

# St Albans Steiner Kindergarten

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	123589
<b>Inspection date</b>	28/06/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Karen Molloy
<b>Setting address</b>	Fleetville Community Centre, Royal Road, Hatfield Road, ST ALBANS, Hertfordshire, AL1 4LQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01 707 275337 or 07970117251
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Type of setting</b>	Childcare on non-domestic premises

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

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## **Description of the setting**

St Albans Steiner Kindergarten was originally registered 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, Hertfordshire. The centre is shared with other local groups. Children have access to a secure garden which leads directly from the kindergarten room and have shared use of the cloakrooms and kitchen. The kindergarten is open Monday to Friday from 9.30am until 12.30pm. The setting offers an extended session on a Monday and Thursday until 2.30pm during term time only. The setting also an open session on Fridays for parents and toddlers.

The kindergarten is registered on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. A maximum of 20 children may attend at any one time. There are currently 25 children aged from three to six years on roll. The kindergarten provides funded early education for three- and four-year-olds. It supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language.

The kindergarten has five members of staff and two volunteers. All staff hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above. They have also completed Steiner training. The proprietor is currently studying for an MA in Early Years and the deputy has completed the Early Years Foundation Degree.

## **The overall effectiveness of the early years provision**

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

Highly qualified and motivated staff have an extremely thorough knowledge of children's needs and how children learn, and this enables them to plan meaningful and interesting learning opportunities. Consequently, children make excellent progress in all areas of learning and development. Exceptional partnerships with parents ensure children's needs are consistently met and each child is fully included, as staff know them extremely well. Successful steps are taken to self-evaluate its provision for children and the kindergarten demonstrates an excellent capacity to make continuous improvement and sustain its existing very high standards.

## **What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?**

To further improve the high quality early years provision the registered person should consider:

- developing partnerships with other providers delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage to further ensure progression and continuity of learning and care.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision**

Children are very well protected because staff have an excellent understanding of safeguarding procedures and know when to take action to safeguard children in their care. All staff are vetted before working with the children and thorough induction and ongoing training mean they fully understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. Children are protected well as the established staff team keep the premises very secure and supervise the children at all times. Detailed risk assessments are carried out to provide a very safe environment. The environment is organised to reflect the security and warmth of a family home. Space and resources are used imaginatively to fully utilise the indoor and outdoor area. Resources are of high quality; simple hand-crafted toys and natural materials, such as, shells, wood, crystals, wax, sand and fir cones assist imaginative development. Time and space is allowed for undirected, creative play in order to nurture children's initiative, curiosity and thinking. Resources are stored at low level and very accessible for the children to make independent choices. The kindergarten provides children with an abundance of materials and choice and some exceptional learning opportunities within safe and secure surroundings.

Leadership is highly effective and inspirational. Staff are very well qualified, enthusiastic and motivated to do a good job because they are passionate about what they do and how they do it. Great value is placed on supporting their continuous professional development, which ensures they keep up-to-date with current practice while still maintaining the Steiner ethos. As a result, they feel valued and are totally committed to creating the best possible outcomes for the children. Staff have all contributed to the self-evaluation process and are continually reflecting on their practice. This contributes to a setting that is always looking to improve and develop, thereby always improving outcomes for children. Since the last inspection the setting has completed the recommendations, and as a result parents are fully informed of the inspection process and have appropriate contact numbers. In addition, staff have a sound knowledge of the Foundation Stage and the setting has worked hard to ensure the learning and development requirements are met within the Steiner setting. Further improvements have been identified, for example, to become more involved in community events and to expand on the workshops and events for families, and all staff have a clear vision.

Staff have established excellent partnerships with parents. They receive a wealth of information about the setting through newsletters, the notice board and effective daily communication. Termly parent consultations are successfully used to share information about children's progress and development. Coffee mornings provide an opportunity for parents to get together and recently to benefit from a question and answer session about the Steiner approach. Parents also get involved in the parents craft group and many commented on the organised camping trip, which was enjoyed by all. An open parent and toddler session provides an excellent taster and introduction to the group, many of whom move into the kindergarten, ensuring a very smooth transition. The setting is exceptionally welcoming and proactive in inviting parents in and getting them involved. Each morning as families arrive, parents and children join staff in the morning ring time

where a candle is lit and they share a morning greeting/song. Events and festivals, such as Midsummer's Festival, are celebrated and everyone joins together to share food and enjoy the day's activities. Parent questionnaires and general feedback from parents are overwhelmingly positive. They love the ethos of the Steiner setting and comment on the calm, relaxed environment. They feel staff know the children extremely well as it is a small group, that activities are meaningful and they are especially delighted in children's excellent creative, imaginative and social development. They comment positively on the excellent communication and community feel that the group has. Parents say staff are caring and very respectful of children and their ideas. The kindergarten is developing the effective working partnerships with other agencies and early years providers, and this will further support smooth transitions and consistency of care.

