

Bristol Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	801/6011
Unique Reference Number	109345
Inspection number	301503
Inspection dates	9-10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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 Bristol Steiner School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged three to fourteen. Admission is non-selective. The school is situated on two sites, one for the main school and one for the kindergarten, about half a mile apart in residential areas of north Bristol. The curriculum is inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. At the time of the inspection there were 198 pupils on roll. One pupil has a statement of special educational need. During the inspection, class seven were away from school on a residential visit to Wales. The school's aim is for education to be *'a journey not a race'*.

Evaluation of the school

The Bristol Steiner School is successful in achieving its aim and in providing a good quality education for its pupils. The curriculum, based on Steiner Waldorf principles, is intrinsically broad and effectively planned to engage pupils in their learning. Teaching is generally good and so pupils make good progress. Pupils' personal development is outstanding, increasing their self-confidence and capabilities. The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. Parents are very supportive of the school. All the regulatory requirements are met.

Quality of education

The good quality curriculum is shaped by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and makes effective use of the published Steiner Waldorf curriculum. It provides pupils of all ages with a broad range of academic, creative and practical ways of learning.

The curriculum is assiduously planned from the kindergarten onwards, providing imaginative and engaging learning experiences in a settled environment. This enables young pupils to make very good progress, especially in personal and social development and creative development. The established daily and seasonal routines help to foster pupils' self-confidence and assurance. Imaginative play promotes a growing independence as they make choices about activities and resources.

The core of the curriculum in classes 1 to 8 is the 'main lesson' which concentrates on the Steiner-Waldorf themes. The main lesson focuses on one subject but draws together elements from other subjects, helping pupils to make connections in their

learning. It is allocated about two hours each morning with a given theme lasting for three or four weeks. The scope of the themes includes mathematics, life sciences, myths and legends and history and geography in the primary age classes, with more advanced aspects of science, the humanities and literature for older pupils. The remainder of the curriculum includes English, mathematics, French, religious education (RE), music, physical education (PE) as well as the creative and expressive arts. In common with other Steiner schools, pupils do not use computers, but they do have opportunities for designing and making in work with textiles and resistant materials.

Planning is methodical and detailed, with schemes of work identifying the learning aims and objectives. Planning follows a common format which helps teachers to plan more effectively for pupils' progress. Pupils with special educational needs have individual education plans (IEPs) where appropriate and are supported through the sensitive approaches of their teachers and learning support staff. Much effort has been put into planning to meet the wide range of ability in every class. All planning makes reference to the needs of higher and lower achieving pupils, but these needs are often expressed in general, rather than specific, terms. For example, the need for more able pupils to work at challenging tasks is recognised, but opportunities for them to research a topic or work independently are not consistently provided.

Personal, social and health education is a central part of the curriculum, strongly supported by work in RE. Residential and day visits out of school enrich the curriculum and add to pupils' enjoyment, social development and understanding of the wider world.

The quality of teaching is good overall and at times outstanding, resulting in pupils' making good progress. The teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subjects taught, enabling them to plan effective, imaginative schemes of work to support all areas of learning. Teachers have identified a higher proportion of pupils than is usual as having some level of special educational need. However, though particular needs are included in lesson plans, strategies to address them are not always precisely expressed.

The strong emphasis on literacy and communication skills contributes significantly to pupils' good progress in these areas, most notably in speaking and listening. Pupils become confident and articulate speakers, able to ask questions, to clarify their thinking through discussion and to contribute to each other's understanding.

In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils to apply what they have learned, to use their initiative and to make choices about aspects of their work. As a consequence, the pupils are effective learners who accept responsibility and apply themselves very well to the tasks they are given. Teachers are skilful in anticipating and defusing potentially distractible behaviour, helping pupils to maintain their concentration and effort. Where lessons are less successful, pupils have to listen for

too long or teachers lack the skills to manage the distracting behaviour of one or two pupils whose interruptions adversely affect the learning of the others.

