

Brighton Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	846/6016
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Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth AI

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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Brighton Steiner school is an independent day school for up to 200 pupils aged three to 16 years. The school first opened in 1984 as a parents' initiative in a private home and has grown steadily since then. It moved to its current location on the outskirts of Brighton eight years ago. There are currently 190 pupils on roll. The school follows the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy and curriculum, in which the educational content of lessons is introduced in relation to the stages of child development. Pupils are taught through a very specific methodology to *'know and love the world and their fellow human beings'*. Pupils stay in the Kindergarten until the age of six or seven, after which they enter Class I of the school and are introduced to elements of academic learning. By the time pupils reach Classes IX and X, they follow GCSE courses within the overall Steiner-Waldorf curriculum experience. This is the first published inspection report for the school. Steiner's mission statement states that *'our highest endeavour must be to develop creative and responsible human beings who are able to deal with diverse situations and to direct their lives with purpose.'*

Evaluation of the school

The Brighton Steiner school provides a satisfactory quality of education and care for its pupils. It has a supportive, nurturing ethos and the pupils' personal development is central to its philosophy. This is a strength of the school and particularly evident in the Kindergarten classes, where the provision is good. The curriculum and teaching are satisfactory and closely follow the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy. Pupils make satisfactory academic progress, and their personal development is good. The school has made some improvements since its last inspection, but does not meet all the regulations for registration.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets regulations. It closely follows the Steiner-Waldorf guidance, which builds up pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding systematically as they mature. The provision in the Kindergarten is good. It provides very well for pupils' personal, social and emotional development, creative and physical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. Academic

learning is introduced at the age of seven in Class I, beginning with writing, then reading and number work. Subjects are taught through the creative arts and practical tasks. Pupils also learn French and German. The Main Lesson is a fundamental feature of Steiner education. It takes up most of the mornings and covers literacy, numeracy, history, geography, music and science through integrated topics. No textbooks are used in the first few years, and all class work is teacher-led. Specialist subject teaching along increasingly 'traditional' lines is introduced as pupils get older. The curriculum provides well for pupils' creative skills and personal development, and pupils make good progress in these aspects.

Teaching varies from outstanding to inadequate. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory as it is limited by several factors and, as a consequence, does not meet all of the regulations. Many individual teachers show very good teaching skills. In the best lessons, teaching is vibrant, interesting and provides good academic and personal challenge. Pupils concentrate, behave very well and achieve a great deal. They take great pride in the presentation of their work. The main weakness in teaching is the lack of suitable work and insufficient challenge for the higher attaining pupils, especially in more academic lessons. This is because the use of assessment and information on pupils' specific difficulties to match work to their needs is inadequate. Other weaknesses are occasional, but contribute to the overall picture of satisfactory teaching. For example, pupils often have to wait too long with nothing to do until all members of the class have arrived at the same point in learning. Teachers do not always make clear what pupils are to learn, and occasionally there is no structure and organisation to a lesson. Lessons do not always start on time, and pupils do not always know what group they are in when classes are split for different subjects. Management of pupils' behaviour is sometimes poor, and older pupils, particularly, do not conform to the teachers' expectations and requests, and show a casual disregard for them.

Pupils make satisfactory academic progress. Their skills, knowledge and understanding develop steadily. However, their progress is not better for a number of reasons. The curriculum policy and schemes of work are all provided by the Steiner-Waldorf methodology, but teachers do not always interpret them to meet individuals' needs. Planning relates to what teachers will cover, rather than what pupils will learn. Although pupils' specific difficulties might be identified, teachers do not always use suitable strategies to support them in their everyday work. The youngest pupils in the main school only have 19 hours schooling a week, which is considerably less than recommended for their age. This was noted in the last inspection. Older pupils do not always engage in lessons as well as the younger ones. This is sometimes because of teachers' unsuccessful management of their behaviour, and sometimes due to insufficient challenge and interesting content. While the curriculum covers all required aspects, some subjects are dependent upon the employment of suitably qualified staff. This situation currently adversely affects elements of design and technology, music and eurythmy. The range of accreditation for 16-year olds is limited to full GCSEs, which does not provide well for pupils of lower academic standards.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. This is a reflection of the emphasis placed on this area by the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy and practice. The emphasis on whole-group activities, social interaction, and healthy, environmentally aware lifestyles and practices underpins pupils' personal development. It promotes their self-esteem and prepares them well for making a positive contribution to the community. Most pupils develop good social skills and a sense of responsibility. The pupils are full of self-confidence, and are generally caring of one another. Morality, including issues of right and wrong, is addressed in age-appropriate ways throughout the curriculum. For example, pupils in Class I learn about moral issues through fairy tales and in Class VIII through studying revolutions. In addition, each class has a programme of lessons in religion which, over the years, examines the qualities of different religious beliefs and the lives of individuals who have inspired others.

