

York Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES registration number	816/ 6008
Unique reference number	121759
Inspection number	307266
Inspection dates	19 – 20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection of the school 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

York Steiner School is a long-established independent co-educational day school with 191 pupils aged between three years six months to 14. There are 18 children receiving nursery funding. The quality of this provision was also inspected and is reported separately at the end of this report. Admission is non-selective. There are three Kindergarten classes for three to six years olds and the Main school for pupils in classes 1 to 8. In line with normal Steiner practice there is no headteacher; the College of Teachers is responsible for the educational provision. A Management Council made up of parents and friends manage the school. The administrator is in charge of day-to-day running of the school.

The school's curriculum and teaching are inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as expressed through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The school's main aim is 'to recognise the inner development of the child and seek to nourish it with appropriate experiences at each stage, through a wide ranging curriculum.'

Evaluation of the school

Parents are very keen on York Steiner School. One referred to it as 'a complete treasure.' Another noted: 'I cannot praise the school enough...my children are confident, well motivated, independent children who are knowledgeable about learning and value it'. It is indeed a good school, with a distinctive character and it provides a good quality of education and care. As a result of good learning and teaching using the good Steiner curriculum, and high quality relationships which value pupils as individuals, they make good progress. According to one older pupil this is 'a certain kind of school' and pupils report that they enjoy their school life. Parents are committed and fully involved in the whole life of the school. This is the first inspection of the school under s162A of the Education Act 2005 and there are a number of regulations they do not meet.

Quality of education

The Steiner curriculum used in the school is good and aims to develop each individual's potential. In the Kindergarten the curriculum for the younger children is planned around their developmental needs using the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage and they make good progress. The core of the curriculum for the classes from Years 1 to 8 is the 'main' lesson, with the Steiner Waldorf themes

determining the focus. The main lesson lasts for two hours each morning and themes, based on subjects such as English, mathematics, science, geography or history last for three to four weeks. Currently pupils are studying The Life and Times of Saints, Ancient Greek Civilisation, the local area of York and Whitby; European geography, drama, English and mathematics. While focusing on one subject, the themes provide a centre around which learning in other subject areas is planned, helping pupils to establish links between them. From an early age handwork, woodwork, French, German, music, religious education, eurythmy (an art of movement), art, gardening and physical education are taught. There are additional key skills lessons in mathematics and English from class 4 onwards and drama in classes 7 and 8. Part-time specialist staff teach some of these subjects. Music is a very important part of the curriculum. Pupils learn to play the recorder from an early age; older pupils often learn to play an instrument of their choice with some lessons held at school. For example in class 4, all pupils are learning to play the violin. Singing is given a strong emphasis throughout the school and is of a high standard. Music is promoted consistently from the early years through the learning of rhymes, verses and songs. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is not timetabled separately but is effectively taught through 'circle time' at the beginning of the main lesson. The pupils in Classes 7 and 8 move on to study some aspects of the National Curriculum, for example information and communication technology in preparation for the next stage of their education. They are given advice on future careers and undertake an annual trip abroad. They have recently spent over two weeks in Iceland, linked to a school. They demonstrated their grasp of Icelandic by singing a song in the language, which they had learnt in preparation for this trip, with gusto and technical expertise. Pupils who need additional help are well supported.

The quality of learning and teaching throughout the school, including the Foundation Stage, is good with some outstanding features particularly in drama and music. The staff are all fully immersed in the Steiner philosophy and deeply committed to it. In line with this philosophy they respect each pupil as an individual and provide for their learning needs through their aims of developing the 'whole child.' For example during a drama lesson with senior pupils they were given the opportunity to interpret their work and develop their own response. The teachers are constantly asking questions to encourage pupils to think and they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The main lesson begins with 'circle time' where pupils have the opportunity to recite verses, sing songs and celebrate seasonal events. It can also include some mental arithmetic. Pupils of all ages respond positively, are eager to take part and make valuable contributions to the group activity. Pupils enjoy their school life; it is planned that they have the same teacher throughout the school. The older pupils report that 'we like the way we learn' and 'our teachers know us really well.' They say that they like having the same teacher and thrive under their care. Relationships are very strong and younger pupils report that 'I like my teacher; she helps me.' The majority of pupils are good, committed learners. In some less effective lessons, pupils are not fully engaged with the task and waste time. This happens when teachers do not recognise the limits of pupils' concentration or do not give them sufficiently challenging work.

Current procedures for the assessment of pupils' learning are inadequate in classes 1 to 8. The assessment of the younger children's learning is good. The school has established the first stages of an assessment procedure but this must now be developed against agreed criteria and used to plan learning and teaching.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with some outstanding features in personal development. The pupils become confident, mature young people who are prepared well for the next stage of their education. Pupils at York Steiner school are highly valued as individuals, very well known to the staff and each other and regard themselves as part of a large, welcoming 'family'. They thrive under the care of the staff and increase their self-confidence and esteem from an early age. Independence is encouraged with pupils as young as three getting themselves ready for playtime. Playtimes are fun and pupils have many opportunities to explore and investigate in the interesting play areas. The pupils' behaviour is boisterous in some cases but overall they behave well. They know the difference between right and wrong and follow the informal school rules. They take part in community activities and each year raise funds for the Waldorf One World Day, which supports a range of charities. Through the main lessons, pupils are becoming well informed about how society works. For example one class is currently studying the local environment covering many aspects, including local government. Pupils from all backgrounds are treated and respected as individuals. Through the curriculum pupils study other faiths and cultures and seasonal events are celebrated. For example the younger children are looking forward to the midsummer celebrations. Pupils are encouraged to take part in drama and enjoy performing; the older pupils are currently preparing for the end of term play.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Overall the school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils, and they are fully aware of some safety issues, which they plan to rectify with regard to the premises. Health and safety and behaviour policies are implemented effectively. The school is aware of the latest guidance for safeguarding children and staff have received up to date training in safeguarding matters. The school is vigilant with regard to fire safety. All areas of the school are assessed for potential risks, as are visits outside school. Staff are trained in first aid, well-stocked first aid boxes are located where needed, and accidents are recorded diligently. Pupils are well supervised at all times. The school's attendance registers are not kept according to current regulations. The school has a policy with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 but has yet to devise a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for checking staff and other adults to ensure their suitability to work with children meet all current requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The school is located in a large, former secondary school. It does not currently have appropriate facilities where pupils, who fall ill, may rest whilst waiting to be collected by parents. The school is planning a major refurbishment in the near future and such a room is part of the planning. The classrooms are of an adequate size for the teaching groups but some are in need of care and attention and cleanliness in classrooms and corridors is variable. The quality of decoration is inadequate in some areas, notably external window frames and a small number of classrooms. There are a number of uneven floor surfaces and floor coverings. The outdoor play area used by the younger pupils has a broken fence; the rails at ground level covering a space above the basement adjacent to this area are unsafe and some grass areas have a very uneven surface.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents, carers and others with a good range of information through the prospectus, handbook, website and fortnightly newsletter. These give them a clear overview of the school's aims and curriculum. As part of the Steiner philosophy, the parents are very involved in the life of the school and many help on a day-to-day basis. They are given an annual report on their child's progress and meet regularly with the staff. The parents of the Kindergarten children feel that they are given extensive information on their children, this may be through spending more time in school with their children. The vast majority of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelming supportive of the school. Some did not feel that they had enough information on their child's progress and did not know about the complaints procedures. Many made comments on the school such as 'her mind, heart and soul are nurtured and stimulated...and she blossoms at this school', another noted 'it prepares young people for a full, well-balanced and happy life.'

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures, which meet the regulations, and the school is taking steps to ensure that all parents are aware of them.

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 those listed below.

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

- extend the current framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use this information to plan future teaching (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- maintain the attendance registers in line with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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

- provide appropriate facilities for children who are ill in accordance with the *Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999* (paragraph 5(l))
- ensure that there is a satisfactory level of decoration throughout the school (paragraph 5(q))
- ensure that all flooring is in good condition (paragraph 5(s))
- ensure that the play area for the younger children is of a satisfactory standard by replacing the fence, making the ground less uneven and installing suitable coverings for the basement area (paragraph 5(t)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

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 all areas of the school are tidy and clean.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The nursery provision is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff promote personal, social and emotional development, physical development and creative development very successfully. Staff have attended training on the

Foundation Stage and observations are recorded in a 'Foundation Stage Profile'. Planning is organised into areas of learning but does not identify the stepping stones towards the early learning goals. Staff review their practice regularly and are aware of some of the gaps in the usual early years curriculum. In line with Steiner philosophy some learning opportunities are introduced to children only after the age of seven years. As a consequence children do not currently link letters to sounds or recognise numerals, and opportunities to access information and communication technology are limited.

Staff are enthusiastic, motivated and interested in children. Children and staff spontaneously sing in the calm, relaxed environment. Children play with large and small natural wooden materials and resources in an unhurried learning environment. They enjoy very good circle time and take part in action rhymes. In drama sessions children develop self-confidence and esteem. Children explore the natural world around them in the outdoor play area and use their imagination to construct vehicles from planks, tyres and crates. They dig channels in the large sand area and have fun as they add water and watch their feet sinking.

There is a strong emphasis on learning through repetition, rhythm and child initiated play. Children with learning difficulties receive effective support from staff who work closely with professionals and parents to meet their individual needs. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Staff create a soothing environment, and children are well behaved. Staff and older children are good role models for younger children. Staff praise and encourage children's achievements.

The leadership and management of the group is good. They have made progress since the last inspection and use self appraisal to monitor the effectiveness of teaching. The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents are very involved in the setting and are very well informed about their children's and the groups achievements through individual letters, notices and parents meetings.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality and standard of the nursery education the registered person should take into account the following recommendations:

- develop opportunities for children to show an interest in information and communication technology
- develop opportunities for children to link letters to sounds and recognise numerals
- further develop planning to ensure the stepping stones towards the early learning goals are identified.

School details

Name of school	York Steiner		
DfES number	816/6008		
Unique reference number	121759		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY 245654		
Type of school	Steiner		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1980		
Age range of pupils	3.6-14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 62	Girls: 81	Total: 143
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 24	Girls: 24	Total: 48
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 11	Girls: 7	Total: 18
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees	Contributions of around £3,900		
Address of school	Danesmead Fulford Cross York YO10 4PB		
Telephone number	01904 654983		
Fax number	01904 654994		
Email address	Judy@yorksteinerschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Chair of College of Teachers		
Proprietor	Council of Management of York Steiner School		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Childcare inspector	Pauline Garfield		
Dates of inspection	19 – 20 June 2007		