

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools associated with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

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

Name of school:	Norwich Steiner School
DfE number:	926/6154
Inspection team: Reporting Inspector: Supporting Inspector: Lay Inspector:	Mr Ted Cohn Mrs Sara Wiggins Mr Ewout Van-Manen
Dates of inspection:	8-10 March 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Norwich Steiner School	
Address of school:	Norwich Steiner School, Hospital Lane, Norwich, NR1 2HW	
Telephone number:	01603 611175	
Email address:	info@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk	
Proprietor:	Norfolk Initiative Steiner School Ltd	
Name of Chair of the College of Teachers:	Anna Letts	
Name of Chair of the Trustees:	Lucy Parker	
Name of Administrator:	Sandie Tolhurst	
DfE number:	926/6154	
Type of school:	Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship	
Age range of pupils and students:	3-13	
Gender of pupils:	Male and female	
Total number on roll: (Full time)	Boys: 20	Girls: 19
(Part time)	Boys: 14	Girls: 16
Number of children under 5	Boys: 12	Girls: 16
Number of post-16 students:	Boys: 0	Girls: 0
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:	Boys: 1	Girls: 0
Number of boarders:	Boys: 0	Girls: 0
Annual fees:	£5,300	
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002	
Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ted Cohn	
Supporting Inspector:	Mrs Sara Wiggins	
Lay Inspector:	Mr Ewout Van-Manen	
Dates of inspection:	8-10 March 2011	

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 school. His 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:

The Norwich Steiner School is a non-selective independent co-educational day school for pupils aged three to sixteen years old, situated in the Lakenham area of Norwich. Currently it has three to thirteen year old pupils on roll. The school was founded in 2005 in order to provide an education based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, as expressed in the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. At the time of the inspection, the school had 39 full-time pupils and 30 part-time pupils in the kindergarten on roll, with those of compulsory school age in the kindergarten having home-school agreements. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs and seven have been identified by the school as having significant learning disabilities or difficulties (LDD), mainly related to literacy and numeracy. The school aims to provide an education based on the philosophy and curriculum developed by educationalist Rudolf Steiner, covering the whole spectrum of arts, humanities and sciences. The education emphasises the development of social skills and creativity, producing able young people with a strong sense of self and purpose, along with diverse strengths and skills that enable them to become socially and economically responsible

The school generally follows the Steiner Waldorf system for organising classes. The corresponding National Curriculum names for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection are:

School class names	National Curriculum
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1
Willow	Year 2
Oak	Year 3/4
Birch	Year 5/6
Elder	Year 7/8

Summary of main findings:

Norwich Steiner School provides a good education for its pupils, who are well cared for. It is clearly successful in achieving its key aims of developing the social skills and creativity of its pupils, with a clear sense of self and purpose.

The curriculum is broad, with strengths in the creative and aesthetic areas, but it does not identify clearly enough in its planning how individual topics are to be taught, what pupils are expected to know, understand and be able to do, and how assessment informs planning and contributes to pupils' progress. The teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding. Marking is inconsistent, ranging from marking that is cursory to that which is constructive, encouraging and helps pupils make progress. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and often excellent. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good and the provision for welfare, health and safety is, in most respects, excellent, but risk assessment records for trips and visits, while compliant, lack a sharp enough focus on particular situations of higher risk and on contingency planning. The school encourages pupils in developing healthy lifestyles.

All the necessary checks have been carried out to ensure that staff, volunteers and trustees are suitable to work with children. The premises and accommodation are spacious, attractive and conducive to good quality teaching and learning. Links with parents are excellent and parents are very happy with what the school provides for their children. The complaints procedure and policies are fully compliant with statutory regulations.

What the school does well:

- It provides an environment where pupils feel very secure and well cared for;
- the quality of teaching is good and some of it is excellent;
- relationships between teachers and pupils are good and often excellent;
- achievement in art, music and extended narrative writing is of a high standard;
- the premises and accommodation are of a high standard and support teaching and learning well; and
- parents are very well informed about all aspects of the school's provision.

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might like to consider the following:

- ensuring that curricular planning identifies clearly what pupils should learn, in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills and the teaching strategies to be used;
- ensuring that assessment identifies consistently what pupils have learnt, whilst helping them to make progress and informing future planning; and
- focusing records of risk assessments for trips and visits more sharply on planning for situations of higher risk and on contingency planning.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory, with some good and interesting features. It is shaped by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and draws upon the published Steiner Waldorf curriculum. It is broad and includes all the required areas of learning and is enriched by the introduction of two modern foreign languages from an early age; by the quality of its creative and aesthetic provision, notably art and music, and through the wide range of practical skills developed in clay modelling, cooking, gardening, handwork and woodwork. Form drawing (developing pupils' drawing skills from the production of simple shapes to intricate Celtic designs), astronomy, the development of woodcraft skills and religion/ethics further enrich the curriculum. Scientific development for older pupils is hindered to some extent by the limited time devoted to it and the lack of a specialist science teacher, which the school is addressing currently.

The core provision of the curriculum is defined by the Steiner Waldorf themes, known as the main lesson blocks, which comprise mainly two-hour sessions at the beginning of the day, with themes and topics normally running for several weeks. The main lesson includes a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, music, the humanities and, to a lesser extent, science. These are supplemented by lessons in modern foreign languages, and a wide range of other subjects, including the aesthetic, creative and practical areas.

Curricular planning to support teaching is conscientious and provides a clear map of topics and knowledge to be covered, particularly with regard to the main lesson. However, it does not set out as clearly a framework identifying the teaching strategies and learning outcomes for pupils, in terms of the knowledge, understanding and skills that they are expected to develop. Nor does it show how pupils' learning will be assessed in a manner that helps them make progress and which informs future planning.

Personal and social education is good and integrated into lessons as a part of the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. Aspects of health education are dealt with as they arise in the early years and then pursued more formally in specific lessons with older pupils. Similarly, work related to developing pupils' economic understanding and well-being, linked to careers education and guidance, takes place with older pupils, and also prepares them well for the opportunities, responses and experiences of adult life.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including statements of special educational need, is good and includes the recent introduction of the screening of pupils to identify strengths and weaknesses in literacy, numeracy and other areas, such as cognitive development. It includes individual education plans and annual reviews, where required, and ensures that these pupils can access the curriculum. Planning to support the very small number of pupils identified as gifted and/or talented is not so thorough, but teachers generally meet their needs well through open-ended and extension tasks.

The curriculum is also enhanced by various trips and visits, such as the trip to Sutton Hoo, which provided an increased sense of authenticity and reality to work being done about the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and occasionally outstanding. The quality of the pupils' learning experience ensures that they all make good progress in relation to their abilities, including those identified by the school as needing additional support. Teachers demonstrate a sound knowledge of the underlying Steiner vision for learning and pupils benefit from the specific techniques which provide opportunities for rhythmic responses, enhancing and reinforcing their learning. Pupils say that they enjoy being at the school and value the support they receive from their teachers.

The planning of individual lessons throughout the school is good and at its best clearly identifies teaching objectives and how what has been learnt will be assessed. However, the format for lesson planning varies considerably, making it more difficult to monitor lesson planning and plan collegiately. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of what they teach. Lessons are well organised, a variety of teaching strategies is used effectively and lessons progress at a good pace. This, combined with the close knowledge that teachers have of their pupils and their learning needs, ensures a good pace of learning.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and often excellent, encouraging pupils' confidence and helping them to develop a belief in their ability to achieve. Pupils achieve well in the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy and are mostly articulate, confident speakers. Teachers' questioning is used well to consolidate understanding, explore issues and encourage pupils' involvement in activities. Good opportunities for pupils to speak and to listen to what others have to say support well the development of communication skills. Creative and narrative writing, art and music are taught particularly well, with pupils' showing considerable progress and achievement over time.

Teaching, particularly where the main lesson is used to promote an integrated approach to learning, often enables pupils to learn very successfully. For example, in a main lesson a painting was used very well to stimulate pupils to identify descriptive verbs and nouns, thereby developing their literacy skills and leading them to produce paintings of a high standard. The accommodation provides spacious, airy and well decorated rooms, which reflect the distinctive Steiner ethos, and are used well to support the learning of the pupils.

Assessment is satisfactory, with some good features, but some weaknesses. The quality of the marking of pupils' work is variable. At its best, for example in the development of skills in English, pupils are given clear information about what they must do to improve their work. In a few subjects, however, relatively little work is marked and some marking does little more than acknowledge that the work has been done. The diagnostic screening of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and of their cognitive development, provides helpful evidence to inform teachers about pupils' aptitudes and attainment. In several subjects, good records are kept identifying pupils' skills. Teachers know the pupils very well. Individuals' strengths and areas for development are known and often recorded in lesson evaluations. Teachers often provide good oral feedback on pupils' work in lessons that helps them to understand what they have done well and how to improve their work.

Appropriately detailed individual education plans (IEPs) are prepared for pupils with LDD and guidance about specific pupil's learning needs are effectively identified in most teachers' lesson plans. Good in-class support for pupils with specific learning needs, including with a statement of special educational need, is reinforced by time spent on a one-to-one basis with the special needs teacher.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. They develop their self-esteem and self-confidence from an early age and become increasingly self-critical as they move through the school. This process is supported well by the generally excellent relationships between staff and pupils and the courteous and constructive manner in which teachers interact with pupils. Spiritual development, more generally, benefits greatly from high quality experiences in art, music and choral speaking.

Pupils learn how to distinguish right from wrong at an early stage, helped by the consistency of teachers in establishing clear guidelines about what constitutes good and bad behaviour. The discussion of moral dilemmas and right and wrong in traditional fairytales with younger pupils, biblical stories, work on the Norse gods and religion/ethics with older pupils, contributes well to their moral development. As they move through the school, pupils increasingly accept responsibility for their own behaviour and are keen to support the school in activities such as the Summer Fayre, although the school does not create many opportunities for pupils to take on positions of responsibility.

Pupils develop a sound knowledge of public institutions and services, and have had the opportunity, for example, to visit to a polling station in the school and to hold a mock election at the time of the last election. The school's ethos and curriculum encourages a spirit of harmony and tolerance in classrooms, together with an appreciation of and respect for other cultural and religious traditions.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils, which promotes good behaviour, and creates an ethos where pupils feel very safe and secure.

Policies to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare are clear and comprehensive. Staff receive regular training in safeguarding, including inter-agency training for the designated safeguarding persons (DSPs). Risk assessments have been carried out for in-school activities and for trips and visits. Risk assessments records for visits meet the regulatory requirements, but do not focus sharply on areas of high risk or provide great detail about contingency planning, although staff could provide the relevant details orally.

The school has clear and appropriate policies to promote good behaviour and deal with bullying. Staff manage pupils' behaviour skilfully and parents and pupils report that bullying is very infrequent. Pupils were very clear that staff would deal with bullying swiftly and effectively, if it happened.

The school meets all the relevant health and safety requirements, including fire safety. Regular fire drills take place and times for evacuation indicate that it is done speedily. Pupils are well supervised in school and the playground. The school has an appropriate written first aid policy and a plentiful supply of staff trained in first aid to support its implementation. The school has sound procedures for dealing with pupils who commit serious disciplinary offences and these are used appropriately, when necessary.

Encouragement of healthy living is a feature of Steiner education and the school does this in various ways, such as stressing the importance of establishing sustainable farming and means of generating energy, as well as encouraging healthy eating, from snacks in the kindergarten to the contents of lunch boxes and growing fruit and vegetables in gardening.

The admissions register meets all the requirements, which it did not at the time of the last inspection, as do the attendance registers. Unexplained absences of pupils are followed up promptly.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

All the necessary checks have been carried out on staff, volunteers and trustees to ensure that they are suitable to work with children and be involved in the work of the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a pleasant well maintained building, built in the early twentieth century. The building has spacious rooms and has been decorated to a high standard in the Steiner tradition. There are extensive and secure grounds which are used for a variety of activities such as play, games, gardening and woodcraft. In support of a recent main lesson on mythology, staff, pupils and parents constructed a large labyrinth, which pupils greatly enjoy using. The school's buildings and grounds are kept very clean and tidy. Facilities to cater for pupils who are ill are satisfactory and the school has good access for emergency evacuation. Staff have appropriate toilet facilities, which was not so at the time the last inspection, when the school was in different accommodation.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The school keeps parents well informed about the progress of their children. Parents' meetings are held once a term for each class group with the class teacher and separate meetings with parents of individual pupils take place at least once a year. Teachers are always available to talk to parents at any other time and, particularly with younger pupils, helpful discussions often take place when pupils arrive at school or leave it. Parents also have the opportunity to raise any concerns, affecting their own children or more generally, by using the Concerns Form that is available at the school. In the last two years, the school has also sought the views of parents through parental surveys. In responses to the parental questionnaires administered during the inspection, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the way in which the school was educating their children.

Parents are kept well informed about activities at the school and other news. This is done through the interesting and lively newsletter that they receive about four times a year, and through letters, where information is specific to one class, such as a school trip. The school's website also provides much useful information, including various school policies, the newsletters and any other information of immediate import, such as inclement weather leading to school closure.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a good Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure, covering all legal requirements. Parents are encouraged to raise even the slightest concern so that these can be heard and acted upon. This usually prevents the need to register a formal complaint. Complaints in recent years have been dealt with according to good practice including timely responses.

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

Norwich Steiner School has been using an approach to management and leadership of Steiner Waldorf Schools, termed 'Associative Leadership'. Certain aspects of this approach have not functioned effectively, largely due to the difficulty in recruiting people for the various teams from within and without the school community.

The school is in the middle of a process of organisational development and it is anticipated that a new school management team will be created at the next meeting of the trustees, which takes place shortly after the inspection. The changes in the structure will not affect the body of trustees, which is responsible for the effective governance of the school and for strategic planning. The six trustees, five of whom are independent, have good varied experience of business management and charitable work.

The recently reformed collegiate, which consists of many though not all the teachers, concerns itself with shared professional and curricular development. Each area of the school is represented. The collegiate nurtures the school ethos and keeps it both safe and alive.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school is committed to providing a modern, high quality Steiner education and has been exploring management structures that can best serve this aim. School administration is handled extremely capably and with dedication and the school has teachers who are committed to running the school effectively. Leadership is gently emerging among the staff and this will be formalised as part of the organisation development process.

The organisation and management of the school is effective and will be further strengthened by the imminent structural changes.

The school has much parental support and parents' involvement in the school, with many volunteers doing valuable work.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestions as to where specific improvements could be made:

- a new management team, supported by all trustees and staff, with clear terms of reference, would ensure that the school organisation and management continues to improve;
- some work done on overall consistency of the pedagogical approach, while safeguarding the teachers' creativity and innovation, would ensure that all pupils benefit from the best practice in the school; and

- an objective, coherent staff appraisal system would also support and spread the best practice in the school, helping to ensure consistently high quality teaching.

It is encouraging that all these points are already being worked on by the school.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The outcomes for children are good and well suited to the values of a Steiner education. The Early Learning Goals, recommended nationally for this age range, do not always match the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. At the time of this inspection, the school had been granted exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. These sections were excluded from this inspection. Apart from these elements, the school delivers the EYFS learning and development requirements effectively. The children enjoy their learning in this environment, with their achievement being particularly strong in social aspects, speaking and listening and in physical and creative development. They show exceptionally fine motor dexterity through sewing activities where, for example, they competently make bookmarks as they stitch shapes onto a felt backing. They develop good skills for the future as they select and extend their own activities. They play imaginatively in a variety of ways, from creating a helicopter complete with wooden propeller to 'reading' a book to a younger child in a quiet area. The children contribute to classes by tidying materials and equipment away and supporting one another, such as in action rhymes and other activities.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the EYFS is good. Staff achieve a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities and effective use is made of the outside areas. These areas provide many interesting opportunities for children to explore, role play and problem solve, for instance children used planks thoughtfully in building a house. Careful planning, both in kindergarten and the after-school facility, provides activities to challenge older pupils and support the interests of individuals where specific needs have been identified. However, the evidence to support assessment data is not recorded in a sufficiently thorough manner and the data is not used systematically to track progress in learning.

The staff enable children to develop a strong awareness of the rhythms of the year, the week and the day, helping them to feel safe and secure. The use of music as a mood creating tool, a specifically Steiner practice, is more limited. Staff promote health and safety effectively by constantly reinforcing good hygiene routines and by teaching children about the safe use of equipment. The thoughtful support provided by adults promotes strongly the children's concentration and enables activities to continue for significantly long periods of time. Healthy lifestyles are strongly promoted through the nature of the daily snacks, many of which children help to prepare, and the daily routines of the kindergarten.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The leadership and management of the EYFS are good. Excellent communication with parents ensures a shared value for the children's education and this is reflected in the parents' response to the questionnaire, where they commented extremely positively about the high regard which they have for *'such an engaging environment which is specifically suited to their age and developmental stage.'* Resources are very well deployed, strongly encouraging children to initiate their own activities, which make a strong contribution to the good quality of the learning. Adults are highly committed to equality of opportunity, and encourage children to value diversity

and difference. Safeguarding, health and safety policies and risk assessments appropriately support the welfare of the children. Kindergarten staff undertake professional development in a variety of different aspects and meet regularly as a group to consider best practice. Good links have been made with the local authority and the school has worked closely with it to identify areas for improvement. The setting is in the process of using this information and other review processes to create a new development plan.

Overall effectiveness: how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The school has two kindergarten classes and an after-school facility, working with children aged between three and seven years of age. Procedures are coordinated across the classes and many opportunities are provided for children to work and play together. The school meets the needs of every child by recognising that each one is unique and by providing opportunities that enable each to make good progress in their learning. The staff regularly review their work to ensure that they have a strong capacity to maintain continuous improvement.

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 affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk.