

Inspection report

Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley

Independent school

DfES ref no: 919/6109

Inspection under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 14 - 15 November 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 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

The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley, which opened in 1949 in Hertfordshire, is one of the longest established Steiner Waldorf schools in the United Kingdom. In common with other Steiner schools it is managed on a non-hierarchical collegiate basis by the college of teachers. It follows the international Steiner Waldorf curriculum whereby the pupils begin to learn to read, write and do arithmetic at age seven. From this age children receive a two hour 'main lesson' each day, studying a topic for three to four weeks. The main lesson is accompanied by specialist teaching in a wide range of other subjects. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced level (AL) examinations are usually taken a year later than in maintained schools. The curriculum emphasises rhythms and seasonal patterns in the organisation of the day, the week and the year. These are linked to a holistic view of education supporting the development of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of the pupils.

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
Kindergarten/ 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
Class 12	17-18	Year 13
Class 13	18-19	Year 14

Summary of main findings

The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley meets all of the regulatory requirements. Its organisation effectively applies the Steiner Waldorf philosophy, although the educational implications of this approach are not clearly stated in the school's prospectus. Nevertheless it succeeds in meeting its curricular and spiritual aims. It successfully meets its aim of developing each child's innate curiosity and love of learning in creative and practical activities, but is less effective in doing so in academic subjects for all ages of pupils. The curriculum is broad and covers a good range of subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) is introduced in class 9, but is not subsequently developed. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. At times teaching does not involve pupils sufficiently in their learning. The Learning Support Team works effectively to assess all pupils. It provides teachers with detailed information on the pupils, although this is not always used to good effect. Pupils make satisfactory progress. Those who stay until the oldest class achieve in line with or above national expectations in their public examinations.

What the school does well:

- its kindergarten classes provide pupils with clear routines which enable them to settle quickly and to develop their personal and social skills;
- it very effectively enables pupils to develop their self-knowledge and self-confidence; and
- it ensures that by the time pupils leave the school, they achieve at levels in line with or above national expectations at GCSE and A level.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

Next Steps

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

- improve the quality of teaching by providing a greater range of activities within lessons so that the needs and abilities of individual pupils are addressed;
- continue to develop the assessment of pupils and use this to inform teaching; and

- review the provision and use of ICT in the upper school.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided by the school is broad, covering a range of practical, aesthetic, physical and scientific subjects. The curriculum is informed by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as expressed through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, and is satisfactory. Individual lessons or themes are generally drawn up by individual teachers. Whilst these are adequate, they are not subject to review or monitoring to ensure that they cover the intended themes appropriately. In the kindergarten classes the pupils' personal, social and emotional development is well supported and they quickly settle into the class routines. The emphasis is on practical activities and these are of high quality. Parents spoke highly of the work in the kindergarten. In the lower school main lessons are introduced as well as French and German and other specialist subject teaching. The high quality of the work in the kindergarten continues in class 1. However in lower school classes individual pupils' prior knowledge is not considered when lessons are planned. Creative and aesthetic work, particularly in handwork and eurythmy (a form of dance movement), is a strength. Seven year olds help to make, and then embroider, handwork bags, and learn to knit using needles which they make themselves. These skills are applied and developed when older pupils make props for a theatre production. It is significant that both boys and girls participate enthusiastically in handwork, woodwork and other practical lessons. In the upper school the curriculum is broad, covering a good range of subjects and activities. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in community service and work experience. A main lesson in business education includes useful work on personal finance. At present staffing constraints limit courses provided at GCSE and A level, notably in physics and geography, however double science is offered at GCSE. Pupils' experience of ICT within the curriculum is limited. The breadth of the curriculum is further extended by visits out of school.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, and has several good features. It ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Throughout the school, relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils are good. In the kindergarten teaching is generally good, paying close attention to the individual needs of the pupils and to their development. Teaching in the lower school is satisfactory overall, but varies from outstanding to inadequate. Recently there have been discussions in the lower school to develop common approaches to lesson planning, but these have not yet been implemented. It is intended to extend this work by considering ways of differentiating the work set for children in each class. At present planning does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. The Learning Support Team assesses each pupil in the lower and upper schools and provides teachers with detailed advice. This developing system is good: other assessments are devised by each teacher. The Tobias class provides good support for children

with identified learning needs, usually for one or two terms, after which they return to their peer class. In the upper school teaching is satisfactory with some good features evident. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Their exposition is clear. Here, as in the lower school, in some lessons there is insufficient variety of activities, with pupils having too few opportunities to apply their knowledge and to work together in groups of different size. ICT is not used before class 9, but there is little evidence of its use in teaching and learning in this and older classes. Especially in the upper school there is insufficient use of books other than text books. The school has begun to develop a system of peer monitoring of teaching, but this is not yet systematically organised.

