

# Rudolf Steiner School South Devon

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	878/6029
Unique Reference Number	113603
Inspection number	316952
Inspection dates	12-13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton 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

Rudolf Steiner School South Devon is an independent, co-educational school for pupils aged three to 16. It opened in 1980. There are currently 289 pupils on roll. The school supports pupils with a statement of special educational need. Admission is non-selective. There is a nursery and three kindergarten classes for children aged three to six and the main school for pupils in classes 1 to 10 (ages seven to 16 years). During the inspection, classes 9 and 10 were away from school on residential educational visits. In line with normal Steiner practice there is no headteacher. Mandate holders have responsibility for running the school. Of these, the principal contacts for parents are the administration co-ordinator and the education co-ordinator.

The curriculum is inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. The school's aim is to impart to the pupils values such as confidence, self-motivation, creativity, an appetite for learning, an ability to work with others, practical skills, tolerance towards others and an ability to adapt and meet change.

## Evaluation of the school

Rudolf Steiner School South Devon is a distinctive school where pupils make good progress. This is a good school, providing a good quality of education and care. The Steiner curriculum is effectively implemented and is well taught. The philosophy places emphasis on pupils' personal development, which is fostered very well and supported by strong pastoral care. According to one pupil this is '*a laid back kind of school*' and pupils report that they very much 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 small number of regulations that are not met.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. These include the introduction of a modern foreign language from an early age where pupils make rapid progress and the very effective use of the outdoor environment to promote in pupils an awareness of the world around them. This contributes strongly to pupils' overall social development and is in line with the Steiner approach to developing

practical skills. In the nursery and kindergarten classes the curriculum is securely planned and based on play and outdoor, seasonal exploration of the natural world, which is suitable for their age and development, giving all children the opportunity to develop their individual talents. The core of the curriculum for classes 1 to 10 is the *main lesson* with the Steiner-Waldorf themes determining the focus. The main lesson usually lasts for two hours daily and a given theme for about three to four weeks. While focusing on one subject, the themes provide a centre around which learning in other subject areas is effectively planned, helping pupils to make links between subjects. A wide range of subjects makes up the rest of the curriculum. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught to some older pupils and the school has a small ICT suite. Music is promoted consistently from the early years through the learning of rhymes, verses and songs. Pupils learn to play the recorder from an early age. Personal, social and health education is not timetabled separately but is effectively taught. The older pupils study for the GCSE in English literature and language, mathematics, German and French and achieve commendable results. Frequent day and residential visits further enhance the curriculum.

The learning and teaching are good, resulting in good progress. The staff have a detailed understanding of the Steiner curriculum and have the confidence to interpret it effectively. Overall the lessons are carefully planned and teachers' subject knowledge in most of the lessons is good. The relationships between staff and pupils are strong and contribute to a purposeful and enjoyable learning environment. In the most effective lessons pupils are fully engaged in learning, the work is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, their concentration level is high, lessons move at a brisk pace and behaviour is good. Teachers are good at extending pupils' speaking and listening skills through class discussion and the ethos of the school is to listen to each individual's contribution. In a minority of lessons some pupils go off task for part of the time, mainly because of insufficient planning, some lack of challenge for the more able and limited opportunities to work independently. In these lessons some pupils took the opportunity to misbehave. Classes are of mixed ability and provision for the full range of pupils' attainment is evident in most lessons.

Assessment of pupils' progress is satisfactory; staff make frequent informal assessments of pupils' learning and have a clear idea of their understanding. The main lessons are assessed at the end of each theme and this information is used to plan future work. The school has recently introduced standardised forms of assessment and now plans to extend this, in order to ensure greater consistency across the curriculum. Parents are given a detailed annual report, which gives a well rounded account of their children's achievements but does not give sufficient information about what they have learnt and what they need to do next to improve. In the pre-inspection questionnaire some parents expressed the view that they were not kept sufficiently well informed about their child's progress. They have regular formal meetings and can request to meet teachers if they wish. Pupils who need additional help progress well because of well-informed support from the school's learning support team.

