

St Albans Steiner Kindergarten

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number 123589

Inspection date 14 June 2007

Inspector Tina Kelly

Setting Address Fleetville Community Centre, Royal Road, Hatfield Road, ST ALBANS,
Hertfordshire, AL1 4LQ

Telephone number 01 707 27533 or 07970117251

E-mail

Registered person St Albans Steiner Kindergarten Ltd

Type of inspection Integrated

Type of care Sessional care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St Albans Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten opened in 1982. The setting is recognised by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and follows the Steiner education principles. The kindergarten operates from a room in the Fleetville Community Centre in St Albans. They have use of a classroom, there are other community centre users on site. Children have access to a secure garden which leads directly from the kindergarten room, they have shared use of the cloakrooms and kitchen.

The kindergarten is open term time only and offers morning sessions from 09:30 until 12:30. The setting offers an open session on Fridays for parents and toddlers. There are currently 24 children on roll, of these 19 are in receipt of nursery funding. The kindergarten has systems in place to support children who are bilingual, have English as a second language and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The group employs a team of six staff. The teacher holds a Steiner Kindergarten teaching qualification. Other staff hold relevant early years and Steiner qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are learning about being healthy through their daily routines. They change into their indoor slippers as they come into the kindergarten. They understand that this keeps the room clean and is good for their feet. Most children manage to find their named pegs and put on their slippers with little assistance. Children have a growing understanding of hygiene and have an increasing independence in their personal care. They are competent as they wash their hands and find clean cloths to dry themselves then put the cloths in the dirty towel bin. Children manage well when they are taken to the cloakrooms, they are becoming aware of the importance of privacy and insist on closing the cubicle door.

Snack time at the kindergarten is a very important time of the day. Fresh bread rolls are made most days. Children select aprons and wash their hands before they help in mixing and shaping the dough. Wholemeal, organic ingredients are used. Staff try to ensure that all kindergarten cooking is dairy and egg free to accommodate children's special dietary requirements. When this is not possible alternatives are always provided. Pottery cups and plates are used. Children take great care as they pass the plates with honey or Marmite rolls around the table to their friends. When strawberries are served the teacher demonstrates how to eat the red fruit but not the green leaves. Children who serve the fruit repeated the instruction of 'don't eat the green bit' to each and every child. They understood the importance of the message as they shook their heads and grimaced their faces at the thought of eating the green leaves. Children have opportunities to try a wide range of different fruits and foods at this time, they clearly enjoy home made fruit cake as well as grapes, plums and bananas.

Children's health is maintained as two members of staff have attended courses on food hygiene and there is always a qualified first aider on site to take appropriate action in the event of an accident.

Children make good progress in their physical development. The consistent use of music, singing and movement during the Eurythmy sessions provide opportunities for children to develop their self-confidence, spatial awareness and realise how their actions impact on others. Children imitate animals and aspects of the natural world through songs and action rhymes. They reach up to the sky, flap and fly like birds, creep and crawl like animals and jump about like toads. Children listen carefully to the words of the songs so they know what is expected of them, they show great delight as they swoop and jump. The outside play area provides children with opportunities to run, to manipulate push along toys, to use hoops and balls and to develop their large motor skills.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a homely, welcoming and stimulating environment. Bright fabrics, curtains, floral displays and textured rugs are used to great effect. The kindergarten room is set out to provide a range of play areas where children can play and explore the wide variety of natural resources that are available. Children's decision making skills and safety awareness are promoted throughout the session. Staff ask if they can manage, if they think other people can get through as they move furniture to create camps and expand their play ideas. Staff extend their answers to take into account the safety of others playing nearby.

Children's safety is maintained records are in place to monitor visitors and procedures to ensure their safety when being taken out to the cloakroom area. Children know they must walk and hold hands, they are very familiar with the routines to wait for their friends and teachers and to stay together. Children's well-being is monitored and maintained as appropriate records are in place with regards to lost and uncollected children, accidents and incidents.

