

The Meadow School for Steiner Education

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	933/6196
Unique Reference Number	131412
Inspection number	322033
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Meadow School is situated in Bruton, in Somerset. It was opened in 1993 by a group of parents who wanted their children to have an education based on Steiner Waldorf principles. The school caters for pupils from the age of three to 11. The kindergarten has nine part time children on roll of statutory school age and 12 children aged three to four. There are 33 pupils aged between seven and 11 in the main school. 'Parent and child' groups meet at the school for several sessions each week. The school is staffed by 12 teachers many working in a part-time capacity to provide specialist subject teaching. There are three part-time assistants.

The school is recognised by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship as a Steiner school with sponsor status. It follows a curriculum based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and its governance is guided by Steiner principles. The school is a registered charity with a board of three trustees, and is a limited company. The Management Group, with members drawn from teachers, parents and a trustee, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. The 'college of teachers' deals with curriculum and matters of pedagogy. The school is further characterised by *'its small, tightly knit community and intensive interaction and personal connection between parents, staff and children'*. The school was last inspected in June 2004.

Evaluation of the school

Meadow School provides a good quality of education and successfully meets its aims. The commitment of staff to the school's philosophy underpins the good quality of care which, together with the good curriculum, ensures children and pupils make good progress. Its provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Teaching is good. There is strong emphasis placed on professional and pedagogical development of the staff and a clear development plan to guide future development. The school meets all the educational and organisational regulations and has made good improvement since the last inspection.

Quality of education

The good quality curriculum makes effective use of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The systematically planned curriculum provides interesting learning experiences across the academic, aesthetic and practical areas of learning. It encourages excellent personal development, ensuring pupils are confident when facing new challenges. A daily '*Main lesson*' is provided which includes a focus on particular topics which are taught in rotation. These topics promote pupils' awareness of the natural world and the changing seasons and draws together related elements from other subjects that help pupils to make connections in their learning. The topics serve as the vehicle for teaching reading, writing and number and take close account of the National Curriculum, with the exception of the provision for information and communication technology. All pupils learn French and German which contributes well to their appreciation of other cultures. There is a good balance of individual learning, group and classwork. The '*Eurythmy*' (rhythmical movement) sessions add to other experiences that develop in pupils an impressive awareness of their physical and spiritual nature. Planning at all levels is assiduous and objectives set out clearly for main subject and for other related learning. Specific planning for different ability groups varies between classes, although modifications are made during lessons to ensure good learning by all pupils.

The kindergarten provides the youngest children with some excellent opportunities to explore their ideas and also observe, copy and learn from the very good adult role models. The partnership with parents and knowledgeable staff makes an important contribution to the provision, a view supported by the recent Commission for Social Care inspection report. Children make excellent progress in their personal and social learning through the homelike environment. For example, in helping to wash and clear away work boards before helping prepare snack time. These children's linguistic skills develop well through discussions with adults and when playing together. The curriculum for these young children is well resourced with natural materials and the rooms are very thoughtfully laid out to encourage imaginative and self initiated play.

Pupils make good progress in all aspects of the Steiner curriculum. The emphasis given to reading and writing for a purpose and on speaking and listening skills, ensures they have a secure grounding in literacy skills. The linked project work gives pupils practical experiences in applying their mathematics skills and enables them to make good progress in observation and investigative skills. There is good, additional provision for those with learning difficulties and support teaching is effective in helping pupils reach their goals. The individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities set clear and achievable targets that are regularly discussed with parents and teachers.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, enabling all pupils to make good progress. Teachers are skilful at combining expert instruction with pupils' natural enthusiasm for learning and exploring ideas. The excellent relationships pupils have

with their teachers encourages them to develop independence in their thinking and creativity. Teachers take time to explain clearly and they question and probe to ensure that pupils fully understand what they are doing. Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Teachers know their pupils' very well, often having taught them for two or three years, and adapt their teaching effectively to meet their needs. The teachers are diligent in assessing learning against the Steiner framework of curriculum objectives and this ensures they maintain an overview of what pupils have learnt. Whilst lesson planning sheets record an overall evaluation of learning by the class not all teachers record how well different learners have made progress. As a consequence this information is not readily available to share with other teachers or in preparation for the next lesson.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There are many valuable opportunities throughout the day when pupils learn to reflect and experience spiritual awareness. These include during morning greeting and at the end of lessons, in their *'Eurythmy'* sessions and music lessons. What is particularly impressive is the ease with which pupils as a class, come together to join in quiet reflection, singing and chanting. The consistent and clear structure of these activities helps to promote the pupils' self-worth, respect and awareness of others. Staff provide very good role models. This promotes pupils' understanding of right and wrong and helps them to manage their own behaviour towards others. There is much good social development through the many opportunities to work together on projects or when out on the many visits. As a result they have positive attitudes towards school and are respectful and courteous. Older pupils frequently check and advise each other on how they can improve their work. These arrangements have a significant impact on pupils' personal development. Attendance is satisfactory. The school has taken a tough stance in reducing the number of days lost to holidays in term time and this is reducing.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Sometimes a few are overly boisterous in lessons and do not recognise when they are stopping others from learning. Challenging behaviour is reducing. It is managed in a sensitive and non confrontational manner which ensures adults are trusted by pupils. Pupils acquire a strong sense of community through participating in celebrations and festivals. Cultural awareness is promoted well through the Steiner curriculum which provides them with a good understanding of both their own and other cultures and respect for the beliefs and life styles of others. Pupils have a broad knowledge of public services and institutions. They develop as self assured and confident individuals, enjoy their learning and are well prepared for the next phase in their education.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school provides a good level of welfare, health and safety for its pupils. All guidance is provided within the context of the school's philosophy which places the

child at the heart of all the school does. Pupils are taught to keep safe and healthy as part of their personal, social and health education. They are encouraged to bring healthy food such as fruit to school for snacks at their break times and are keen to do so. They enjoy healthy food, as well as active play. There is always plenty to occupy them and keep them active at playtimes. There is no bullying, and no cause for the school to invoke sanctions for serious breaches of discipline. Minor matters are dealt with sensibly but the incident logbook does not always record the sanctions imposed in accordance with the school's behaviour policy. There are two designated child protection officers and there are good systems to ensure pupils feel safe. As one pupil put it, 'the school is their family'. Pupils say they feel safe in school and the excellent relationships they have built up with their teachers' means they always have someone to confide in if required.

Systems for recording health and safety risks meet requirements but are poorly organised and difficult for managers and trustees to monitor. This has resulted in slippage in dealing with some minor matters. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act and has a three year-year accessibility plan. The constraints of the tenancy in the listed building mean that not all parts of the school are accessible to all.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out the necessary safeguarding checks for all staff. It is updating the details of all staff and volunteers at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau. References and confirmation of employment history are now sought for all new appointments.

School's premises and accommodation

The classrooms comfortably accommodate the small numbers in each class. This enables teachers to move around and support individual learners, quickly and calmly. The kindergarten classrooms are large and bright and well resourced to encourage creative and imaginative play. The school makes use of a nearby grassed public space at playtimes, 'come rain or shine'. This is secure and well maintained.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents, prospective parents and others are provided with a good range of information. The parents' handbook pack contains all of the required information and parents can view other documents on request. Both the prospectus and the handbook set out very clearly the principles of Steiner education and how the school is organised and managed. Parents receive a good quality report on their child's progress. The reports are clear about achievements and compliment the many opportunities parents have in the year to talk with their child's teachers. During the inspection some important documentation was hard to retrieve as the systems are not fully understood by all the office staff.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which complies with all of the regulations. Any complaints that are made are dealt with effectively and the outcomes are recorded and shared with all parties concerned. The school acts on the recommendations made. A few parents of children in the Kindergarten are unsure of the complaints procedure.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Improve the recording of daily and weekly assessments of pupils' learning.

School details

Name of school	The Meadow School for Steiner Education		
DCSF number	9336196		
Unique reference number	131412		
Type of school	Independent		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1993		
Age range of pupils	3–12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 17	Girls: 16	Total: 33
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 19	Girls: 17	Total: 36
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3600		
Address of school	18-20 High Street Bruton Somerset BA10 0AA		
Telephone number	01749 813 176		
Email address	admin@meadowsteiner.somerset.sch.uk		
Administrator	Mrs Sally Sandiford		
Trustees	Fran Steele, Barbara Hunt, JW Phillips		
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	8–9 July 2008		