

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, schools accredited as members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, and those schools belonging to the Cognita Group which are not members of the Independent Schools Council and its constituent associations

INSPECTION REPORT

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002**

Name of school:	Bristol Steiner School
DfE number:	801/6011
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn Supporting Inspectors: Mr Peter Jones Mr Andrew Rickett Lay Inspector: Mrs Sally Jenkinson
Dates of inspection:	18-20 November 2014

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of School: Bristol Steiner School

Address of School: Redland Hill House Redland Hill Bristol BS6 6UX
Rowan Tree Kindergarten
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Bristol
BS6 6DR

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Email address: info@bristolsteinerschool.org

Proprietor: The Trustees of Bristol Steiner School

Co-Chairs of the College of Teachers: Mr Roger Chorley
Ms Jess Dawson

Chair of the Trustees: Mr Coen de Groot

Administrator: Ms Helen Nicholls

DfE number: 801/6011

Type of school: Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3-16 years old

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full-time) Boys: 72 Girls: 79
(Part-time) Boys: 22 Girls: 23

Number of children under 5: Boys: 19 Girls: 23

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: Boys: 1 Girls: 0

Annual fees: £4,500-£6,750

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Peter Jones
Mr Andrew Rickett
Lay Inspector: Mrs Sally Jenkinson

Dates of inspection: 18-20 November 2014

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors, who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector, who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF). The lay inspector's findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Bristol Steiner School is a non-denominational, non-selective independent school for girls and boys which is a member of SWSF. It is situated on two sites a short distance apart in the northern suburbs of Bristol. The school was established in 1973 on the site now occupied by the kindergarten, whilst the main school moved to its current site in 2003. The school provides education for 196 boys and girls between the ages of three and sixteen. Forty-two pupils are below compulsory school age, of whom 38 attend part-time. The school has one pupil with a statement of special educational need and fifteen who require learning support, mainly for dyslexia and dyspraxia. The school also has a number of pupils whose first language is not English, but of these only two require any support. The school's aims are to give children a gentle but thorough education, addressing the child's intellectual, spiritual, emotional and practical development whilst nourishing their innate curiosity and love of learning through a balance of academic, artistic and practical activities.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf system for naming classes. The corresponding National Curriculum nomenclature for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection is as follows:

Steiner Class Names	National Curriculum
Kindergarten	EYFS, Year 1
Class 1	Year 2
Class 2	Year 3
Class 3	Year 4
Class 4	Year 5
Class 5	Year 6
Class 6	Year 7
Class 7	Year 8
Class 8	Year 9
Class 9	Year 10
Class 10	Year 11

Summary of main findings:

The quality of education is good and the school meets its aims well. The quality of the curriculum remains good and overall it supports teaching and learning well, although planning to support progress in learning remains inconsistent. The quality of teaching has improved, with more examples of outstanding practice, and is good overall. The teaching in the kindergarten now matches that in the main school, so pupils of all ages generally make good progress in their learning. The school has expended considerable time and energy in developing more effective assessment practices in the light of the criticism of the last report, but it has not yet been successful in ensuring the consistently good quality of teachers' marking. Provision for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities continues to have considerable strengths, but no longer includes formal independent education plans (IEPs) to provide guidance for class and subject teachers. The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils remains outstanding, despite significant changes in the inspection criteria. Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and implemented well, so that pupils are safe and secure. Pastoral care is also very good, as is the attention paid to health and safety. All requirements in relation to recruitment of suitable teaching and administrative staff, trustees and volunteers are met. Premises and accommodation generally support teaching and learning well, as do resources with the exception of the library.

What the school does well:

- it promotes the personal and emotional development of pupils very well throughout the school so that, by the time they leave, pupils have become self-confident, assured young people with a strong moral compass to guide them in adult life;
- the best teaching kindles intellectual and creative curiosity, stimulating pupils to produce work of a high quality, particularly in the expressive arts;
- GCSE results are above the national average in the subjects that pupils study; and
- the revised management structure supports staff well and contributes to improving morale, as well as giving staff a clearer focus in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improving planning and assessment to support progress in pupils' learning more effectively;
- improving the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities through the re-introduction of IEPs;
- ensuring the monitoring of teaching is effective in raising its quality to a consistently good level; and
- reviewing the way in which classrooms are allocated for teaching purposes.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good, and maintains the quality found at the last inspection. There is a well-constructed curriculum policy document which outlines the underlying educational philosophy of the school and explains how it is interpreted year group by year group throughout the school. The curriculum provides good coverage of all the required areas of educational experience, with subjects often integrated to demonstrate connections between subjects. It includes English, mathematics, French, history and geography and a full range of scientific subjects, including anthropology, botany, physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, ecology and nutrition. Aesthetic and technological experiences are provided through lessons in art, art history, mythology, performing arts, music and eurythmy, handwork, and craft and design, including woodwork. Pupils gain good spiritual experiences through religious education and other subjects, such as art, drama, eurythmy, music and English, whilst physical education, eurythmy and games support physical development well.

The distinctive organisation of the curriculum through the two hour main lesson at the beginning of the morning is a key feature of planning and delivering the curriculum. Part one involves a morning verse and a series of introductory activities that can include: singing and poetry, movement and dance, rhythmic work, the playing of musical instruments and mathematics-based activities, often helping pupils to learn their tables. These activities also involve pupils in group activities that help them relate to each other and become focused on learning. Other parts of the main lesson cover various subjects of the curriculum planned in three to five week blocks. The rest of the timetabled day is organised in subject lessons.

Subject matter is well planned to provide secure coverage of the outline curriculum, giving details of what will be taught and the order in which it will be taught. Planning to identify and assess progress in learning is less secure and it is not always clear from the planning how the learning needs of all the pupils will be fully catered for, although teachers can often explain how this will be achieved. Through the Steiner curriculum the school provides pupils with very good opportunities for speaking and listening in a wide variety of contexts from an early age, including choral singing and recitation of poetry, debates, discussion, presentations and the annual play that each class puts on. Pupils gain good, systematic experience of mathematics through the curriculum, which is taught imaginatively and provides pupils with a sound knowledge of mathematical concepts and their application in areas such as basic mechanics and hydraulics. Pupils' personal, social and health education is well developed and strongly supported by the wide range of subject coverage in the Steiner curriculum. The school provides age-appropriate careers education, although some pupils say that they would like more information about the schools available to them when they leave. Good preparation for adult life comes through the strong emphasis placed on intellectual, creative, moral and social development in the curriculum.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and has improved since the last inspection. Teaching in Classes 9 and 10 now support pupils' progress well and GCSE results in the last three years have been above the national average in the subjects that pupils have taken. Most of the teaching is good and well-organised, engaging children well, with clear learning objectives and well-structured tasks that take learning on and allow opportunities for pupils of all abilities to make good progress. The best teaching kindles intellectual and creative curiosity, stimulating an intensity of learning and high pace, so that pupils produce work of an excellent quality. This high-quality teaching is most commonly found in the expressive arts, but instances were also noted in other subject areas such as English, mathematics and science. Some of the teaching is less effective, on occasion lacking sufficient pace and drive so that pupils are not fully challenged and the pace of learning is relatively slow.

Lessons are planned carefully by teachers. Generally, this is done well, but occasionally insufficient attention is paid to meeting the needs of all pupils in the class, when there is not a sufficiently sharp focus on what pupils are expected to learn. Lessons are well organised and taught by well-qualified staff who have a good knowledge of Steiner philosophy and approaches, as well as good and often excellent command of their teaching material, which includes, for examination groups, a good awareness of examination criteria and the ability to guide pupils carefully in how best to meet those criteria in their work.

