed and 'expectations are much higher'. Furthermore, pupils are confident that the behaviour policy and the 'traffic light system' is applied consistently by staff.
- Information held by leaders on behaviour incidents show a dramatic decline in the number of incidents of poor behaviour. Similarly, the number of physical restraints on pupils have reduced dramatically. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school, enjoy their learning and want to do well. They understand the importance that good behaviour has on their outcomes.
- Pupils' behaviour during lessons and social times is good. They respond quickly to directions given by staff, are diligent in their work and commit positively to doing their best. However, when activities do not specifically meet their needs, pupils do not work as hard and learning slows.
- Pupils enjoy their education, and this is reflected in their regular attendance. Attendance is above the national average for all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- A high proportion of pupils who attend the school have significant complex needs. This means their starting points are much lower than expected because of their communication, social and emotional needs.
- Leaders and staff are working tirelessly to eradicate the legacy of pupils' underachievement. While there is evidence of significant improvements, for example in BSL, there remains work to be done to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress. This is especially so in mathematics. Pupils do not make good progress in their mathematics. They do not have the mathematical vocabulary and understanding that they require to successfully access their work in mathematics.

- Staff are increasingly confident in assessing individual pupils' progress and have a better understanding of what they know, understand and can do. Nevertheless, there remain inconsistencies in how assessment information is used to plan activities to meet the needs of pupils precisely.
- Pupils are encouraged to read regularly. The newly refurbished library has sparked pupils' interest, with books that are appropriate for them, given their stage of reading development. Pupils' reading skills are improving quickly. This is helping them in their learning across a range of subjects, such as science and history.
- Pupils write for a range of purposes. For example, in key stage 4 pupils are taught how to write formal letters. They understand the need to use formal language such as 'faithfully' at the end of their letters. As a result of improved teaching, pupils are making stronger progress with their written work across a range of subjects.
- There is no discernible difference in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, and their peers. Where teaching is effective, activities are well planned. They meet pupils' needs and ensure that they achieve well, for example, key stage 4 pupils working towards their GCSE in English. Nevertheless, as a result of some remnants of inconsistency in teaching, pupils are not yet achieving their full potential.
- Staff provide pupils with helpful guidance and support for their next steps into college, training or employment. The school makes effective use of impartial careers guidance to support and guide pupils in their interests, for example successfully gaining a level two qualification in hair and beauty. This has given them the skills and confidence to pursue their chosen career in hairdressing. Nonetheless, pupils' preparation for their next steps requires some improvement. This is because pupils do not make as much progress in their academic work as they are capable of achieving.
- Pupils make strong progress in drama and expressive arts. For example, key stage 3 pupils were engrossed in using paint to decorate their tiles. They worked carefully, with sustained concentration, producing work of a high quality and which they were proud of.

School details

Unique reference number	113654
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10052977

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Alexander
Co-Principals	Trudy Chappell and Sylvan Dewing
Telephone number	01392 267023
Website	www.exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk
Email address	info@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 November 2016

Information about this school

- Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education is a non-maintained special school for moderate, severe and profoundly deaf pupils. Pupils are learning English as an additional language and some have delayed use of their first language, BSL.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for primary and secondary pupils. There is also a specialist college provision which caters for students aged 16 to 25. An inspection of the college's provision took place at the same time as the school.
- There have been significant changes to the staffing structure of the school since the previous standard inspection. Most notably, there have been changes in the senior leadership team and in governance. There are two co-principals. One principal holds responsibility for the quality of education, the other for safeguarding and care. There is a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body.
- Most pupils in school are residential. The inspection of the residential provision was

aligned with the inspection of the school provision.

- Although the school is designated for those aged five to 16, currently there are no pupils in key stage 1.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Plans are in place to relocate the school to a new site in 2020.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the school. The quality of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- Meetings were held with the co-principals, the school's safeguarding team, middle leaders, staff and governors. Inspectors took account of the 63 responses from staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors talked with a group of pupils to listen to their views about the school. The views of other pupils were gathered during lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors were, at times, accompanied by independent BSL interpreters.
- A wide range of documentation was examined, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plan, reports written by external providers and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors considered the two responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and a text message was also taken into account. Phone calls were made to parents and carers to seek their views about the quality of education and care their children receive.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie Nash

Ofsted Inspector

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