Most pupils show clearly that their moral development is good, but the picture is spoiled by the behaviour of some older pupils who can show an over-casual attitude and lack of respect for teachers and learning. Nevertheless, behaviour is satisfactory overall. It is outstanding in the Kindergarten, and good in most of the rest of the school. The clear enjoyment of school by most pupils lessens in the three oldest classes. Attendance is unsatisfactory overall, and poor for the oldest pupils. This is sometimes due to parents taking their children out of school for holidays in term time. Pupils' cultural development is good and is promoted very well through the arts curriculum and ethos. This is evident in pupils' good art GCSE grades and the outstanding presentation of work in many pupils' books. The annual curriculum cycles and rhythms are based on cultural festivals, supported by play acting, which is an important feature of the Steiner curriculum. The curriculum and ethos of the school effectively support pupils' racial tolerance and multicultural understanding.

Pupils are prepared well for making a positive contribution to the community and achieving economic well-being as adults. They learn about looking after the global community through composting, gardening and farming in different countries. All pupils contribute to social and cultural events within and outside school, especially festivals and drama productions. They raise money for charities such as Children in Need, perform for the elderly and assist in the preparation and serving of meals to homeless people. Pupils learn the key skills needed for further education and adult life, and develop an understanding of public institutions and services and their contribution to a democratic society. Main Lessons include business mathematics and running a small business initiative and the lifeskills curriculum contributes well to this area. All pupils learn French and German, which prepares them very well for work in the European Union.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the pupils is satisfactory. The Steiner principles place a strong emphasis on promoting the health and personal development of the pupils, and this aspect of the school's work is good. The school provides healthy food and encourages parents to provide similarly for pupils' packed lunches. Preparing and eating wholesome organic food is part of the curriculum for pupils in the Kindergarten. Baking bread is, for example, a weekly activity. Pupils are encouraged to walk to school and play outside in the fresh air. Many lessons are multi-sensory and encourage learning through practical activities such as eurythmy and investigative mathematics. The curriculum specifically supports a healthy life style, and includes learning about farming and gardening. Watching television and using computer games are actively discouraged. The parents' and pupils' questionnaire returns show overwhelmingly that pupils feel safe at the Brighton Steiner School.

The practices to support the welfare, health and safety of the pupils are underpinned by a number of policies. These are generally implemented effectively. For example, risk assessments are completed appropriately, bullying is dealt with swiftly and staff are trained in matters such as fire safety and child protection. Nevertheless, several of the policies have not been written with regard to the latest guidance required, and do not fully meet regulations. Attendance registers are not kept in accordance with requirements; this was an issue identified in the previous two inspections. The admission register does not hold all the required details, and the school does not have a three-year plan showing how it intends to increase the accessibility of the building and curriculum to pupils with disabilities.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

A range of checks is made on staff prior to confirmation of their appointment, and these include enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff are not left alone with pupils if there is any delay in receiving these checks back. The checks are kept appropriately in a single central record. All regulations are met.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are of adequate quality and provide a safe and effective learning environment for the pupils. The building was previously used as a hospice and some adaptations have been made to improve the accommodation. Most of the classrooms are furnished and floored using natural wood, in keeping with the Steiner philosophy of using natural materials wherever possible. Parents and staff decorated the classrooms and public areas themselves. However, some of the décor and flooring is now in a poor state and does not meet two of the regulations. The school has made good use of attached outbuildings for woodcraft and pottery, but the pottery is very small and can only be used by a limited number of pupils at a time. The grounds are attractive and naturally divided

into different areas for differing sorts of outdoor play and activities, such as composting, willow weaving, quiet reflection, and games. The Kindergarten playground has recently been refurbished and provides an attractive, safe, interesting variety of activities including gardening, sand play, adventurous play and a wild life pond.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information meets regulations. The school has a suitable prospectus which comprises a number of loose-leaf documents contained in a professionally produced folder. The documentation includes an indication of additional information and policies that are available on request. The school has an attractive and informative web-site which covers many aspects of its work and contains further information about the school and Steiner education. The inspection questionnaires indicate that parents are mostly happy with the quality of information they receive about their children's progress, and annual reports are of adequate quality. Parents are kept informed about school events by contact with staff, posters, direct notification, and through the rhythmic cycle of events and celebrations that are a natural part of the Steiner methodology.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, fair complaints procedure. It is available to parents on request and meets regulations.

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 provision of education (standard 1) and must:

- plan lessons to meet individuals' needs, use effective teaching methods and suitable activities, and manage time wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- develop a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (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:

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance *Bullying: don't suffer in silence* (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DCSF guidance *Health and safety of pupils on educational visits* (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- maintain admission and attendance registers in accordance 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:

- improve the standard and maintenance of decoration in classrooms, offices and public areas (paragraph 5(q))
- improve the condition and fabric of the flooring (paragraph 5(s)).

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

School details

Name of school	Brighton Steiner School Limited		
DCSF number	846/6016		
Unique reference number	114661		
Type of school	Rudolf Steiner School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1 September 1984		
Age range of pupils	3-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 87	Girls: 103	Total: 190
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 5	Total: 11
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 2	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,005-£7,287		
Address of school	John Howard House Roedean Road Brighton East Sussex BN2 5RA		
Telephone number	01273 386300		
Fax number	01273 386313		
Email address	admin@brightonsteinerschool.org.uk		
Business Manager	Mr Damian Mooncie		
Proprietor	Brighton Steiner School Council of Trustees		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth AI		
Dates of inspection	13-14 November 2007		