

Cambridge Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	873/6029
Unique Reference Number	131937
Inspection number	320733
Inspection dates	5-6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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 Cambridge Steiner School is an independent day school currently catering for 101 children aged three to 11 years. The five main school classes have around 11 children in each, and the remainder attend the three Kindergartens on a part-time basis. The school also provides after-school care for some children. The school first opened as a Kindergarten in 1994, and as older children have been enrolled, it moved premises several times to accommodate them. The school has now purchased its own premises, a large redundant special school in Fulbourn on the outskirts of Cambridge. It has functioned from these premises since January 2008. Two of the Kindergarten classes are situated there, and a third has been based in a community centre in Ross Street, Cambridge since October half-term 2007.

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. Children are taught through a very specific methodology to 'know and love the world and their fellow human beings'. Children stay in the Kindergarten until the age of six or seven years, after which they enter the school and are introduced to elements of academic learning. The Kindergartens were last inspected in July 2004, the after-school care in September 2005, and the school itself was last inspected in March 2003. This is the main school's first published report. Steiner's mission statement says:

'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 school provides good quality education. The curriculum and teaching are good and closely follow the Steiner-Waldorf guidance and philosophy. Pupils make good progress and their standards are generally average or above in English and arithmetic by the age of 11 years. The school promotes pupils' personal development effectively and it is good. However, although pupils are well supported and nurtured, the school does not provide adequately for their health, safety and welfare. Many of its policies and practices do not meet the regulations for registration. A number of these were noted in previous inspections and have not been adequately addressed.

Quality of education

Parents are generally very pleased with the school, and the good quality education it provides. They say, for example, 'I have always felt I couldn't have made a better decision about my son's education' and 'He is seen as a unique individual invested with skills, talents and abilities which the staff value as much as his academic skills and progress.'

The curriculum is good and meets the regulations for registration. The main school takes the content of its work directly from the published Steiner-Waldorf documentation. The school's planning is at its best in the Kindergartens, where it is good and links well with the national Foundation Stage curriculum. Throughout the school, the curriculum builds up children's skills, knowledge and understanding systematically as they mature. The Main Lesson is a fundamental feature of Steiner-Waldorf education. It takes up half of the mornings and covers all the subjects through integrated topics. Single subjects are taught during the rest of the day. No textbooks are used, although there are reading books available, and there is no information and communication technology as this is not used in Steiner education until children are older. Children have the opportunity to use technological skills to design and build in other contexts. The provision for their personal and creative development is particularly strong. Children make good progress within this context.

Teaching is good. It is consistently good in the Kindergartens where it combines a homely, nurturing approach with activities to support the consistent development of children's skills. Teachers throughout the school have good subject knowledge and teach the Steiner curriculum effectively. Teaching is traditionally teacher-led using a minimum of resources. The quality of lesson planning is variable, but is generally insufficiently detailed. It does not provide clear learning objectives, or an outline of work for children of different ability. Nevertheless, classes are small, relationships are good and teachers know each individual very well so their needs are usually well met. At times, children working at a faster rate have to wait too long with nothing focused to do until their peers catch up, which wastes learning time. The best lessons are challenging, lively, well-paced, and full of humour and fun. The needs of children of differing ability are well-considered. For example, in one mathematics lesson, the teacher worked with two children who were still mastering the concept of fractions; the majority were completing a worksheet on the lowest common denominator, and those who had finished had mental arithmetic problems to complete.

Children make good progress. Although literacy and numeracy are introduced late in comparison to their mainstream peers, their skills develop quickly. Children make good progress in speaking and listening. These qualities are supported by the curriculum in general, the teaching approach and sessions dedicated to performing plays and 'speech.' Two regulations relating to the assessment of children's developing skills are not met. The Steiner philosophy does not include assessment by

testing against national norms and benchmarks. However, the school does not take advantage of helpful planning and assessment formats that are found in Steiner guidance that could support planning for progress. Individual teachers may use some of these, but the school has no policy about assessment, or about planning for learning. Children's work is not marked, as such, although it is regularly reviewed by the teachers and self-marked by the children themselves. However, the information is not always used effectively to adapt teaching in the next lesson.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The children's 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 the school's good practice in implementing it. From their first days in the Kindergarten, children develop good moral and social skills. They are tolerant and accepting of one another, and make a good contribution to the school community although their contribution to the local and wider communities, for example by addressing conservation, is more limited. As children mature, the curriculum supports their developing understanding of different communities, civilisations and local and wider public institutions and services.

The children enjoy contributing to social and cultural events, especially the festivals and drama productions that play a strong part in the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum. The children are supportive of one another. They wait patiently for each other's turn in group activities and choose to work in pairs or small groups when they can. On one occasion, Class IV performed a play about Loki, and pupils were observed reciting the whole play under their breath and prompting each other on the few occasions that someone forgot their words. The children's behaviour and attitudes to school, learning and play are good. Morality, including issues of right and wrong, is addressed in age-appropriate ways throughout the curriculum. The children clearly enjoy school and their spiritual development is good. They are confident, try hard and are proud of their accomplishments.

