Inspection of Waldorf Cambridge School

Hinton Road, Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire CB21 5DZ

Inspection dates:	8 to 10 July 2025

Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**
The quality of education	**Requires improvement**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Requires improvement**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Requires improvement**
Early years provision	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**No**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe. They trust staff to listen and help when they have worries. They value the respectful atmosphere and feel encouraged to become confident, independent learners.

Behaviour is often calm and focused, especially in the early years. Most pupils respond well to routines and clear expectations. A small group, however, find it more difficult to meet these expectations or to attend regularly.

Pupils have opportunities to take part in a wide range of exciting experiences, such as sailing and indoor climbing. These help build confidence, teamwork and a spirit of adventure.

High expectations underpin the curriculum, though how consistently these translate into daily learning varies. In subjects like art, music, handwork and woodwork, pupils flourish. These lessons are carefully planned, with knowledge built step by step and plenty of chances to practise and apply it. In the early years, teaching meets children's needs well. Regular routines, such as circle time, help children grow as confident speakers and listeners. Across the school, pupils develop well socially and creatively.

Reading and writing are not taught as effectively. Pupils at the early stages of learning to read do not always receive timely support that is precisely matched to their needs.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum is thoughtfully planned. In some subjects, it builds knowledge over time and helps pupils make links in their learning. In particular areas, staff have secure subject expertise. They model processes clearly and give helpful feedback. Pupils receive suitable time to practise, refine and improve. It shows, for example, in pupils' expressive music-making and detailed scientific diagrams. By the end of key stage 4, pupils complete qualifications that enable them to progress to further education, employment or training. The school continues to explore appropriate qualification routes to support pupils' next steps and build on their learning.

The school has set out an approach to the teaching of reading and writing. However, how well this is put into practice varies. While time is allocated for reading across the school, some pupils do not get the consistent support they need to develop fluency and expression. Pupils who fall behind are not always identified quickly, and the help they receive can be too infrequent or inconsistent. As a result, they do not catch up quickly enough. Writing tasks are included across subjects, but the support provided is not always well matched to what pupils can already do or what they need next. This means difficulties persist with spelling, punctuation and grammar, affecting how well they can express themselves through writing.

The school is working to strengthen its provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Training has taken place, and there is a shared commitment to improvement. However, systems to identify needs and provide the right help are not consistent across the school. Some support plans lack precision. They do not always set out what pupils find difficult, what strategies are being used or how progress will be measured. While some staff know pupils well and adapt teaching successfully, others do not have the information they need to do this. In early years, processes are more firmly established. Children with SEND receive more effective help and make progress. However, greater consistency is needed so that this strong start continues into the next stage.

The early years provision is a clear strength. It provides a warm, purposeful environment for children to learn in. Calm routines and rich experiences nurture children's confidence and independence. Activities like apple harvesting and storytelling inspire curiosity and creativity. Skilled staff model language and movement with care, building strong foundations for future learning. The school is working to strengthen how this is sustained, so that children's strong start carries through as they move into their next stage of education.

The school tracks attendance and has seen some improvement. More pupils now attend regularly. However, absence patterns are not analysed well. Concerns are not always addressed quickly. Actions to reduce persistent absence lack urgency and consistency. These issues remain unresolved.

Most pupils behave with kindness and respect. In the early years, routines, calm voices and gentle reminders help children listen well, concentrate and manage their feelings. The school has recently updated its behaviour policy. Though it is clear and easy to understand, it is not always used as intended. Systems for recording and reporting incidents vary. This makes it hard to spot patterns or make links to individual needs, particularly for pupils with SEND. As a result, a small number of pupils continue to display unacceptable behaviours. Records shared with the proprietor do not always provide clear or complete information. It limits effective oversight and affects compliance with the independent school standards (the standards).

Pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences that help them grow as individuals. Lessons about health, relationships and life skills build pupils' confidence from a young age. Careers education is well considered, with visitors such as electricians, journalists and Paralympians inspiring pupils to aim high. Outdoor learning, festivals and drama build pupils' resilience, creativity and self-belief.

The school fosters a caring, respectful culture. Staff feel valued, supported and confident to seek guidance. Leaders promote openness, enabling honest conversations and a shared commitment to improvement. Staff feel trusted and able to manage their workload. Many parents and carers speak positively about the school's genuine care, including thoughtful touches like personalised birthday verses

in annual reports. These celebrate each child's uniqueness alongside clear updates on progress.