Information provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board is available to parents on the notice board. However some contact details in the parent handbook are out of date. Appropriate actions may be delayed and children's well-being compromised if the correct information is not available. Children are protected as staff have a good understanding of child protection issues having attended second level training. They are aware of the policies and procedures that are in place to ensure the children's safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy and settled within the kindergarten setting. The Rudolph Steiner approach to learning means children are self-motivated and enjoy undirected play in a bright and creative environment. Children relax into familiar routines which are repeated throughout the weeks. Songs, stories and circle times are based on natural rhythms which reflect many aspects of the wider world. Well resourced play areas enable children to explore a wide range of natural materials and artefacts. They make choices about all aspects of their play and the activities that they take part in. They create their own imaginative world as they dress up with flowing fabrics and use pine cones, wooden blocks and shells in their play. Children's play develops naturally and often incorporates the games that are developing with the other children around them. They negotiate and join their play ideas as they come across new concepts that have been created in other areas of the room. This happened when children moved their home play ideas out to the large mat area near to where chairs and tables had been made into an elaborate camp. Each of the children's ideas linked and touched some of the others but they continue to develop their own play side by side.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are keen to express themselves, they are motivated and free to extend and adapt their environment and to solve problems that arise as they move around the kindergarten. Children develop a sound basis to their learning as they watch and concentrate on examples given by staff. They observe closely, ask questions and comment on the actions taken. There is a strong emphasis on developing language and conversational skills, these contribute to the children's learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Staff are experienced in teaching within the Steiner principles. They adapt and extend the opportunities for children to ensure their individual skills are developing in line with the Foundations Stage guidance. Curriculum plans are based on seasons and the timescale of the natural world, they encompass all areas of learning. Records of achievements show children are progressing towards the early learning goals. Children are well supported in small groups or as individuals. They learn to take turns, negotiate and to share resources in the group setting.

Children are developing good listening skills, the oral tradition is strong within the group. Teachers introduce stories from around the world, using simple paper puppets and real flowers to bring the tales to life. Children may join in as they begin to recognise the story line. They are confident as they take part in counting songs and action rhymes, they learn through

repetition throughout their time at kindergarten. Books are readily available, children choose from an extensive selection in the cupboard. These are stored alongside the kindergarten documents and resource books. Children are becoming aware that books and documents are important and have relevance to their day to day routines as staff refer to the same cupboard when they need a book.

There are opportunities for early mark making set out most days. Many children recognise the letters of their names and some can write their name in full. They are able to find their pegs with symbols that younger children can link to their own name and belongings. There is little opportunity in the provision of imaginative play resources for children to access paper and pencils. They are not using these resources to extend their early reading and writing skills in everyday spontaneous play. Some aspects of mathematics and technology are not being fully explored. Children are asked to get the cups and plates out for snack time, there is some counting but the numbers and concepts are not fully explored. They are not linking the numbers of cups to the places at the table or the children present. Lanterns on twigs and coloured tissue paper window displays show how a range of natural materials are used in craft sessions. Children have access to a range of unusual technological resources. They use a coffee grinder to grind the grain to put in the bread, looms are threaded, and pieces of weave are produced which are displayed around the kindergarten. They are able to look at their kindergarten through a kaleidoscope which gives them a new and different understanding of their environment.

Children enjoy their time at kindergarten. They thrive in a well supported and challenging environment. They are making progress in working towards the early learning goals.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are highly valued as individuals, families and new babies are welcomed into the setting and to join in the circle time at the start of the session. The Friday morning session is offered as a toddler group with younger children attending. They become familiar with the setting so that they settle easily when they start at kindergarten. Each term sessions are planned for parents to come in and take part in the children's play, they are encouraged to share in the experiences that their children enjoy. Parent consultation when staff are available to discuss the children's achievements are also social events, for example, parents work alongside the children to tidy up and help to maintain the garden.

