

Inspection report
Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 332/6000

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 3 - 4 October 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School opened in 1934 and moved to the present site in 1946. In addition to the original two houses there are several further buildings providing specialist craft, laboratory, movement and other teaching rooms including those for graphic communications and information and communication technology (ICT). It has 251 pupils aged between 3 and 17, and at present 6 pupils board with families associated with the school. The school aims to provide a Steiner Waldorf education to enable pupils to develop their learning and respect for their fellows and the natural world. It follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum based on rhythms and routines for the day, the week and the year, with learning related to pupils' periods of development. The teaching aims to use art, music and practical activities to balance academic work and so enable the pupils to fulfil their potential. In common with other Steiner schools, there is no headteacher, instead the Council of Management is responsible for the legal, administrative and financial aspects of the school. The College of Teachers has delegated functions for educational policies. Both groups meet regularly.

Pupils' ages, Steiner classes and National Curriculum year groups

Steiner Waldorf School	Age	National Curriculum Year Group
Nursery	Under 4	Nursery
Kindergarten	4-6	Nursery/ Reception
Transition	5-6	Year 1
Lower School		
Class 1	6-7	Year 2
Class 2	7-8	Year 3
Class 3	8-9	Year 4
Class 4	9-10	Year 5
Class 5	10-11	Year 6
Class 6	11-12	Year 7
Class 7	12-13	Year 8
Class 8	13-14	Year 9
Upper School		
Class 9	14-15	Year 10
Class 10	15-16	Year 11
Class 11	16-17	Year 12

Overall evaluation of the school

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education which has several particularly good aspects. It meets all of the educational regulations except one and enables the pupils to make at least satisfactory progress by the time they leave at age 17. The moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is particularly good, however the ways in which aspects of this development are addressed is incidental rather than being directly planned. The school is aware of these aspects and is taking steps to address them.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with good elements. The school follows the guidelines of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum which provides a good basis for curriculum planning as well as a very broad range of educational experiences. Learning in the nursery, kindergarten and transition classes is based upon play with clear daily routines and a strong emphasis on developing social skills. Many parents spoke highly of this approach which enables the children to develop within a relaxed and well ordered environment. Parents also commented that their children enjoyed coming to school, and were eager to learn. From class 1, literacy and numeracy skills are developed through Main Lessons which last for up to two hours each morning, following a well planned series of themes which also include other subjects. These lessons continue throughout the Lower and Upper Schools. Other subjects, including French and German, eurhythmy (an art of movement), music and painting are introduced in the Lower School. In the Upper School these are extended with metalwork, woodwork, cooking, sciences (biology, chemistry and physics are taught separately), and crafts such as pottery and basket work. Throughout the school the strong philosophic emphasis on balancing academic learning and developing skills in the arts and practical activities is successfully put into practice. This is a strength of the school.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, and there are significant elements that are good or outstanding. The work in the Kindergarten classes provides a particularly good basis for pupils to settle into school and very effectively develops their social and speaking skills. Practical activities such as baking bread - pupils grind barley seeds to make the flour - and preparing snacks help to provide both a pattern for the week and develop the pupils' awareness of seasons. Teaching in the Lower School is at least good overall, with outstanding provision in dance lessons and where good use is made of singing and appropriate varied activities to maintain the pupils' concentration during longer lessons. In the Upper School teaching is satisfactory: in metalwork it is outstanding, being very well organised and enabling the pupils to achieve at high levels. Elsewhere in the Upper School, teaching is not always sufficiently supported by regular recorded assessments of individual pupils' progress leading to work planned for all pupils' capabilities and previous attainment. There is no overall assessment policy. In classes where teachers have changed, the new teacher is not always sufficiently aware of what each pupil has successfully covered before they begin a new topic. Whilst this reflects the freedom given to staff to interpret the school's curriculum in their own way, the current approach does not provide sufficient overview to promote consistent practices to raise the overall standards of teaching. Homework is set, but there is no timetable for this and both

parents and pupils felt that such routines are not always clear.

Pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress by class 11, although not at similar rates throughout the school to that of pupils in maintained schools. The annual use of assessments in the Lower School for reading, spelling and mathematics provides a sound basis for planning in those classes and is supplemented effectively by regular tests for spelling and mathematics. In the Upper School, assessments are varied, both within subjects taught by different teachers and between subjects. Pupils take four GCSEs in class 10 and up to five more in class 11. As they may also resit examinations in class 11, direct comparisons with other schools are not appropriate. Support for pupils with additional learning needs and/or difficulties is good overall. Dudley local authority provides support for pupils with statements of special educational needs and the school provides support for others. This work is reviewed regularly, albeit informally. Throughout the school there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal and social skills for adult life. All pupils have the chance to spend time at Steiner schools abroad in France or Germany, and pupils from those countries and Scandinavia make visits to Elmfield.

Provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good. It is a strength of the school which successfully meets its philosophic goals in this respect. The pupils behave well from an early age, cooperating extremely well, recognising each other's achievement. Good class and group discussions enable these skills to be used in classroom situations, especially in the older classes. The successful integration of pupils with additional learning needs and/or disabilities provides further evidence of this success. Spiritual development and cultural awareness are fostered through assemblies, religious education lessons and themes followed in main lessons. Evidence for this was limited during the inspection but it is at least satisfactory, although knowledge of public institutions and services tends to be dealt with when discussing current affairs rather than in a more structured way. Over 90% of pupils in the Upper School responded to the questionnaire sent to them as part of the inspection. Two major concerns were expressed: nearly two thirds felt that they were not involved in making decisions about the school, the School Council having fallen into abeyance. Also nearly half felt that their views were not sufficiently taken into account, enabling them to suggest improvements. The school intends to address these issues.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. The staff show a very strong commitment to pupils' welfare and safety. Appropriate policies have been developed for this and are kept under review. These include developing the family sessions (parent and toddler) and after school care provision, both of which are good. There are a small number of pupils from Steiner schools elsewhere in Europe. They considered that the arrangements for their stay as boarders at Elmfield were good. Good procedures are in place for checking the suitability of staff before they start work at the school, including where they are foreign nationals.

The accommodation is maintained satisfactorily. The site is large and has a good variety of outdoor areas which are well used. Vegetables are planted and the produce used in cookery, including jams being made for the Christmas fair. The

children greatly enjoy taking part in such activities. The outdoor environment is well-used to implement the school's approach to learning.

The school has particularly good links with parents, who spoke very positively about the school. A Parent-Teacher Association has recently been re-established. Many parents made reference to how well their children had settled into school, often after less satisfactory experiences elsewhere. They felt that their children were more emotionally able to cope with school and looked forward to coming as well as to learning. Some felt that policies, such as that for complaints are unduly complicated. Whilst this policy meets the requirements for registration, the school has rightly agreed that it could usefully be simplified and is addressing this issue. Both staff and parents are involved in this review.

The collegiate approach to management is generally successful, although in some aspects, such as assessment, it lacks a clear overview. Staff are clear as to their roles, but some of the complex delegated 'mandated' functions are less clear to parents. It is very evident that the school's approach successfully fosters very high levels of commitment from staff and parents towards the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended 17 Jan 05, with the exception of that listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the quality of education provided (standard 1) and must:

- Put in place a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly, using the information from such assessment to plan teaching and so support pupils' progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- consider ways in which, within the school's philosophy, the quality of all teaching and classroom practices can be raised to the standards of the best;
- ensure that teachers have access to records of pupils' prior achievements ;
- provide a homework plan, especially for pupils in the Upper School; and
- consider ways of involving the pupils in decisions about the school and ways of improving it.

School details

Name of school:	Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School		
DfES Number:	332/6000		
Type of school:	Steiner		
Status:	Independent		
Date school opened:	1934		
Age range of pupils:	3-17		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll :	Boys: 130	Girls:118	Total:248
Number of boarders:	Boys:3	Girls:3	Total:6
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys:2	Girls:1	Total:3
Annual fees (day pupils):	£2,880 - £5,640		
Annual fees (boarders):	£9,735		
Address of school:	Love Lane, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 2EA		
Telephone number:	01384 394633		
Fax number:	01384 393608		
Email address:	info@elmfield.com		
Headteacher:	The College of Teachers		
Proprietor:	Association of Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Ltd through the Council of Management		
Reporting Inspector:	Martin Bradley HMI		
Dates of inspection:	3 - 4 October 2006		

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