Teachers know their pupils very well and generally have a good understanding of what they are capable. Close attention is paid to identifying pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and diagnostic tests are used in Classes 2 and 4 to identify pupils with specific problems, usually related to dyslexia and dyspraxia. Pupils can also be referred at other times for testing and diagnosis. After diagnosis, learning support staff work out a programme of support through withdrawal from the classroom and one-to-one or small-group tutoring, which is sharply focused on the learning needs of individual pupils and helps them to progress in their learning. The progress in learning of these pupils is also often discussed in staff meetings and they are frequently the subjects of child studies, to discuss further the learning difficulties that they have and how to address them. At the time of the last inspection this knowledge was enhanced by helpful individual education plans (IEPs), which provided good guidance to teachers about how the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities could best be met. At the moment these plans are not being provided for teachers, but the school intends to reintroduce IEPs and further enhance support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the near future. The one pupil with a statement of special educational need receives extra provision and good support within the school. On occasion, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged, but generally speaking the teaching provides learning tasks that are challenging for them and at times leads to their producing work of a high quality across a number of subject areas, particularly in the expressive arts.

Teachers have very good relationships with pupils they teach, who generally enjoy their lessons, with many evincing great enthusiasm for what they do. Pupils behave very well in lessons and work well independently and collaboratively on tasks set. From an early age they have developed good powers of concentration and work intently and intensively on tasks set in the classroom or for homework. Teachers have a quiet authority and maintain calm and well-ordered classrooms, highly

conducive to learning. They generally provide clear instructions and explanations, which quite frequently are enthusiastic and colourful, as well as erudite on occasion; these enthuse pupils, helping them to make good and sometimes rapid progress in their learning. Questioning is frequently used well to test and consolidate understanding and explore issues; on occasion leading to lively debate. Teachers are good at pitching questions of an appropriate level to pupils of particular abilities, demonstrating their often excellent understanding of their pupils' current level of achievement. Lessons also provide good opportunities for pupils to build on their high-quality speaking and listening skills developed in the kindergarten and older pupils demonstrate considerable skills in arguing their case in debate or presenting their views, showing high levels of articulateness and confidence.

Assessment was an area for improvement at the time of last inspection and the school has expended considerable energy in addressing the issue. They have developed a system that they have found difficult to implement effectively, so they are returning to first principles in order to ensure that assessment supports pupils' progress in learning more effectively. Marking, as part of this process, is at the moment is variable in quality. There are some excellent examples of marking, which celebrate strengths, recognise areas for development and set targets to help pupils make further progress in their learning. More generally, marking is always encouraging but less frequently diagnostic. Some pupils' books contain little evidence of marking and so it makes little contribution to progress in learning. However, there are also various examples of teachers giving helpful and detailed oral feedback to pupils about the work that was observed during the inspection. Pupils interviewed confirmed this and stated that they valued this feedback highly. The school has a framework for assessing pupils against its own aims and GCSE and APT Awards examination results. These are above national averages in the subjects taken.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, and maintains the quality found at the time of the last inspection, despite significant changes in inspection criteria. A powerful theme of spiritual development runs through the curriculum from Class 1, through, for example, lessons in religion, eurythmy and music. A strong emphasis is placed by the school on the development of moral and ethical behaviour and personal integrity, which, in this curriculum, supports pupils' understanding of the British democratic values very effectively. Pupils show excellent self-awareness and self-esteem, with older pupils in particular being very clear about their own strengths and weaknesses.

As part of a small and mutually dependent community, pupils are well aware of the importance of the rule of law. They have a very clear view of right and wrong and a powerful sense of the importance of individual liberty, exercised responsibly. They understand how laws and rules protect communities. Pupils readily accept responsibility as, for example, when older pupils act as 'buddies' for younger ones when they join the school. Pupils know about public institutions and services in England, but scope exists for a more systematic focus on the way in which local and national government and the European Union works.

The curriculum and teaching provide pupils with a very good knowledge and understanding of different faiths and cultures. In English, geography, history and religious studies pupils learn much about different cultural traditions and faiths in many societies. Stories, legends and myths from around the world form an integral part of the curriculum for all age groups. These give pupils a sophisticated understanding of different cultures and faiths and are also used very effectively to exemplify moral and ethical behaviour. The presence of a number of visiting pupils from Steiner schools in other countries helps pupils to become aware of other cultural traditions, whilst the perceptions of these pupils of the British way of life also provides valuable insights for pupils into their own culture. Pupils thus celebrate cultural difference and show respect for individual characteristics of others both in the UK and abroad. In ethics lessons older pupils discuss the difference between democratic consensus and autocratic decision-making in public life in both the present day and throughout historical times, including ancient Greece and Rome. The school is planning to re-establish a school council, which had operated for some time in the past, with a view to ensuring that pupils from each year group can participate in decision-making and that their opinions are heard. Where debate about political issues takes place, differing, balanced views are taken into consideration and pupils are well able to weigh evidence and reach measured judgements. Pupils are not afraid to express their own views and to give their opinions. The school is quite clear that it does not permit the promotion of partisan political views.

The school has clear and appropriate inclusion and equality policies whose principles are embedded in its practice and meet the requirements of the Equalities Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The school has taken due account of the latest statutory guidance and complies with its requirements. Careful attention has been paid to safeguarding pupils' welfare. The designated safeguarding lead has undergone the appropriate inter-agency training and has a very good understanding of safeguarding procedures and child protection matters. The school has established a good relationship with local external agencies. A clear policy for child protection is in place. It is available to parents through the school website and includes the names of those responsible for safeguarding in the school. All staff have received appropriate training in safeguarding and are alert to issues regarding child protection. New staff have training in safeguarding as part of their induction and are alert to issues regarding child protection. Staff have a good understanding of the child protection policy and its implementation and are aware that they can call on the services of the designated safeguarding lead. There are clear procedures in place in the event of any incident and detailed records are kept appropriately. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and know that adults in school are there to care for them and are confident about talking to them if they have a problem.

Behaviour is excellent and relationships amongst pupils and between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils show great care in their behaviour towards each other, and staff show sensitivity in managing the individual needs of pupils, both in and outside the

classroom. Pupils have a thorough understanding of what bullying is and the different forms it can take. They acknowledge that sometimes they fall out with their friends or that other problems with relationships can occur, but that many of these incidents can be resolved by themselves in the first instance. If not, they are confident that staff will deal with any concerns promptly and effectively. The use of a buddy system, where an older pupil supports and guides a younger one, makes an important contribution to establishing good relationships between older pupils and younger ones and making them feel safe.

The school has a good behaviour policy, which is accepted by pupils as fair and just. They also accept that rewards and sanctions are fair, but some pupils report that these are not always applied consistently across the school. Records are kept of any sanctions given, which are relatively few, these are detailed and monitored by senior staff. The school also maintains clear records of incidents and the actions they have been taken to resolve any issues. Records of sanctions and incidents are held in a secure location. Pupils have been well educated in issues concerning e-safety, but the school has recognised that they now need to place more emphasis on raising pupils' awareness of e-safety out of school. Staff are receiving further training so that they can educate pupils more effectively about e-safety as part of their PSHE. This reflects the school's prompt and sensitive response to address issues concerning safeguarding.

Careful risk assessments of the premises and on-site activities have been carried out. The school has a comprehensive and clear health and safety policy relating to activities that take place off the school premises. Risk assessments for school trips and visits off site are thorough and procedures to implement them are well understood by staff. The documentation and organisation of a trip by Class 9 and 10 to London is a good example of how risk assessments are very well planned. The school has a sound written first aid policy, which is implemented effectively. Sufficient staff have up-to-date training in first aid to ensure that a trained first aider is on-site at all times and at least one accompanies all trips out of school. Medical equipment is regularly checked and first aid boxes are well stocked and easily accessible around the school. Additional paediatric first-aid training has been undertaken by staff in the kindergarten. The school has appropriate facilities for sick and injured pupils, where medical examinations could be carried out in private. Close attention is paid to fire safety. The school has regular fire drills, with relevant notes and points for action. Checks on alarms, emergency lighting and fire extinguishers are all carried out by competent persons at scheduled intervals.