Children receive praise and encouragement, they learn what is right and what is wrong as staff are good role models. When asking children to move from a particular activity or area staff explain that 'your friends are waiting for you' which prompts the children to join in with the others. They re-direct the children and dissipate any behaviour issues in a calm and sensitive manner. Staff have attended a range of courses and have experience in working and supporting children with educational difficulties and physical disabilities. The lead teacher is the designated special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). The kindergarten cares for children from a range of cultural backgrounds, many children are bilingual. Children are comforted as simple counting rhymes are sung in their home language.

Children are kind and thoughtful, they negotiate as they work together to develop individual and group ideas. Children learn about the importance of the natural world and how the seasons change with stories and rhymes which introduces them to festivals and celebrations from around the world. A simple song of thanks for the food they have is sung with great reverence at snack

time. There is great discussion about where food comes from, which is supported by the children's involvement in grinding the grain and making the bread rolls.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is being fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded children is satisfactory. Staff plan opportunities for parents to discuss their children's achievements each term, this supports the children's learning at home. Information is readily available on the notice board about the day to day running of the kindergarten. Parents are not informed about the nursery education provided by the kindergarten. There is no detail about the registration with ofsted or the inspection process.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Staff are very knowledgeable in the Steiner method of learning. They follow the principles closely to provide an interesting and stimulating environment where children learn through play. Staff take responsibility for setting out resources before the children come into the kindergarten. The session is well managed, there is a smooth transition between free play, group time and outside play sessions.

Children's well-being is maintained as staff know the children and their family backgrounds well. Appropriate records for their personal care needs are recorded and readily available. The parent handbook informs parents about the Rudolf Steiner philosophy and aspects of the day to day running of the kindergarten. However, the information is not well presented. Parents are not able to find information about policies and procedures that are in place to protect their children.

The leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff have a basic knowledge of the Foundation Stage, they provide children with resources to extend and develop their early learning skills. Aspects of planning are linked with the early years curriculum but specific early learning goals are not identified. Developing staff knowledge of the Foundation Stage would ensure all aspects of the early learning goals are developed within the Rudolph Steiner ethos. Children's early learning skills would be extended in a sensitive and stimulating environment.

Staff are good role models, they recognise and extend the opportunities for children to solve practical problems, they are careful not to interrupt the children's ideas. They are proactive in supporting the children as they adapt their environment and create challenging situations for themselves.

Children are protected as systems are in place to ensure the adults working with them are suitable to do so. Staff records and appraisals record the courses attended and identify training needs for the future. The staff team works effectively together to ensure that the setting offers an inclusive environment where every child matters.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the children who attend.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the time of the last care inspection the kindergarten was given four recommendations; to ensure that fresh drinking water is made available at all times, ensure that staff have regard for the code of practice for the identification and assessment of special educational needs, to

ensure the time of children's attendance is recorded and to identify a named deputy who is able to take charge in the absence of the manager.

Children's needs are met as they have access to water when they need it. Staff have attended a range of courses covering special needs and inclusion to ensure that children's needs are recorded and met in line with the local authority code of practice. Children's safety is maintained as detail is recorded on the register. The position of deputy has been identified to ensure appropriate actions are taken in the absence of the teacher.

At the time of the last nursery education inspection (S122) the kindergarten had the following key issues that identified aspects to be improved; the assessment system, the planning of activities and to provide more challenge for older and more able children with regards to communication, language and literacy.

Children's record of achievements have been reviewed and are now based on an assessment profile provided by the Steiner Fellowship. This ensures the children's learning is based on the Foundation Stage and early learning goals. Children's communication, language and literacy skills are promoted. There is consistent support for the older and more able children. Their early learning skills are developing in a style and manner that reflects the Rudolf Steiner education system.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the information for parents to ensure important contact numbers are up to date and they are fully aware of the registration with Ofsted, the nursery education provided and the inspection process.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- develop staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage
- develop opportunities for children to link sounds and the written word within everyday activities, extend children's use of mathematical concepts and number recognition in every day play.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education* (HMI ref no 2599) which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk