

Rudolf Steiner School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	919/6109
Unique Reference Number	117631
URN social care	SC068999
Inspection number	334314
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI
Social care inspector	Jan Davies

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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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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

The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley opened in 1949. It is situated in pleasant surroundings in Hertfordshire and is one of the longest established Steiner Waldorf schools in the United Kingdom. It offers educational provision for pupils aged from three to 19 years. There are currently 393 pupils on roll, including eight boarders who are all placed with host families locally. The school is a member of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and, in common with other Steiner schools, it is managed by a non-hierarchical College of Teachers. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum emphasises rhythms and seasonal patterns in the organisation of the day, the week and the year. Pupils begin to learn to read, write and do arithmetic at age seven. GCSE and A-level examinations are usually taken a year later than in maintained schools. The school and its boarding provision were last inspected in 2006.

The school has applied for exemption from aspects of assessment, reading, writing and elements of mathematical development 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

The Rudolf Steiner Kings Langley School provides a satisfactory quality of education. The school has acted on most of the recommendations of the last inspection, although assessment is still not used enough to improve progress and two of the current regulations relating to independent schools are not met. The positive ethos of the Steiner philosophy promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, particularly as pupils get older. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage and for boarding is satisfactory.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The curriculum is good. It is based on a set of coherent aims underpinned by the Rudolf Steiner school's specific theory of child development. The kindergarten emphasises the development of creative, social and emotional skills well. The main lesson for the first two hours of each day, followed by a range of subject-based lessons, provides good opportunities to link all the required areas of learning. The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to acquire a wide knowledge and range of skills through a balance of academic, physical, aesthetic and creative work. Pupils report that they would like to use information and communication technology (ICT) earlier in the school to enhance their study skills. The findings of this inspection confirm their views because the use of ICT and the availability of some other resources, such as in science, are limited. Careers education and guidance is not sufficiently timely, particularly to inform pupils well in advance at key transition points and when making important choices on future learning or training pathways. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. They have clear individual education plans and precise targets.

The quality of teaching and assessment of pupils' progress, including teaching in the Kindergarten, are satisfactory. Teaching ranges from inadequate to outstanding with most being good on the GCSE and A Level courses because teachers have a thorough knowledge of examination requirements and older pupils have, by that time, developed good study skills and self-discipline in their learning. There are weaknesses in the lower school because some staff do not reflect sufficiently on the impact that their teaching has on individual pupils. In all years, the best teaching ensures that planning identifies objectives well and these are shared with pupils who are then actively involved and inquisitive about their learning. The weak teaching focuses too often on what the teacher wants to teach at the expense of what pupils already know and need to learn. Consequently, some pupils are passive and, for the more able, the pace of learning is too slow. Teachers know their pupils really well, helped by the fact that they stay with a group throughout their time in the lower school. This is particularly effective and ensures good progress for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially when they have additional support from learning support assistants. However, for some teachers, strategies to ensure that work is closely matched to ability are not secure.

There is a clear framework for assessing pupils' work and progress. In practice, the quality of marking and assessment is uneven. The Steiner philosophy does not encourage assessment by testing against national norms and benchmarks. Pupils understand this but, in the lower school, they are not sufficiently aware of what they need to do to improve their work. In the upper school pupils report that they would find it useful to know precisely what they need to do to achieve better standards and higher grades. Several parents said that they would like more information on the progress made by their children. The findings of this inspection agree with these views. Overall, the use of assessment information to feed back to pupils, set clear targets and report to parents on strengths, areas for development and progress made in specific subjects and skills, is limited.

Pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress in creative, social, physical and emotional skills is good. This is aided through sports events, personal and social lessons and drama. There is high quality art work evident in all years. Although literacy and numeracy skills develop later in comparison to their mainstream peers, progress is steady once these are introduced. Speaking and listening skills are particularly strong. In the lower school, more able pupils make insufficient progress in some classes because they are not challenged enough. In GCSE and A-level examinations, pupils achieve standards above those found nationally. The latest GCSE and A-level results indicate good performance overall.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and children's personal development in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Pupils' spirituality is well developed through activities such as looking at the awe and wonder of the world of nature, awareness of the seasons and taking part in many celebrations from around the world. Pupils develop an outstanding sense of their own culture and that of peoples all over the globe, from the many visits to other countries and sites all over Britain and the very wide representation of cultures among staff and pupils. Pupils learn a good sense of moral values through aspects of the personal and social curriculum. Behaviour is good overall. Whether in lessons or outside, pupils are attentive and cooperative and the great majority get on well with everyone around them. Some pupils in the lower school, however, complain that there is some bullying and they say that it is not dealt with effectively by staff. The lack of any school council for younger pupils is a missed opportunity to ensure that they have a voice in improving aspects of provision and relationships. Pupils clearly enjoy school, attend regularly and talk enthusiastically about their work and play. Several said that 'the teachers were very helpful', and that 'where they had failed in other schools this place had been great!' In lessons, pupils are very attentive and cooperative. They develop good personal skills for their future in the outside world, from literacy and numeracy skills to getting on with their peers and adults, and an awareness of the world of work. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community. Pupils help each other in the classrooms and the playground, as playground buddies or mentors for new or young children. They take part in many maintenance tasks around school and the gardens, and support local, national and international charities very willingly.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils are supervised effectively in school and when they go out into the community. Risk assessments, including for out-of-school activities, are in place but some, such as those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, have not been recently updated. Routine checks of fire systems and procedures are regularly carried out but, the latest fire risk assessment and fire drill records have not been updated and, as a result, this regulation is not met. School staff lack training in the administration of medicine and there is no stock control of the homeopathic medicines that are kept in the first aid box. However,

there is a designated medical practitioner and counsellor for the school and consultation is sought with therapeutic services and external professionals when required. The regulations regarding the safe recruitment of staff to work with children and child protection training are met. Pupils are aware of the importance of following a healthy lifestyle and enjoy learning how to cook healthy dishes in domestic science lessons and keep active through a range of physical activities. The school has prepared a three-year accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. There are some areas of concern identified in meeting the boarding requirements which the school must 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. The curriculum adheres to the principles of Steiner schools well, following the flow of the seasons and their festivals and moods. The system of teaching in themed blocks works for these young children and they enjoy the activities and the regular rhythm of each day. There is considerable parental involvement, and the curriculum is individualised for each child, with activities varying a little, depending on the teachers' informal assessments of aptitudes and progress. The teaching in the Kindergarten is satisfactory. Teachers build up warm and positive relationships with children who are expected to learn at their own pace from the example set by the adults around them, and to explore situations, rather than be directly taught. This can have the effect of making the learning quite slow in some areas of development, but progress in self-confidence, speaking and social skills is good. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Weekly meetings effectively review many aspects of learning, timetables and the specific needs of individual children. Their welfare is promoted well overall. Good regard is paid to the requirements and guidance for safeguarding children, with suitable staff, procedures and premises. Some risk assessments, particularly for the outdoor area, are not sufficiently robust and have not been reviewed recently. Access to outdoor activities is very good and this helps develop children's physical skills and knowledge of the world around them as they watch the changes of nature in their well-maintained and attractive green spaces and garden.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The overall quality of boarding is satisfactory. The promotion of equality and diversity is good and there is good integration and inclusion of international boarders. Staff are provided with guidance relating to safeguarding and the protection of children. The policy has not been updated regularly to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. The complaints information for parents and pupils does not include, as it should, the role of Ofsted in the process. The designated child protection leads are experienced and appropriately trained. Staff refresher training, however, is infrequent and the person with responsibilities for the care of boarders has not undertaken any training specific for this role. The school has acknowledged that shortfalls exist and has begun to review current practice.