Admission registers are well maintained and procedures for completing attendance registers are fully compliant. Absences are followed up swiftly with phone calls to parents. Pupils learn how to be safe and stay healthy as part of their lessons in PSHE and science, including healthy eating and the value of vigorous exercise. The school meets the statutory requirements of the Equalities legislation and is aware of the actions needed to ensure that any pupils with disabilities are treated sensitively.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the requisite checks of the suitability of staff, trustees and appropriate volunteers to work with children have been carried out meticulously and the central register is in good order.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation meet the educational requirements of the school and are conducive to effective learning. Most classrooms provide bright inviting learning environments, although one room in the basement has little natural light, the lighting is only satisfactory and is not an inviting learning environment. High quality displays in hallways, stairs and corridors enhance the aesthetic appearance of the school and celebrate pupils' achievement.

The school has appropriate washroom and toilet facilities and suitable accommodation for the short-term care of pupils who are sick or need medical treatment. Drinking water is clearly marked and pupils know which taps to use in refilling their class drinking water supply. Regular maintenance checks and meetings with the maintenance team ensure that the school administration is aware of any concerns regarding the upkeep of the buildings, so that they can be addressed promptly. These are supplemented by the regular checking of lighting, and the checking of water temperatures to ensure water is not too hot for hands to be washed comfortably. The school has a rolling programme of repairs and improvement in place and the building is kept clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.

The outside areas provide suitable opportunities for play, although some areas of the spacious grounds at the back of the school, used mainly by younger pupils, become muddy in winter and dusty in summer. A hard surface area in the front of the school used by older pupils is in a good state of repair. An amphitheatre, built into a bank at the back of the school, is an important feature in the school's celebrations of festivals. Raised vegetable beds have been built by pupils and are well used to grow vegetables and contribute to the history and science curriculum and PSHE.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The quality of information provided for parents and carers is good. An illustrated school handbook provides helpful and detailed information about all aspects of the school's provision and provides a link to the school website. Parents are also given a list of staff names, their roles and key contacts, at the beginning of the school year and a list of staff qualifications is available for parents on request.

A fortnightly newsletter, edited and produced by Class 10 pupils, contains details of current events, carries some interesting articles and includes some highlights of pupils' work. Detailed and helpful annual reports and termly meetings with parents

keep them well informed about the progress of their children. Some teachers also write termly reports detailing the progress of pupils, which are greatly appreciated by parents.

In questionnaires completed at the time of the inspection and in discussions during the inspection, parents of kindergarten children were extremely positive about their children's experiences. Parents in the main school also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the education of their children, but a few stated in questionnaires that they did not fully understand the complaints policy and procedures or how the management of the school worked and whom to contact with any concerns. The school is aware of these issues and is addressing them. The complaints policy has been re-written recently and is now much clearer. Lists identifying management roles and responsibilities have now been produced, making it much easier for parents to identify whom to contact in the light of a particular concern. The parents' handbook provides a helpful description of the various roles and responsibilities of key groups and individuals in the management of the school, but does not name any of the relevant individuals, which is being rectified in the next newsletter.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has a suitable complaints procedure that meets all the requirements. An escalating procedure from 'concern' to formal complaint is outlined clearly and a record of every complaint, listed with the date it was brought to the school, is kept in a complaints file, together with comments relating to the final outcome or resolution. The school publishes the number of complaints received once a year, and the Ofsted address for the further pursuit of complaints is also provided.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The organisation and management of the forty-year-old school was restructured in 2006. There are four main bodies, which are the College, the Teaching Faculty, the Executive Group and the Trustees. All positions of authority are appointed by consensus. The various groups carry responsibility for pedagogical, educational, operational and governance, respectively. All groups have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The school has clearly defined objectives and strategies and it monitors and reviews its activities regularly. A strategy group is developing a five-year plan. A finance officer, who is also company secretary to the trustees, was appointed in January 2014. His responsibilities include writing the budget, preparing the accounts for the auditors, overseeing the bursary policy and applications etc. There is a finance committee and a maintenance team, which is significant because the main school is a Grade 2 listed building, and this group ensures that the buildings and grounds are maintained and used effectively. The structure of management supports staff well and contributes to improving morale. It has also given a clearer focus for staff in terms of their roles and responsibilities.

College is a representative body drawn from members of staff and is responsible for ensuring that the school maintains the educational pedagogical principles developed by Rudolf Steiner. The position of chair of college is held jointly by three people, including a kindergarten staff member. This works well by ensuring that one chairperson is always in attendance. College meetings are effective in carrying out their business. The executive group, comprised representative members of other groups, is the 'operational group' responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. This ensures good contact and information exchange between the various groups. The trustee group, which bears legal responsibility for the school, comprises parents, teachers and a former parent. Together, they have a good range of skills and are in the process of recruiting further members to extend and complement their current capabilities, but parents have not yet been informed of the names of individual members and the responsibilities that they undertake in the various groups.

The administrator and the educational coordinator have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The administrator has responsibility for all the administrative functions that ensure the smooth running of the school and compliance with various regulatory requirements, such as the single central register. The educational coordinator supervises staff appraisal and provides induction and mentoring for new staff amongst other areas of responsibility.

The school upholds the Steiner ethos in the curriculum and functioning of the school and it maintains an active relationship with SWSF and its international partners through its teacher representative and SWSF advisory visits.

The teachers' interview group ensures that effective recruitment procedures are in place, including ensuring that at least one interviewer has done the safer recruitment in education training. Management and disciplinary procedures are followed closely, with legal support if necessary. A more rigorous system of appraisal and mentoring

was implemented in 2013, so that over two years all staff will be assessed, but it has not yet removed the inconsistencies in teaching noted earlier in the report. A development plan is created from each assessment and support is given by mentors and SWSF advisers. There are review meetings to check that recommendations have been accomplished. New teachers are always assessed by their school mentor and visited by SWSF advisers during their first year of service.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes

Trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestion as to where specific improvements could be made:

- ensure that the monitoring of teachers is effective in raising the quality of teaching to a consistently good level.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall quality and standards of the early years' provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and it is now consistently good. Children make good progress in their personal and emotional development and learning across the EYFS. Their readiness for the next stage in their education is evaluated carefully and transition arrangements support continuity in learning effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and very well implemented, as are those concerned with children's welfare. Leadership and management have been successful in ensuring consistently good practice in the classroom and perceptive evaluation of teaching and learning in order to improve it. As a result of these factors, they are clearly successful in creating the means to improve children's life chances and provide a very secure foundation for their future progress.

How well the early years' provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

The early years' provision meets the needs of all children very well. The creation of lower and upper age groups in the kindergarten this year, to take account of the particular numbers of children in different age groups, has worked well in helping the youngest children to settle quickly into the school, whilst providing more learning opportunities to challenge older and higher achieving children. Combining this organisation with times when children from the full age range in the kindergarten play together outside still allows opportunities for younger children to learn from older ones through interaction and older children to help and support young children, thus retaining an important feature of Steiner education. The curriculum is thoughtfully planned to reflect the natural rhythms of the day, week and seasons of the year, so characteristic of Steiner education, whilst also providing good opportunities for children to make progress across all areas of learning for which the school has not been granted exemptions by the Department for Education.

Teachers and teaching assistants quickly develop a deep understanding of their children's capabilities, so can support their progress in learning well and sometimes very well. They create a calm and purposeful atmosphere in their classrooms, helped by attractive learning environments, enhanced by items such as a lantern diorama, a wide range of wooden toys, hurdles, large wooden blocks and logs, fur cones, conkers, cuddly toys and small pans. These provide a rich variety of resources to stimulate imaginative and creative play and other activities such as counting games and puppet shows. In addition, good use is made of the playground, which allows a wide range of activities to take place, such as digging, climbing and building and changing structures. In a lesson where children were in the playground, excellent use was made of climbing apparatus for collaborative play and adaptation, with benches and wooden blocks being used to supplement the climbing apparatus. The school has also sought out several places within easy distance of the school where different types of outdoor play can take place, for example a municipal park with swings, slides and climbing apparatus, and a small wooded area. The use of the municipal playground observed during the inspection extended children's opportunities to develop their physical skills and aerobic exercise, whilst encouraging sharing through turn-taking.