The proprietor understands their statutory duties. Monitoring of statutory requirements, such as safer recruitment and health and safety, is thorough and ensures compliance. However, scrutiny of curriculum delivery and related areas is less rigorous. For example, provision for reading, highlighted at the previous inspection, still needs attention. Leaders' oversight does not always provide the clear and timely information needed to secure improvement. This is affecting secure compliance with the standards.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Reading and writing support is not consistently effective. Pupils who find English a challenge are not always identified early or accurately. Support, when provided, is sometimes infrequent or not well matched to pupils' needs. This means that some continue to face difficulties with reading fluently or writing with accuracy, which affects their wider learning. The school should develop more consistent systems for identifying gaps in English and ensure that teaching is adapted effectively, so that pupils get timely, targeted help.
- Support for pupils with SEND lacks consistency and clarity. Across the school, approaches to identifying and meeting pupils' needs are uneven. Some support plans are too broad and do not include precise strategies or measures of progress. This affects how well some pupils access learning and make progress. The school should ensure that pupils' needs are identified clearly and addressed through well-planned, consistently implemented strategies.
- The school's approach to identifying and responding to attendance concerns is not consistent, timely or well targeted. As a result, patterns of persistent absence are not consistently addressed early enough to prevent further disengagement. The school should strengthen how it monitors and responds to attendance issues so that action is prompt and effective in reducing persistent absence.
- Behaviour systems are not applied consistently. While most pupils behave well, a small number sometimes act in ways that goes against the school's expectations. Staff do not always use the behaviour policy as intended, and systems for recording and analysing incidents vary. This limits how well patterns are spotted and addressed, particularly for pupils with SEND. The school should ensure that staff follow the behaviour policy consistently and that information about behaviour is used more effectively to guide support and intervention for pupils.
- Oversight of compliance and strategic monitoring of the standards requires strengthening. While some areas such as safer recruitment and health and safety are well monitored, scrutiny of curriculum delivery, behaviour management,

support for pupils with SEND and assessment is less rigorous. This has affected full compliance with the standards. The proprietor should ensure that oversight systems provide clear, accurate information to support timely action and maintain full compliance with all relevant standards.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	131937
DfE registration number	873/6029
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10374842
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	105
Proprietor	Cambridge Steiner School Project
Chair	Joel Chalfen
Headteacher	Tina Hobday
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,699 to £14,713.20
Telephone number	01223882727
Website	www.waldorfcambridge.uk
Email address	reception@waldorfcambridge.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 to 28 April 2022

Information about this school

- The school is a member of Waldorf UK, formerly known as the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. This membership reflects the school's commitment to the Waldorf educational philosophy, which focuses on nurturing children's intellectual, artistic and practical skills through a creative, holistic curriculum.
- The school admits children to its kindergarten from the age of two. Children are expected to attend at least four days a week until they reach statutory school age.
- The school has an exemption from specific learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage statutory framework, including those relating to the formal teaching of literacy, numeracy and the use of technology. This exemption aligns with the Waldorf UK approach, which follows its own developmental curriculum and principles for early years education.
- The school offers after-school childcare for pupils aged four and above who attend the school. It is run by school staff and managed by the proprietor.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the teaching and learning lead, who also serves as the headteacher and the pastoral lead. The lead inspector met with representatives of the proprietor: four trustees. These trustees, together with two additional members, form the school's proprietor body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and creative and aesthetic. Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Beyond the subjects explored through deep dives, inspectors also reviewed curriculum plans and spoke with leaders about other areas, including the personal, social and health education programme and woodwork. In addition,

they held discussions about the school's approach to supporting pupils with SEND and considered relevant documentation.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record, considered the views of leaders, staff, and pupils, and examined the extent to which the school promotes an open and positive safeguarding culture that places pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors undertook a range of activities to assess compliance with the standards, including checking the suitability and maintenance of the premises, reviewing documentation, such as risk assessments and policies, and exploring the school's procedures for managing complaints.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through responses to Ofsted Parent View, including any written comments. In addition, one inspector spoke with a sample of parents at the end of the school day. Inspectors also considered the views of pupils and staff through separate discussion sessions.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nerrissa Bear	His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
  - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
  - 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.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
  - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
  - 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;
  - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
  - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
  - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.

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.

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