Attendance is good although punctuality is an issue that has not been well-enough addressed by the school. Art, music and stories are important elements of the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum, and the school promotes cultural development effectively. Children's well-rounded personal development gives them a good foundation for their future adult lives, economic well-being and contribution to cultural tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the children is inadequate. This is largely to do with long-standing inadequate management systems. Work has recently begun to address these issues. The Steiner-Waldorf principles place a strong emphasis on promoting children's health and personal

development, and this aspect of the school's work is good. The curriculum specifically supports a healthy life-style, and includes learning about farming, the preparation of healthy food and gardening. Watching television and using computer games are actively discouraged. Parents provide healthy foods for packed lunches and the children play happily outside, following traditional childhood pursuits such as imaginative play and 'exploring'. The parents' questionnaire shows overwhelmingly that they think their children feel safe at the school.

However, this effective provision is not secure. Many of the policies to support the welfare, health and safety of the children are not written to current requirements and a number of regulations are not met. The attendance and admission register are not kept appropriately, and there is no policy on late arrivals. Some of these issues were identified in previous inspections. Furthermore, those policies and practices that do exist are not consistently implemented. There is no system by which the implementation and effectiveness of policies are monitored, and this depends too much on individual teachers' inclinations.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All adults are appropriately checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. However, an effective, standardised system for checking adults' other credentials and noting the outcome on a single central register has not been established, as required. A number of regulations are not met in this area.

School's premises and accommodation

The school has occupied its new premises for just two months. Staff have worked hard and successfully to make the classrooms as Steiner-friendly as possible, and they are spacious, calm, well-decorated spaces for learning. Some areas of the school have yet to be organised tidily, but these are not used by the children. The main school building is of good quality with excellent scope for development. The arrangements for children who are ill are currently inadequate on both sites. The main school has good grounds with a wealth of wooden adventure play resources amongst which children play with imagination. Parents have recently planted willow hedges to enhance the grounds further. The play space for children in the Ross Street Kindergarten is too small to allow children to play freely and safely, although the staff have done their best to enhance the space available.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has a prospectus and a parents' handbook which together provide some, but not all of the required information, and a number of regulations are not met. Inspection questionnaires indicate that some parents are not satisfied with the

information they receive about their children's progress. Parents are kept informed about school events by contact with staff, notices, detailed newsletters 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 grievance procedure to address parents' dissatisfactions; however, some parents said that they were unaware of it. The procedure does not meet several of 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 curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a framework by which pupils' work can be assessed regularly and thoroughly and ensure that the information from such assessment can be utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g))
- provide a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).

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* (DCSF 0064/2000) (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- prepare and implemented written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of children on activities outside the school which has regard to DCSF guidance *Health and safety of children on educational visits* (reference HSPV2) (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- prepare and implement a satisfactory written policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6))

- maintain an admissions register 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 suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references. This information should be taken into account in determining whether the appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- in relation to each member of staff in post on or after 1 August 2007, show on the register the checks made (and certificates obtained where relevant) of: his/her identity; qualifications (where required); whether an enhanced CRB was obtained, or where appropriate, that he/she is not working in contravention of section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (List 99); the right to work in the UK and, where relevant for those who have lived outside the UK, suitability to work in a school, including the date on which each such check was completed or the certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(2 and 3))
- in relation to each member of the body of persons named as the proprietor in post on or after 1 August 2007, show on the register whether a check was made of: his/her identity; right to work in the United Kingdom; and whether an enhanced CRB check was carried out and certificate obtained, or where appropriate, confirmation that he/she is not barred from working in school under section 142 of the Education Act 2002 The register must also show the date on which any check was completed or certificate obtained (paragraph 4C(6 and 7))
- keep the register in such a form, including kept electronic form, so that the information recorded is capable of being reproduced in legible form (paragraph 4C(9)).

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))
- improve the arrangements for providing outside space for pupils to play safely in the Ross Street Kindergarten (paragraph 5(t)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils particulars of the proprietors' name, and the address and telephone number of its registered or principal office (paragraph 6(2)(b))
- provide to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- provide to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- ensure that parents and others are aware they can request particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- ensure that parents and others are aware they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j))
- ensure that parents and others are aware they can request details of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- set out clear timescales for all stages of the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c))
- if the parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, make provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f))
- ensure that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
- allow for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h))
- provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations, and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors, head teacher and where relevant the person complained about, should be given copies of these (paragraph 7(i))
- provide for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- ensure that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are all kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

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	Cambridge Steiner School		
DCSF number	873/6029		
Unique reference number	131937		
Type of school	Rudolph Steiner School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	3-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 23	Girls: 32	Total: 55
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 32	Girls: 14	Total: 46
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,935 – 4,365		
Address of school	Hinton Road Fulbourn Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB21 5DZ		
Telephone number	01223 882727		
Email address	school@cambridge-steiner-school.co.uk		
Chair of the College of Teachers	Jonathan Kitson		
Proprietor	The Trustees of the Cambridge Steiner School		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	5-6 March 2008		