Boarders say they feel safe and well cared for in their respective host family homes. The school's management structure and the strong sense of community contribute to the promotion of their welfare. The school adheres in practice to its equal opportunities policy and boarders state that there is no discrimination and that they get on well together. There are a number of strengths but there are also significant weaknesses relating to the safety of boarders and the school does not meet all of the key National Minimum Standards. The school's system for vetting host families is not sufficiently robust and there are no clear arrangements to visit all lodgings on an annual basis. Policies for managing risk relating to activities undertaken by boarders are sound. There are guidelines for the host families, however, these do not include sufficient guidance relating to situations when boarders could be staying overnight elsewhere while in their care.

Host families are sensitive and help boarders settle and agree acceptable boundaries with boarding routines which promote their welfare. Boarders are supported effectively by the pastoral staff who meet once a week with them. Twice a term, a formal meeting with all boarders takes place to talk about issues of their choice to help them to become responsible and mature individuals. Boarders are able to enjoy privacy both in school and with host families. The principle of mutual respect is communicated well by staff. Boarders have their own room, can keep in touch with their own family and have regular access to telephones and the internet in addition to personal mobile phones. The school understands and promotes the value and importance of communication with family and friends.

Boarders' behaviour is managed effectively. Relationships are respectful, courteous and harmonious. Boarders say that 'staff care about them' and that they are 'well matched' to their host family. There is a clear understanding of the expected standard of behaviour and positive behaviour is acknowledged and rewarded by staff. Sanctions are rarely used in school, and never in host family homes. Pupils say that rules and sanctions are fair and proportionate to the situation.

Boarders state that they are satisfied with the activities provided by the school outside of study and the school is proactive in organising cultural events, external speakers and the very popular weekend visits to London. Staffing levels are good and boarders say that they can always approach an adult about any concerns. The school responds sensitively to any specific need. The recommendations of the last inspection have been addressed.

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:

- ensure that boarding accommodation has regard to all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (paragraph 3(3))
- update all risk assessments, including fire drills, so that they include the latest checks made (paragraph 3(5)).

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the school must:

- regularly update all risk assessments, particularly for the outdoors area.

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

- ensure that satisfactory written agreements are in place with each adult providing lodgings in order to respond to safeguarding and safety matters (NMS 51.5)
- ensure that at least once a school year a member of staff visits all lodgings where pupils are accommodated to check the continued suitability of the accommodation and to review provision with the adult responsible for the pupils (NMS 51.9)
- ensure that Criminal Record Bureau checks are done for all host families (NMS 38.2)
- ensure that boarders and their parents are informed by the school of how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (NMS 5.4).

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.

- Engage young people more and give them a voice so that they can contribute to improving the quality of provision at the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of whole-school monitoring and evaluation by:
 - ensuring that agreed policies are applied in practice
 - monitoring the impact of teaching to improve learning and the rate of progress of all pupils, particularly the more able
 - using assessment more rigorously to provide accurate feedback to pupils and identify clearly what and how they need to improve
 - improving the quality of reports to parents to focus on progress made by their child.
- Provide high quality staff training to improve the satisfactory teaching to good and address the weaknesses of unsatisfactory teaching.

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	Rudolf Steiner School		
DCSF number	919/6109		
Unique reference number	117631		
Type of school	Steiner Waldorf		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1949		
Age range of pupils	3–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 171	Girls: 165	Total: 336
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 25	Girls: 32	Total: 57
Number of boarders	Boys: 4	Girls: 4	Total: 8
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 3	Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,405 - £8,370		
Annual fees (boarders)	Annual fees as above plus £110 per week		
Address of school	Langley Hill Kings Langley Hertfordshire WD4 9HG		
Telephone number	01923 262505		
Fax number	01923 270958		
Email address	info@rsskl.org		
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Smith (Education Facilitator)		
Proprietor	Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI		
Dates of inspection	12–13 May 2009		