Children in the nursery and kindergarten classes make good progress in their social, emotional and creative development and in their speaking and listening skills. The younger classes provide a good quality, interesting learning environment. The assessment method, using a profile for younger children, provides comprehensive information.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils' is outstanding and a strength of the school. Pupils 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. Pupils' attendance is good and they enjoy school and report *'we do lots of different things...I like school...we have to work hard but if you can't do it you are helped'*. They all mix very well together and there is a very strong community spirit. Pupils' behaviour is good and the school has recently placed increased emphasis on pupils taking responsibility for their own behaviour. The simple school rules are adhered to and the staff set very good role models which pupils respect. As they move up the school pupils gain in confidence and maturity and are able to communicate well with adults.

The outdoor environment is used very effectively to promote not only skills such as gardening and woodworking but as an integral part of the extended classroom. Pupils enjoy the freedom of exploration in the extensive grounds while under the watchful supervision of the staff. They especially enjoy the freedom of the outdoor areas saying *'the grounds are massive and great fun... gardening is my favourite thing'*. Through the main lessons pupils are becoming well informed about how society works. Through the RE curriculum pupils study other faiths and religions and seasonal events are celebrated. Pupils from all backgrounds are treated and respected as individuals.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Overall, the school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. The school health and safety officer has worked diligently to ensure that the school premises and equipment are all in a safe condition, although the school has identified that there are still some areas of the school in need of additional attention. Health and safety and behaviour policies are implemented effectively and pupils are well cared for. There is a trained child protection officer at the school and all staff are fully aware of recent guidance to ensure the safety of pupils. The school attendance and admission registers are kept according to regulations. The school is aware of its responsibilities towards the Disability Discrimination Act and has taken practical steps to address this, but it has not yet written a three-year plan to show how it will comply with the regulations.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has robust procedures in place to check the suitability of staff to work with children and has put in place comprehensive appointment procedures for recent appointments.

## School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The whole site covers over six acres in an idyllic rural setting surrounded by open countryside. The school is held in a range of buildings, the main one being a listed Manor house. Until recently most of the classes were located in this building. The school has recently undertaken a programme of rebuilding and has erected a new classroom block, which includes a large hall. The main toilet block in the Manor house is now inappropriately located and there are plans to rectify this. The nursery and kindergarten pupils are in two purpose built timber framed buildings with their own dedicated garden, which are very well equipped for outdoor imaginative play. The use of cloth hand towels in these classrooms does not meet hygiene requirements. Most areas of the school are made attractive and maintained sufficiently to a satisfactory standard. However, there are still some areas in the grounds in need of care and attention. The school does not currently have suitable facilities for pupils who are ill.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents, carers and others with a good range of information. There is an attractive brochure setting out the aims of the school and the Steiner curriculum. Further information is available on the school's comprehensive website and there are helpful notice boards and a weekly information sheet to keep parents up-to-date. The very large number of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. Most are active supporters of the school in practical ways, gardening, building, cooking and decorating. Comments such as *'this school is fantastic at integrating home and school life...we and the school are working together to educate our child'...* *'no other environment I know nurtures the whole individual within such a responsible contributing community'* testify to the parents' support and confidence in the school.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures, which meets the 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 premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the regulations (paragraph 5 (l))
- ensure that all areas of the school are maintained in a clean and tidy state (paragraph 5 (n))

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:

- introduce ICT for younger pupils.
- continue to extend procedures for assessment and ensure that parents are kept informed about what their child has learnt and what they need to do to improve.

## School details

Name of school	Rudolf Steiner School South Devon		
DCSF number	878/6029		
Unique reference number	113603		
Type of school	Steiner		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1980		
Age range of pupils	3-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 106	Girls: 133	Total: 239
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 29	Total: 50
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees	Requested contributions in the range of £3060 - £4560		
Address of school	Hood Manor Dartington Totnes Devon TQ9 6AB		
Telephone number	01803 762528		
Fax number	01803 762528		
Email address	<a href="mailto:enquiries@steiner-south-devon.org">enquiries@steiner-south-devon.org</a>		
Educational Co-ordinator	Mr Alan Swindell		
Proprietor	Association of Rudolf Steiner School South Devon		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	12-13 September 2007		