Staff have high expectations of pupils and motivate and enthuse them well, such as in ring-time, where they provide excellent models of singing and movement for the children to imitate, which many of them do well, such as in imitating the various movements of a hedgehog during the year while singing a song about the activities of a hedgehog across the four seasons. Transitions from one activity to another are generally managed well, but occasionally these take a little time, some children become restless and the pace of learning drops. As a result of all these activities and learning opportunities, children of all ages and abilities make consistently good progress in their learning, and this progress is particularly good in speaking and listening, personal and emotional development and the development of physical skills.

Teaching staff also work very closely with parents in a continuing dialogue about their children's personal and emotional development and progress in learning. The annual written reports are constructive and encouraging and particularly good at analysing progress in personal and emotional development and speaking and listening, but are sometimes less good at identifying clearly the progress that children make in other areas of learning across the EYFS from which exemption has not been granted.

The contribution of the early years' provision to children's well-being

Teaching staff make an excellent contribution to their children's well-being. They quickly establish warm and empathetic relationships with children and also develop a deep understanding of their children's personal and emotional needs and capabilities, which guides and supports their interventions. Staff quickly help children to settle and feel safe and secure in school, whilst learning to enjoy what they are doing. Through talk and play, they encourage independence and imagination and working together, so that children learn how to explore and use their surroundings creatively. Staff provide excellent models of courtesy and thoughtfulness for pupils to emulate. As well, through a gentle firmness and subtle and unobtrusive interventions, staff help children to learn how to behave well and cooperate with each other.

Children learn about the value of regular exercise and healthy eating to their well-being and how to manage their own hygiene and other personal needs well. They are given ample opportunities for a variety of creative and vigorous activities outside, whilst activities such as ring-time and eurythmy help to develop skills such as balance, rhythm and timing. Snacks are nutritious and healthy. Children often help making food such as bread and porridge, or preparing fruit and healthy drinks are provided. Snack-time helps children to develop their skills in conversation and learn how to behave well at the table during mealtime. Detailed risk assessments for activities in the school and the visits to local areas, such as the woodland area, together with longer trips, ensure that children are kept safe at all times.

Children are well prepared for transition to Class 1, with extensive discussion between staff, visits and a careful evaluation of a child's readiness for transfer, involving teaching staff, parents and sometimes the school doctor.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the early years' provision

The leadership and management are good. Staff evaluate their own practice in a thoughtful and rigorous manner, record evaluations well and use them to review and adapt their planning in an effective manner. They provide informative and

comprehensive reports for parents, which are particularly strong in comments on personal and emotional development.

The collegiate management model adopted by the kindergarten, centred around weekly meetings and continuing informal discussions, is clearly helpful in ensuring that staff have a very clear understanding of Steiner principles and practice and the relevant EYFS areas of learning. In classrooms, teachers and teaching assistants collaborate very closely to become very effective teaching teams. The kindergarten has a designated safeguarding lead and deputy, both of whom have had recent training at the appropriate level and made themselves known to the appropriate official of the local Safeguarding Board. Other staff are well briefed about safeguarding and welfare requirements and implement these rigorously. Safeguarding is a major element of induction for new staff and all staff are updated regularly.

Teaching staff engage in rigorous self-evaluation. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and review them in some detail. Weekly meetings of teaching staff are also used to evaluate teaching and learning, whilst many individual children are evaluated in some detail through child studies, which provide helpful in-depth studies and are particularly good in identifying and supporting personal development. Staff regularly attend training courses and conferences and report back key messages to staff meetings. They work within an ethos of continuing improvement and meet all the requirements of the Equalities Act.

Staff have excellent relationships with parents, with a continuing dialogue about their children in which the teacher, as the key person, takes a leading role for each class. These discussions are well informed by the detailed knowledge teaching staff have about the children they teach. Responses in parental questionnaires indicated parents have very high levels of satisfaction with the education that their children receive.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

Yes

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools accredited as members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk