

Greenwich Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	203/6299
Unique Reference Number	132066
Inspection number	301530
Inspection dates	15-16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Bradley HMI

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

Greenwich Steiner School was established in 1999 in the basement of St George's Church in Blackheath, South East London. More recently it has also rented part of an Army Cadet Force base in Blackheath. At present the three Kindergarten classes work in the Church, whilst the Lower School classes are in the Army Cadet Force centre. The school is in the process of restoring a Grade II listed building close to the Kindergarten to provide a long term base for the Lower School.

The school aims to provide a Steiner Waldorf education to enable pupils to develop their learning and respect for others and for the natural world. The curriculum seeks to link learning to the child's stages of physical, mental and emotional development without introducing intellectual and conceptual thinking prematurely. The teaching aims to use art, music and practical activities to balance and enhance academic work and so enable the pupils to fulfil their potential and to support their continuing creativity.

In common with other Steiner schools, there is no headteacher, instead the Trustees are responsible for the legal, administrative and financial aspects of the school. The management group, which includes representatives of the teachers, has delegated functions for educational policies and for the development of the school ethos.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education and care provided at Greenwich Steiner School are good. The quality of the curriculum is also good, with several particularly strong features, although at present it is not possible to provide the full Steiner curriculum. Social skills are particularly well developed. Teaching is good overall and the pupils make satisfactory progress. The school meets nearly all the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education provided at Greenwich Steiner School is good. Due to the constraints of the present accommodation some aspects of the curriculum, mainly outdoor practical work in the Lower School, are limited; however, the overall curriculum is good with several particularly strong features. The three Kindergarten classes all focus upon developing the children's social skills by consistently using

patterns of activities for the day, the week and over the year. This approach is effective. It enables the children to develop particularly good consideration for one another, to learn to work and play together as well as to use their language skills to express ideas and emotions and to empathise with the feelings of others. In the Lower School, the use of specialist teachers for subjects such as modern foreign languages, handwork and music provides outstanding opportunities to extend the work covered by class teachers. The main lessons are based on themes which are developed over a period of several weeks. The themes include English and mathematics as well as a wide variety of other subjects. Class teachers show a good, and occasionally outstanding, knowledge of these themes and ways of developing them.

The quality of teaching is good. In a minority of lessons observed it was satisfactory and in a similar number it was outstanding. No inadequate lessons were seen. In the best lessons, effective planning and teaching meets the needs of all pupils, whether they are in a single age class or in classes containing several age groups. Teachers are well aware of the capabilities of individual pupils, although at times in the Lower School, the more able work on similar tasks to the rest of the class rather than being given work which will challenge them and extend their learning with teacher support. Such lessons are satisfactory overall. In the Kindergarten classes teachers support the children's activities well, providing a caring and well-organised environment in which the children are able to develop without formal learning. Throughout the school teaching makes good use of resources. These are adequate, although limited for some extension work for individual pupils. Specialist teaching frequently enthuses the pupils and the oral approach to teaching French and German, and practical lessons, such as knitting, involve all pupils successfully.

Assessment is based upon a mixture of teacher devised tests, on-going assessments and profiles, as well as verbal feedback to pupils. This is satisfactory, although it tends to focus on personal and social development rather than identifying pupils' individual progress in gaining skills and knowledge. The approach accords with the school's Steiner Waldorf philosophy, but direct comparisons with national expectations for achievement are not possible. Some parents expressed concern that the transfer to other schools, currently at the end of Year 7, might pose difficulties if the transfer was not addressed sooner and more directly.

In the lessons seen most pupils made good progress. In some it was outstanding. However progress over time is less clearly developed and is uneven between pupils with different capabilities. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress. Their social skills, their verbal skills and ability to apply these in mature discussions are often outstanding. In some cases the more able make particularly good progress in specific areas, such as where main lesson themes encourage them to extend their skills and knowledge by appealing to their own interests, or where specialist teaching challenges them in specific subjects.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their social development is often outstanding, largely as a result of the consistently high standards sought by all the adults in the school. From the Kindergarten classes, pupils show consideration for others and the capacity to understand how others might feel. Attendance is good, as is behaviour. Both boys and girls show good attitudes towards learning. They enjoy their education and helping one another. When given the opportunity, they have raised funds for another Steiner school and they are aware of ways in which they can contribute to the school community, such as the older pupils acting as good role models for younger ones. This is evident both in class and during outside play sessions; however, opportunities to take other responsibilities are limited at present. Taken as a whole, pupils' moral and social development is a particular strength of the school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school promotes the welfare, health and safety of the pupils particularly effectively and this aspect of its work is good. The pupils commented that they felt particularly safe as a result of being in what they regard as a caring community where the adults provide outstanding support. The school has clear policies and practices on healthy eating and ways of staying healthy. Again the pupils are aware of these and follow them. Appropriate policies and practices are in place to minimise health and safety risks. During the inspection part of the Lower School premises had to be evacuated due to drainage problems. The school acted quickly to prepare for possible early closure, and although the problems were solved before this was required, procedures were applied efficiently.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school makes appropriate checks on all staff before they work with children. Where staff are foreign nationals, care is taken to ensure that evidence of their qualifications and background is obtained.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is in the process of acquiring new premises which will address many of the relatively minor shortcomings of its present accommodation. At present the Lower School provision for children who are unwell does not meet the regulations. The school has identified this and intends that the new premises will meet requirements. Both of the current premises enable pupils to learn effectively and safely, both indoors and out.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school is in the process of updating its information packs and prospectus. At present all the necessary information is provided, but it is in several documents rather than in a single pack. A minority of parents felt that the annual reports and the parents' meetings tend to give general information on the themes and lessons covered, rather than focussing on individual pupils' progress; however, this was not seen as a major issue by most parents.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints procedure is clear and is available to parents and carers. It fully meets the regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of that listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

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:

- ensure that work is more specifically planned for different abilities especially in mixed age classes, and that teaching and assessment takes account of this; and
- discuss with pupils and their parents and carers the transition from Greenwich Steiner School to the pupils' next schools earlier in the final year.

School details

Name of school	Greenwich Steiner School		
DfES number	203/6299		
Unique reference number	132066		
Type of school	Steiner		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	3-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 46	Girls: 35	Total: 81
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 22	Girls: 15	Total: 37
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of looked after children	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils) Kindergarten	£3450		
Lower School	£4490		
Address of school	Hollyhedge House Wat Tyler Road Blackheath London SE3 0QZ		
Telephone number	020 8691 9823		
Fax number	020 8691 9823		
Email address	admin@greenwichsteinerschool.org.uk		
Administrator	Ms T Chapman		
Proprietor	Greenwich Steiner School Limited		
Reporting inspector	Martin Bradley HMI		
Dates of inspection	15-16 May 2007		