

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Limited

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	332/6000
Unique Reference Number	103876
URN for social care	SC025000
Inspection number	334309
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Marian Harker HMI
Social care inspector	Martha Nethaway

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). The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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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.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

This was a light touch educational inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School is situated in pleasant, semi-rural surroundings in Stourbridge, in the West Midlands. The school buildings comprise two large Victorian houses and purpose-built accommodation. The school was founded in 1946 and offers educational provision for pupils aged from 3 to 17 years. There are currently 271 pupils, including one boarder, on roll. The school is a member of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and closely follows the philosophy and principles of this movement. It is run by a College of Teachers assisted by a non-teaching administrator. The school is divided into an Early Years Foundation Stage department for children aged 3 to 6, a lower school for pupils aged 6 to 14, and an upper school for pupils aged 15 to 17. The school was last inspected by Ofsted and the Commission for Social Care Inspection in October 2006.

The school has applied for exemption from the reading, writing, elements of mathematical development, some elements of technology and assessment aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Hence these aspects were not inspected and no judgements are made. The school must teach all elements of the learning and development requirements unless exemption is granted by the Secretary of State.

Evaluation of the school

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School has improved since its last inspection and now provides a good standard of education for its pupils. The curriculum and teaching are good and closely follow the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. Pupils make good progress in this context. Assessment is satisfactory and meets the required regulations.

The school has a supportive, nurturing ethos and the pupils' personal development is good. The school meets most of the regulations for registration. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage and for boarding is judged to be satisfactory.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and meets all the regulations for registration. As a result the great majority of pupils make good progress. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and children make expected progress. The school has a clear curriculum statement and long-term plans are based on published Steiner Waldorf documentation. The curriculum from the lower school upwards covers English, mathematics, science, history, geography, religious education, French, German, art, music, design and technology, physical education and personal, social and health education. These subjects are taught in the main lesson, which is a fundamental feature of Steiner-Waldorf education and lasts for two hours each morning. Single subjects are taught during the rest of the day. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not taught until the pupils reach the upper school. However, there are many opportunities for pupils to use technological skills to design and build in other contexts such as handwork, woodwork, metalwork and building dens in the school grounds. Pupils report that they would like to be taught ICT earlier in the school. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of residential visits and regular opportunities to visit Steiner schools overseas. Guest speakers often visit the school. For example, older pupils have the opportunity to learn about the world of work, not only through work experience opportunities, but also through visits from a range of professionals. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, although parents and pupils report that they would appreciate more, particularly in sport.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is good overall. It ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and teach the Steiner Waldorf curriculum effectively. Lessons are usually led by a teacher, using a minimum of resources. Pupils enjoy their learning and increasingly are encouraged to work independently as they move through the school. For example, in a history lesson, pupils were encouraged to develop their report writing skills through role play. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported sensitively and work is closely matched to their needs. The quality of lesson planning is inconsistent. It is generally sufficiently detailed and the best examples have clear learning objectives and have considered outcomes for pupils of different abilities; however, this is not always the case. As class sizes are relatively small, teachers know their pupils very well, so that individual needs are usually met effectively.

The Steiner philosophy does not encourage assessment by testing against national norms and benchmarks. However, regular assessments are made of each pupil in relation to their acquisition of key skills and attitudes to learning. For example, detailed records are kept relating to their understanding, effort, engagement and independence.

In the upper school pupils are also assessed using GCSE grades. The quality of marking is uneven and pupils are not always aware of what they need to do to improve their work. The school is aware of the need to improve the marking of pupils' work. Although there is a regular homework timetable, pupils report that they would appreciate further guidance to help them understand the link between work covered in school and homework tasks. Assessment procedures are satisfactory and have improved since the last inspection.

Pupils make good progress in relation to their taught curriculum. Although their literacy and numeracy skills develop later in comparison to their mainstream peers, these develop steadily once they are introduced. Pupils make good progress in developing their creative skills. In GCSE examinations, pupils achieve standards above those found nationally in the large majority of subjects, particularly in French and German. As they move through the school pupils' speaking and listening skills develop well. This is supported by the curriculum and teaching sessions dedicated to performing plays and to the art of speech.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' personal development and well-being in the Early Years Foundation Stage and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the lower and upper school are 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. Pupils are polite, considerate and welcoming. They are tolerant and accepting of one another. Pastoral care, including boarding, is a strong feature of the school. Pupils all make a strong contribution to the school community through participating in a range of events and taking on responsibilities for keeping the environment tidy. As pupils move through the school, the curriculum supports their personal development and their understanding of different communities and civilisations. The school teaches pupils about local and wider public institutions and services. Pupils report that they enjoy contributing to social and cultural events, especially the festivals and drama productions that play a strong part in the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The school does not currently have a pupil council. Pupils report that they would appreciate the opportunity to make a greater contribution to the decision making and influence future developments. Their behaviour, enjoyment of and attitudes to school and learning are good. This is reflected in attendance rates which are currently above the national average for secondary schools. Pupils are prepared well for their next steps in education or employment and other local schools, to which some of them move, report favourably about Elmfield pupils' capabilities on entry.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The safeguarding of all pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils are supervised effectively in school and when they go out into the community. Risk assessments for the lower and upper schools are robust, although the quality of these assessments is uneven in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

All pupils report that they feel safe and are confident that staff will deal with any problems that may arise. The designated person for child protection has been trained to the appropriate standard and staff have undertaken child protection basic awareness training. The school has a satisfactory policy with regard to safeguarding, although it is not reviewed with sufficient regularity. Routine checks of fire systems and procedures are regularly carried out: however, the latest fire risk assessment has not been updated recently and as a result this regulation is not met. Pupils are aware of the importance of following a healthy lifestyle and parents are given helpful guidance for lunchbox contents. Pupils also enjoy learning how to cook healthy dishes in domestic science lessons and have regular opportunities to participate in a range of physical activities. All the regulations regarding the safe recruitment of staff to work with children are met. However, the school has not yet prepared a three-year accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. There were also some areas of concern identified in meeting the boarding requirements which the school should address. These are explained in the section on the effectiveness of boarding provision below.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children are cared for well within a warm and nurturing environment which contributes to their good personal development and behaviour. All adults help children to settle in quickly by providing a high level of individual support and reassurance. Links with parents are close and inspectors agree that children feel safe and happy. Parents are very pleased with the work of the school and their children obviously enjoy the time spent there. The school closely follows the curriculum guidance that has been issued by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. It is currently awaiting revised guidance that will help it to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage more closely. Generous levels of staffing pave the way for the effective development of children's language and social skills. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory and this is reflected in children's sound achievement and close, mutually trusting working relationships. They have good access to outdoor activities and this helps them to develop their physical skills and knowledge of other areas, such as elements of science as they watch the seasons pass. However, risk assessments for off-site visits undertaken within the Early Years Foundation Stage use a format that is different to the rest of the school and is not as robust. In addition, the safeguarding policy has not been reviewed sufficiently regularly.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The overall quality of boarding at Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School is satisfactory. Most of the National Minimum Standards are met. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school benefits from the presence of international pupils with good integration and inclusion being strong features of the school. Staff show strong regard for the safety, education and well-being of the pupils at all times.

Pupils receive good pastoral care which contributes positively to the support of their emotional, social and physical well-being. Medical treatment is thorough and efficient, and includes access to local doctors. Parents retain responsibility for their children's general welfare, such as check-ups with the dentist and opticians. There are a good range of opportunities for exercise and the outdoor facilities are used well. Pupils learn about the principles of healthy eating and are actively encouraged to take all available opportunities to prepare and cook meals in the school and in the boarding setting.

Staff are provided with a satisfactory level of guidance relating to safeguarding and the protection of children but the policy has not been updated regularly to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. The designated child protection leads are experienced and appropriately trained. However, whole-staff refresher training is infrequent.

Staff give good consideration to risk management. Risk assessments are completed for activities and off-site excursions which are organised effectively and promote a good safety conscious culture for pupils and staff. Staff complete regular fire evacuation drills and fire safety checks. However, a review of the school's risk assessment in relation to fire has not been conducted recently.

Pupils are able to enjoy their privacy and the principle of mutual respect is communicated well by staff. All pupils have their own rooms while living with the host families. They are able to keep in touch with their family and have regular access to telephones and the internet, as the school understands the value and importance of communication and contact with family and friends.

Pupils feel safe and secure with the host boarding families. Pupils can readily identify staff they can approach if they are concerned or worried. They know how they can make a complaint and information is accessible in the boarding handbook. Host families are sensitive and help pupils settle and agree acceptable boundaries with boarding routines which promotes good concern for their welfare. This helps them to become independent, responsible and mature individuals. Pupils are actively supported by the pastoral staff who meet once a week with them. Twice a term a formal meeting with pupils takes place to talk about issues of their choice. However, there are some shortfalls with the arrangements for the lodgings. For example, the school has not set in place a written agreement with each adult providing lodgings. Similarly, there are no clear arrangements by the school to visit all lodgings on an annual basis.

Pupils' behaviour is managed effectively. Bullying is not identified as a problem at the school. Relationships are respectful, courteous and harmonious.

Pupils commented that 'staff care for them'. Although the school's behaviour strategy policy has not been reviewed recently, pupils have a clear understanding of the expected standard of behaviour.

Staff understand that pupils test boundaries and a clear behaviour code is set. Pupils' positive behaviour is noticed, acknowledged and if appropriate, rewarded by staff.

Sanctions are used occasionally and these are fair and proportionate to the event.

The recruitment and selection checks of prospective staff are satisfactory and are recorded centrally as required. The school completes the necessary checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with children, except that it does not ask all referees to state if there are any known reasons why the applicant should not be employed to work with children.

Management of boarding is satisfactory and shows good leadership qualities in a collective approach for monitoring the boarding provision. The staff team are allocated specific roles in relation to overseeing health and safety, complaints, child protection and incidents. The school intends to develop a more cohesive quality assurance function in relation to how policies are evaluated and reviewed.

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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, the Regulatory Record (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and by any report from the Fire Authority (paragraph 3(5)).

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

In order to meet the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools and associated regulations the school must:

- review the written policy on discipline (NMS 4.2).
- provide all staff, at all levels, with refresher training on responding to safeguarding matters (NMS 3.5).
- ensure that the school's recruitment system specifically asks referees to state any known reason why the person should not be employed to work with children (NMS 38.2).
- ensure that the school's risk assessment in relation to fire is regularly reviewed (NMS 26.1).

- ensure the school has in place a satisfactory written agreement with each adult providing lodgings. (NMS 51.5)

- ensure that at least once a school year, a member of staff visits all lodgings in which it accommodates pupils, to check the continued suitability of the accommodation and to review provision with the adult responsible for the pupils (NMS 51.9).

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:

- improve the quality of marking so that all pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- increase opportunities for pupils to contribute to the decision-making procedures across the school.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?			✓	
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?			✓	
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?			✓	
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?			✓	

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision			✓	
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School details

Name of school	Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Limited		
DCSF number	332/6000		
Unique reference number	103876		
Type of school	Steiner-Waldorf		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1946		
Age range of pupils	3-17		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 134	Girls: 137	Total: 271
Number of boarders	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£960–£6,210		
Annual fees (boarders)	£10,710		
Address of school	14 Love Lane Stourbridge West Midlands DY8 2EA		
Telephone number	01384 394633		
Fax number	01384 393608		
Email address	info@elmfield.com		
Headteacher	College of Teachers		
Proprietor	Association of Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Marian Harker HMI		
Dates of inspection	29–30 April 2009		