

Alder Bridge School

Bridge House, Mill Lane, Padworth, Reading, Berkshire RG7 4JU

Inspection date

17 March 2022

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1), 2(1)(b)–2(1)(b)(i), 2(2)(e)–2(2)(e)(iii), 3, 3(c)–3(d)

- At the most recent standard inspection in February 2019, the curriculum and teaching did not take account of pupils' previous attainment, knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils were not receiving the careers advice to which they are entitled.
- The previous progress monitoring inspection found that much work had been started to address the identified weaknesses. However, more needed to be done to implement the changes consistently to meet some of the remaining un-met standards.
- Leaders and staff have continued to build on the early signs of improvement in the quality of education that were evident at the first progress monitoring inspection. Staff now routinely use the new curriculum documents that at that time had only recently been introduced to guide what they teach. Staff can demonstrate how the curriculum is adapted for individual pupils' starting points.
- There are systems in place for ensuring that agreed education approaches happen across the school. Leaders' increased support and challenge to teachers regarding academic expectations is an important culture shift.
- The approach to careers education meets the requirements of the independent school standards. It includes impartial information about a range of career possibilities, individual computer profiling to support pupils to make informed choices and one-to-one careers interviews with external specialists.
- The paragraphs that were checked in this part that were previously un-met are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7–7(b), 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- The school was found to be meeting the safeguarding standards at both the previous standard and progress monitoring inspections. Previous issues regarding the safeguarding policy had been resolved by the time of the first progress monitoring inspection.

- There has been more than one change of designated safeguarding lead (DSL) since the time of the previous standard inspection.
- The school's safeguarding policy is available on its website. However, the policy is not sufficiently precise about the school's approach to identifying and acting on concerns, and the associated arrangements for record-keeping. Furthermore, the practice found in these areas during this inspection does not match what is written in the policy, and there are significant weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- The records of safeguarding concerns available at the time of this inspection are weak. There is no consistent format for keeping these important records to show a clear chronology of what has happened over time. Leaders cannot remember, or do not know, important details about what has happened in some cases. This includes how, and if, leaders have acted on concerning information they have received. This information is not written down.
- Safeguarding records show that the school's policy to record in writing discussions, decisions made and the reasons for those decisions is not consistently followed. Files contain very little detail to build the contextual picture around individual pupils, even when other professionals have brought concerns to the school's attention. There is no evidence that some important safeguarding records have been passed on as they should be when pupils leave.
- Leaders have not checked that staff have understood the training they have received about safeguarding. Available records suggest that no staff, including the DSL, has completed a single internal referral form in the last six years. The only concerns in existing records are those brought to the school's attention by other agencies and/or professionals or, occasionally, other parents. Leaders have not questioned whether this absence of records of concerns identified internally is reasonable to reassure themselves that staff are not failing to notice concerns and/or not acting on them in line with the school's policy.
- The paragraphs that were checked in this part are un-met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)(a)–34(1)(b)

- In recent inspections, not all of the independent school standards have been met. Leadership and management were inadequate at the time of the previous standard inspection. The progress monitoring inspection found that work to address the issues was at an early stage, and trustees acknowledged that progress had been slower than they would have wished. There remained some disconnect between what trustees thought was happening and the reality.
- There is clear evidence of a positive impact of actions taken to improve the quality of education. However, there remains a lack of clarity and effectiveness around certain aspects of the school leadership's responsibility, knowledge of the requirements of the independent school standards, lines of oversight and accountability. Trustees' intention of appointing a single school leader was to provide one channel of accountability and communication with trustees. However, there still appears to be a divide between the oversight of education and other operational matters such as those regarding health and safety. Although the school leader is clear she retains the accountability for aspects

where she does not have lead responsibility, fundamental weaknesses in safeguarding procedures and practices had not been identified prior to this inspection.

- It continues to be the case that effective governance arrangements are not securely established. Four of the seven trustees that form the board were appointed immediately prior to this inspection. The chair was elected the day before the inspection took place. Consequently, trustees are in a period of transition and starting again, almost from the beginning, with a substantially new board and a new chair. That said, there are some small signs of improvement, such as the introduction of structured reporting from the school leader to trustees.
- The paragraphs that were checked in this part that were previously un-met remain un-met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	110175
DfE registration number	869/6013
Inspection number	10216403

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Steiner school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part-time pupils	21
Proprietor	Alder Bridge Association for Steiner-Waldorf Education
Chair	Paul Jenkins
Headteacher	Lucia Dimarco
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,104 to £10,290
Telephone number	0118 971 4471
Website	www.alderbridge.org.uk
Email address	office@alderbridge.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26 to 28 February 2019

Information about this school

- Alder Bridge School adheres to the International Waldorf Steiner curriculum developed by the Austrian philosopher Dr Rudolf Steiner.
- The school is exempt from some aspects of the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage. This applies to the younger children within the school's kindergarten.
- The school's registration as recorded on the Department for Education's (DfE) website, Get Information about Schools, shows that the school is registered for pupils aged three

to 12 years old. However, the school is currently providing education for pupils up to the age of 14, the end of Steiner Class 8.

- Some older pupils also attend part time. Parents and carers have decided to electively home educate these children for part of the week.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The school has a 'school leader' rather than a headteacher. In keeping with Steiner tradition, there is also a 'college of teachers'.
- The chair of trustees is a long-serving member of the board but was only elected as chair the day before this inspection. Four of the seven members of the board of trustees are new.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place on 26 to 28 February 2019. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection was conducted on 26 November 2019.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the second progress monitoring inspection since the previous standard inspection found un-met standards in February 2019. The first monitoring inspection in November 2019 found several previously un-met standards remained un-met.
- The statutory action plan that the school was required to produce to address the remaining un-met independent school standards was rejected by the DfE on 4 May 2020.
- The inspection was conducted without notice.
- The inspector held meetings with the school leader and other leaders. He spoke with the chair of trustees by telephone and met one of the newly appointed trustees. He spoke with staff and pupils, visited lessons and reviewed a range of documents and records.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Standards that were met at the previous inspection, but are now judged to not be met at this inspection

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons.

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