Assessment procedures are thorough, enabling teachers to have a secure knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers evaluate lessons methodically, assessing pupils' progress and reshaping their planning accordingly. Regular marking, class tests and teachers' observations of pupils contribute to comprehensive written reports which cover pupils' academic and social progress. Child studies are compiled when the need arises for a close focus on a pupil's progress. Almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire feel fully informed about their children's progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The distinctive and well-established ethos of the school creates a strong sense of community. All pupils have opportunities for reflective periods each day and become increasingly aware of their spirituality. Themes of tolerance, compassion and understanding help to broaden pupils' perspective on their own and others' conduct. The evident dedication of teachers, mentioned specifically in some written responses to the parents' questionnaire, gives pupils a strong role model.

The code of conduct and the policies supporting good behaviour reinforce pupils' understanding of right and wrong. Pupils are very well known to all staff and feel safe in their care. Discussions with younger pupils and the questionnaire responses of older ones confirm overwhelmingly their enjoyment of school. Attendance is consistently high. Behaviour is generally good with pupils cooperating well in class. Frequent opportunities to present and celebrate their work through performance foster pupils' self-confidence and self-reliance and contribute to their sense of achievement. Pupils actively plan and organise fund raising events for school and class ventures and for those less fortunate than themselves. These activities are taken seriously and pupils discuss their plans with the Bursar - a good preparation for the world of work.

Main lesson themes include the study of the festivals of other major world faiths, expanding pupils' understanding of religious belief. Similarly, extensive opportunities are created for pupils to explore the lives and heritages of other peoples, helping them to appreciate diversity and value the achievements of cultures other than their own.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' safety, health and welfare is outstanding. Their safety is secured through comprehensive policies which are assiduously implemented and regularly reviewed and updated. Risk assessments for school visits are carried out rigorously. All aspects of the child protection policy are thoroughly implemented.

Fire safety is given a high priority. All fire fighting equipment is routinely checked under contract. Detailed fire and general risk assessments have been carried out on both sites. There are sufficient trained first aiders on both sites.

Pastoral care and welfare are very good for all pupils. Staff know pupils well and careful thought and consideration is given to their individual needs. Being part of a class group over a long period of time creates a strong sense of belonging. Relationships are good. Pupils are friendly and cooperate with one another, contributing to the strong and supportive ethos of the school.

Healthy living and staying safe are fostered in the curriculum and reinforced from the early years, for example through the preparation and sharing of food at snack time. Younger pupils work regularly in a nearby allotment, learning first-hand about producing healthy food. Pupils understand the potential dangers to their health from tobacco and illegal drugs. Similarly, the importance of exercise is learned early, with some pupils expressing regret that the main school site unavoidably limits the opportunities for more extensive sport.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has effective procedures for the recruitment and checking of prospective staff, including checks through the Criminal Records Bureau.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is on two sites about half a mile apart: one accommodates the main school and one the kindergarten. Both are large residential properties which, though not ideally suited to school premises, have been suitably adapted.

In the main school, specialist rooms are fully exploited to enhance learning. Staff also make very good use of the accommodation in the kindergarten to create welcoming and interesting learning environments.

Improvements have been carried out to the walled garden to provide a grassed outdoor play space, but there is little space for outdoor PE.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides an extensive range of good quality information for its parents and prospective parents. The importance of home and school working in partnership is emphasised and parents are encouraged to participate their children's learning.

The views of parents who responded to the questionnaire reflected overwhelming satisfaction with the school, which they consider is well run. They believe their children like coming to school, are taught effectively and make good progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements in full.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- refining planning so that the strategies to meet individual needs are precisely identified
- developing procedures to monitor teaching and learning so as to ensure more consistent provision and to share good practice in classroom management.

School details

Name of school	Bristol Steiner School		
DfES number	801/6011		
Unique reference number	109345		
Type of school	Primary and lower secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1973		
Age range of pupils	3-14 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 81	Girls: 72	Total: 153
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 24	Girls: 21	Total: 45
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,368- £4,416		
Address of school	Redland Hill House Redland Hill Bristol BS6 6UX		
Telephone number	0117933 9990		
Fax number	0117933 9999		
Email address	info@bristolsteinerschool.org		
Education co-ordinator	Mr Carter Nelson		
Chair of Trustees	Mr Omer Paker		
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew		
Dates of inspection	9-10 May 2007		