

Inspection report
Norwich Steiner School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 926/6154

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 14 June 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Norwich Steiner School is recognised by the Steiner Fellowship as a sponsored school: as a new school it is not yet eligible for full membership. It follows the curriculum devised by Rudolph Steiner covering the spectrum of arts, humanities and sciences. This emphasises the development of social skills, lateral thinking, creativity, and the gaining of self belief, as well as the acquisition of the strength of will and purpose for later life. The school first opened as pre-school provision, and has expanded to take school age children, registering as an independent school. At the time of the inspection, there were 31 children on roll, 28 aged between 3 and 6 years attending part time, and three aged over 6 attending between 0900 and 1300 hours every day, and also on Wednesday afternoon. When the children are not attending the school or at the afternoon care sessions, they are educated at home by their parents or carers. In common with Steiner practice, the school does not have a head teacher, but is supervised by a steering group, working with the College of Teachers, whilst the Trustees have oversight of the general development of the school. The Kindergarten class is for children aged 3 to 6 years and class 1 has 6 to 8 year olds.

Overall evaluation of the school

Norwich Steiner School complies with most of the regulations and has made good progress since opening at the start of the present year.

It is developing its work with the Steiner curriculum satisfactorily, and receives useful support from the Steiner Fellowship and a nearby more established Steiner school. The teaching is good, children enjoy coming to school and they make good progress. The children's personal development is good: they show consideration for others and cooperate well with each other. Parents are highly supportive of the school and its approach to education. The school is well organised.

Quality of education

Curriculum

The curriculum is good overall. Although it meets the range of needs and interests of the children well, and is supported by their parents, curriculum planning and

recording is not sufficiently detailed nor closely linked to assessments of the children's progress in acquiring skills and knowledge. The school seeks to follow the Steiner curriculum; at present not all staff are fully trained in this approach. Although the present curriculum fully embraces the underlying philosophy, it does not consider all of the details of the Steiner approach to teaching. The broad curriculum is firmly based in the concept of the rhythms of the day, the week and year. Lessons follow a clear structure, using repetition of songs and rhymes to support the children's learning and follow the seasons of the year. Some elements of the Steiner curriculum are not yet taught, such as a modern foreign language and eurhythmy - an art of movement. Parents spoke very positively about a school-organised family visit to a sheep shearing and a picnic shared by families in a local park. The development of the school garden and outdoor play area has usefully broadened the school's work. Music successfully extends the children's skills, both in singing and playing tuned and untuned instruments. Kindergarten children sing several songs in foreign languages.

Teaching and assessment

The quality of the teaching is good and as a result, children make good progress and are developing good attitudes towards their learning. In the Kindergarten, teaching effectively uses a calm, supportive approach, which values the children's opinions and ideas whilst setting clear expectations for behaviour and self-discipline. The staff are experienced Steiner practitioners who have received Steiner teacher training or who are completing this training. Teachers consistently encourage and support the children to make choices in their learning, enabling them to develop good practical and social skills, as well as extending their good speaking and listening skills. The usually good pace of work in the Kindergarten is at times slowed when staff seek to gain the attention of the whole group, such as for the grace said prior to snack time. This leads to some children temporarily losing their concentration. In part this is due to the group being quite large at present: the staff are aware of this and are monitoring the situation.

In class 1 staff have established clear expectations about behaviour and this is supporting the children's development of concentration, especially where tasks are challenging. The teaching is effective, using a variety of well-paced activities which make good use of the range of equipment currently available. Activities are varied and are supported by lively teaching which engages the children effectively. The class 1 staff are developing their knowledge of the Steiner approach through training and by visiting other schools. This is developing their awareness of Steiner approaches to teaching and learning and their knowledge of the Steiner curriculum... Specialist teaching of handwork augments the good art and clay modelling. In accordance with the Steiner curriculum, the children are being introduced to knitting. They concentrate very well following the rhythmic action songs and finger plays used at the start of this lesson. A strength of the teaching is that this approach develops concentration and is used by both class teachers at the start of sessions.

Parents spoke very positively about the afternoon care provided for Kindergarten

children where they enjoy making music with the recently appointed class 1 teacher. This provides a useful link with the work done by older children.

Assessments are satisfactory overall. Assessment in the Kindergarten is good: detailed notes are made on children's developing social skills and their participation in activities and tasks are made. They provide a good basis for reporting to parents, and could usefully be extended to other aspects of their development, in particular physical coordination. In class 1, good general evaluations of the children's learning have begun to be made, which potentially provide the basis for further detailed assessments using the materials produced by the Steiner Fellowship.

Pupils' progress and achievement

Children's progress and achievements are good in both classes. The school's philosophy clearly identifies the ways in which it seeks to promote children's progress by providing a steady routine, purposeful activities and using positive support. The parents appreciate this approach and are strongly supportive. In the Kindergarten, the children quickly settle into the well organised routines and enjoy the activities which they share very well. In particular, they have good speaking and listening skills, supported by the school's use of well-told stories and by the staff making sure that children are encouraged to express their ideas and feelings. The recently appointed teacher in class 1 has quickly established good patterns of work and behaviour. Current progress in class 1 is improving and has many good aspects.

Many parents rightly spoke very positively about the ways in which their children were encouraged to develop good personal and social skills without being pressurised. The staff promote these skills by encouragement and by providing positive and consistent role models. As parents noted, the children thrive and enjoy school.

Personal development

The children's personal development is good: it is a strength of the school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children is good. Good use is made of the children's experiences; some have knowledge of foreign languages and travel within the United Kingdom. The children make good progress in their social learning, especially as the adults in the school listen carefully to what the children have to say and value their ideas. The children behave well, showing consideration for others and cooperating well with each other. Their attendance is good. They spoke extremely positively about the school and clearly enjoy the activities. The skills which they are beginning to acquire provide a satisfactory basis for their future learning and life in the community. At present they have limited opportunities to contribute towards community life, although the strong emphasis given to mutual care and support is a major element in their overall personal development.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets nearly all of the regulations for welfare, health and safety. It promotes the children's health very effectively. For example, a raised garden has been cultivated, and at the time of the inspection, its organic strawberries were greatly enjoyed by the Kindergarten children. A regular feature of Kindergarten lessons is food preparation, including grinding wheat seeds to make flour, and fresh fruit and organic food are daily features of snack times. This provision is outstanding and encourages the children to be aware of healthy eating and the value of home prepared foods. Despite the warm temperature at the time of the inspection, several children asked when they could next make soup. Care is taken to ensure that the children who bring packed lunches eat healthily. The school complies with welfare, health and safety legislation. At present the premises do not have toilets for the disabled, but the landlord is considering this issue. Good risk assessments have been made and are known to staff and the majority of parents. Good use is made of relevant training provided by a number of agencies and the school has useful contacts with Norfolk's Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. The school does not maintain an admissions register that meets the regulations.

Organisation of the school

The school is well organised and meets most of the regulations. The premises are adequate for the present number of children, although the school will need additional accommodation if it continues to grow at the present rate. The College of Teachers is beginning to form itself into an identifiable body and the school has a very clear view of the ways in which it needs to manage the envisaged expansion. This will include growth in numbers in the Kindergarten class and taking more children of compulsory school age. It has several support groups which help to develop its work. Checks are made on staff prior to their appointment, and parents are kept particularly well informed about developments at the school through the school's termly newsletter. There have been no formal complaints from parents since the school opened.

What the school must do to comply with regulations

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- maintain an admissions register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)); and
- ensure that there are separate toilets for staff from those used by pupils, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5k).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- continue to develop the knowledge of all staff about the Steiner curriculum, supported by the Steiner Fellowship; and
- extend assessment procedures to include aspects of the children's physical development, such as coordination skills, and for the older children record their acquisition of skills in all areas of the curriculum.

School details

Name of school:	Norwich Steiner School		
DfES Number:	926/6154		
Type of school:	Steiner		
Status:	Independent		
Date school opened:	12 September 2006		
Age range of pupils:	3-11		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll :	Boys: 18	Girls: 13	Total: 31
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys:0	Girls:0	Total:0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:0	Girls:0	Total:0
Annual fees (day pupils):	£2160 (Kindergarten) £3000 (children aged over 6)		
Address of school:	Bowthorpe Road Methodist Church Hall Between 302 and 302a Bowthorpe Road Norwich Norfolk NR5 8AB		
Telephone number:	01603 503795		
School Administrator:	Mr Trevor Thorley		
Proprietor:	Mr Andrew Vestrini, Chair of Trustees		
Reporting Inspector:	Martin Bradley HMI		
Date of inspection:	14 June 2006		

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