Pupils' progress overall is satisfactory. The absence of validated testing, means that data on pupils' attainment are not available and consequently their progress cannot be assessed in academic terms, for example by reference to levels of attainment. The school seeks to judge pupils' progress through the teaching of the curriculum, rather than by assessing individuals. In the kindergarten pupils' personal and social skills are developed effectively. The school's philosophy does not support the development of reading, writing and mathematical skills at this stage. In both the lower and upper schools, pupils' progress is satisfactory. It is supported by good behaviour in most lessons and pupils are generally interested in their work. When given the opportunity they show good initiative and problem solving skills especially in practical subjects. There are fewer similar opportunities in academic subjects. Upper school pupils' achievement is in line with or above national expectations at GCSE and A Level. However, almost all examinations are taken a year later than in maintained schools, and the pupils have this extra year in which to mature academically.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school enables pupils to develop their self-knowledge and self-confidence very effectively. From an early age they accept responsibility for their behaviour and contribute to community life. There are many examples where older pupils work with and help younger ones. Comments made by employers regarding work experience placements spoke very positively about the pupils' attitudes towards their work. Pupils also acquire an appreciation of their own and other cultures through main lessons and in lessons on religion, and they have a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school complies with the regulations on health and safety. In line with its philosophy, the school promotes healthy life styles and the curriculum is extended by cookery lessons. The pupils make good use of opportunities to be active, and these are supported through the school's curriculum. Pupils feel safe and reported that bullying is not an issue for them. Behaviour is good overall, although some pupils can show a lack of concentration when lessons do not engage them in practical and challenging activities. A small number of pupils board with local families: this provision is due to be inspected later this year. Detailed risk assessments are conscientiously completed. At present the school does not have a separate plan to meet the requirements of the DDA, although sections of the current whole school plan refer to ways in which some of the requirements will be met.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

Appropriate checks are made on staff, several of whom come from overseas. The three sections of the school – kindergarten, lower and upper schools – are brought together through the college of teachers which meets regularly to discuss common issues concerning teaching and curriculum. The sections also meet separately. They are accountable to the college, but individual teachers have a significant degree of autonomy.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable, although some areas are in need of redecoration, and some rooms are untidy and unattractive. They form a significant contrast to other areas and teaching rooms, such as the kindergarten, which are well furnished and thoughtfully decorated. Some facilities are good, especially those for practical subjects and for drama. One science laboratory is poorly organised. The extensive grounds have been well developed. Pupils have contributed to the built and aesthetic environment through main lessons and other activities, including main lesson work in gardening where plots of land are cultivated.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

Information for parents and other partners is good. The parents' handbook is very informative. Many parents have daily contacts with the school and make good use of its shop which sells homeopathic medicines, toys and books.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school's complaints procedure is detailed and fully meets the regulatory requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley		
DfES Number:	919/6019		
Type of school:	Steiner Waldorf		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	3 -19 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll :	Boys:222	Girls:176	Total:398
Number of boarders:	Boys: 3	Girls: 8	Total: 11
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£2,985 - £7,800		
Annual fees (boarders): boarding fee only	£3,675(full boarders) £2,625 (weekly boarders)		
Address of school:	Langley Hill Kings Langley Hertfordshire WD4 9HG		
Telephone number:	01923 262505		
Fax number:	01923 270958		
Email address:	info@rsskl.org		
Joint Chairs of the College of Teachers:	Jeremy Smith, Regina Walsh		
Proprietor:	Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley Ltd		
Reporting Inspector:	Martin Bradley HMI		
Dates of inspection:	14 -15 November 2006		

© Crown copyright 2006. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

School inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The website lists Ofsted independent school inspection reports, together with information on the work Ofsted does in the independent sector.