The manager is passionate about her work with children and is committed to ensuring each individual child is highly valued. Positive steps are taken to ensure all children are well integrated, value others and understand the society in which they live. Therefore the setting is fully inclusive to all. The mixed age group mirrors an extended family unit and this encourages children to learn from and guide each other, which is very evident in their play. Information about each child is gathered prior to them starting at the kindergarten and staff demonstrate they know each child very well and are able to meet their individual needs.

## **The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children**

Children have access to an extensive and wonderful range of resources and activities that are stimulating and provide valuable learning opportunities. The setting has some exemptions from the learning and development requirements in relation to the early learning goals. However, children are making excellent progress in learning and development. There is a very individualised approach to planning and this ensures that children's individual needs are recognised and responded to effectively. Planning is flexible and incorporates children's individual interests as well as the yearly rhythm of the seasons. Observation and assessment is effective. Staff know the children extremely well and know where they are in their development. They make purposeful observations which help them plan successfully for their next steps in their learning.

The atmosphere in the setting is one of calm, where children are busy and thoroughly engaged in their play. Children are keen, active learners and play a very proactive role in their learning; they offer ideas and respond to challenges with great enthusiasm. They are confident and have good self-esteem, for example, children take the lead and organise their friends, carrying on imaginative play scenarios for sustained periods of time. Staff have a sensitive approach and support children extremely well. They are on hand to support them but do not direct their play or ask leading questions and only intervene when necessary, taking the lead from the child. Consequently, children display exceptionally high levels of independence, curiosity, imagination and concentration. Children develop trusting relationships with their peers and the staff, and they play cooperatively, often in 'family' groups with little disruption or disagreements.

As the environment is designed to reflect the security and warmth of a family home, activities are often domestic, such as, baking, sewing, gardening and preparing and sharing of communal meals. Children show great pride as they make and sew their own pencil case, ready to move from the kindergarten to the Steiner school. Creative skills are fostered, such as when they make bee hives, cutting out spirals carefully and forming the bee and wings from wax. A recurring rhythm of activities, such as, painting, baking, crafts and gardening give the children the form and structure of the day which is organised to help them feel safe and secure. As a result, children are very settled and confident in their approach to staff and the activities.

Children's communication, language and literacy are developing exceptionally well. This is promoted as staff read stories from memory, and a wealth of books encourage children to 'read' to each other, which they frequently do, telling exciting and elaborate stories. Songs, rhymes and puppets shows further encourage the foundation skills for literacy. Children develop an understanding of numeracy through everyday activities, for example, they help to prepare for the morning break, laying the table and counting the chairs, cups and plates. Songs and rhymes also incorporate number and counting.

Children have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They develop good habits and an understanding of hygiene, such as washing hands before baking and meal times. Fresh fruit and vegetables are enjoyed at break time, and children help to make seasonal soups using vegetables grown at the kindergarten and bake bread daily, which they share at break times. Children's knowledge and understanding is further enhanced as they grind the grain for the bread, mix and chop vegetables and discuss the ingredients. Children use the outdoor area in all weathers, and raincoats and wellies are provided in wet weather so children are able to splash and enjoy the rain. They are given valuable opportunities to manage their own risks, for example, older children like to climb the tree outside, and with supervision they are encouraged to decide how high they can go in order to still get down safely.

Children's behaviour is exceptionally positive. Strong emphasis on developing good habits and managing behaviour is promoted successfully through rhythm, distraction and boundaries. However, disruptive or challenging behaviour is not evident and children appear skilled at sorting out their own dilemmas or minor disagreements. As children learn and develop within the setting, they build up exemplary skills for the future.

## Annex A: record of inspection judgements

### The key inspection judgements and what they mean

*Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality*  
*Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong*  
*Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound*  
*Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough*

### The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

<b>How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?</b>	1
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	1

### The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	1
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding	2
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	1
The effectiveness of partnerships	2
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	1

### The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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### Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

<b>Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	1
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	1
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	1

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## **Annex B: the Childcare Register**

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are:	Met
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The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are:	Met
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