

# 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

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Name of school:</b>      | Cambridge Steiner School  |
| <b>DfE number:</b>          | 873/6029  |
| <b>Inspection team:</b>     | <b>Reporting Inspector:</b><br>Dr Martin Bradley<br><br><b>Supporting Inspectors:</b><br>Mr Mike Thirkell<br>Mrs Sara Wiggins<br><br><b>Lay Inspector:</b><br>Miss Deborah Leah |
| <b>Dates of inspection:</b> | 30 November to 2 December<br>2010   |

### CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

**Section A: Introduction and summary**

**Section B: Compliance with regulations for registration**

**Section C: The quality of organisation and management**

**Section D: Early Years Foundation Stage**

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Cambridge Steiner School

Address of school: Hinton Road,  
Fulbourn,  
Cambridgeshire CB21 5DZ

Telephone number: 01223 882727

Fax number: n/a

Email address: [school@cambridge-steiner-school.co.uk](mailto:school@cambridge-steiner-school.co.uk)

Proprietor: The Trustees of Cambridge Steiner School

Name of the Chair of  
the Faculty of Teachers: Clara Vormer

Name of the Chair of  
the Board of Trustees: Rosy Moore and Alejandro Skidelsky

Name of Administrator: Ella Baker

DfE number: 873/6029

Type of school: Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3 to 11

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 22 Girls: 17  
(Part time) Boys: 18 Girls: 17

Number of children under 5 Boys: 12 Girls: 12

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

Annual fees: £1,575 to £5,250

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley  
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Mike Thirkell  
Mrs Sara Wiggins  
Lay Inspector: Miss Deborah Leah

Dates of inspection: 30 November to 2 December 2010

## **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. Her 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:**

Cambridge Steiner School has 74 pupils aged between three and eleven. Thirty-eight of these are in the two Kindergartens which admit children aged between three and six. There is also a Kindergarten with eleven younger children aged two and a half to three years which was not inspected on this occasion. The after-school provision for children from three years old to pre-school age was inspected. None of the children attending the school has a statement of special education needs. The school developed from a kindergarten founded in 1993 and moved to its present site, a former special school, in 2007. At the time of inspection the school combined Classes 1 and 2 (Years 2 and 3) and Classes 3 and 4 (Years 4 and 5), whilst Class 5 (Year 6) was in a single year class.

In 2008 the school experienced a financial crisis which led to strong parental intervention and support. This has stabilised the situation and, in particular, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) element has expanded significantly. A significant feature of the school is its woodland provision which is used by the Kindergartens and Class 1 and 2 throughout the year.

The school follows a curriculum based upon Rudolf Steiner's insights. This emphasises 'the changing needs of the growing child centrally in a holistic education, developing the child's imagination and morality alongside their intellectual, physical and practical skill capacities. Our aim is to foster healthy, balanced children with enthusiasm for learning and life'.

### **Summary of main findings:**

The school provides a good quality of education and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The rigour with which it has addressed the regulatory requirements has ensured that these are now all satisfied. Provision in the EYFS is outstanding. The teachers work hard and diligently. The developing role of the education facilitator seeks to bring a clearer focus for professional development and the related staff appraisal. Assessment of pupil's learning is good. Teachers enable the pupils to make good progress. The pupils' behaviour is generally good. Leadership and management are now good and recent improvements, supported by the parents and the school community, have enabled the school to develop after a period of considerable uncertainty. The school intends to continue to ensure that leadership and management practices are fully embedded in its work.

**What the school does well:**

- Its work in the EYFS is outstanding, including the Woodland Kindergarten activities;
- It provides a good quality of education; and
- Its pupils make good personal and academic progress across the broad-based curriculum.

**What the school must do to comply with the regulations:**

The school meets the regulations.

**The school complies with the Equality Act (2010).****Next Steps**

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

- further develop administrative and management procedures, including staff appraisal; and
- strengthen strategies for evaluating and measuring pupils' progress throughout the school.

## **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 overall. It is broadly based. Pupils of all ages and abilities are provided with a good range of opportunities to learn. They make progress across linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative areas. This learning is strongly supported by the outstandingly positive attitudes developed in the Kindergarten classes. The pupils acquire good skills in speaking, listening, literacy, and numeracy.

In following the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, the Primary school begins with Main Lessons lasting about two hours each day. After introductory activities these lessons follow a theme for up to a month. The themes cover a wide range of literacy, numeracy and cross-curricular work. They also cover festivals and reflect the seasons of the year. Main Lessons provide an integrated approach to the curriculum and project work. The Main Lesson is followed by an eclectic range of subject lessons. At the time of the inspection these included literacy, mathematics, French, German, religion, drama, handcrafts, art, games, gardening, use of the nearby woodland, music and cooking. The quality of teachers' planning for the Main Lesson and other lessons is consistent and appropriately detailed, supplemented by annual and half-termly plans. These are useful documents which develop the Steiner Waldorf curriculum.

The school's approach to learning requires teachers to reflect at the end of each day on the achievements of pupils in order to refine the curriculum plans and to decide how their needs can best be met the following day. As a consequence the teachers know and understand the pupils very well and are able to plan the future curriculum to match their changing needs. This also enables the school to prepare pupils very effectively for their future opportunities, responsibilities and experiences.

The oldest pupils take part in the annual Steiner 'Olympics' in Forest Row and have also visited the British Museum. Other pupils have visited Ely and the Botanical Garden. The innovative Woodland project in the Kindergartens has not yet had an impact on the woodland work in the older classes, although Class 1 and 2 benefit from visiting the nature reserve.

A small number of pupils have learning difficulties and none has a statement of special educational needs. The kindergartens appreciate the support which is available from the local authority especially for children with additional learning needs.

#### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching is good overall in Classes 1 to 5. Teaching has some outstanding features, for example the generally high quality of interaction and discussion between teachers and their pupils. Teachers show strong commitment to their pupils and work hard to provide lessons that encourage them to develop a love of learning and pleasure in discovery. They demonstrate a good knowledge of the

Steiner Waldorf curriculum and its aims for children's learning and development. Teachers plan most lessons well within the context of the children's stage of development and the Steiner Waldorf guidance. Lessons are for the most part well structured to provide a progression in learning; for example, in a carefully structured music lesson the well-planned range of tasks and activities supported good singing, instrument playing and work on notation. Sometimes more consideration needs to be given to the structure and process of learning. Occasionally aspects of lessons require more detailed planning with respect to the use of time and preparation of resources to sustain pupils' concentration. Teachers know their pupils well and the small size of classes generally enables them to plan successfully for mixed-age and ability groups. They make good use of the suitable range of teaching resources available.

Questioning is generally used effectively by teachers to ensure that all pupils in their class are engaged in learning. In mixed age groups questions are generally pitched at an appropriate level to ensure that pupils of all ages are involved in the work. Discussions on specific topics or ways of working frequently demonstrate the teachers' high expectations and encourage and challenge pupils to think independently by deducing answers to the questions posed and thinking imaginatively. In Nature Drawing the teacher asked pupils to use their experiences and imagination through questions such as 'How can we draw the wind' and 'What would the trees be doing?' Teachers always listen carefully to what their pupils have to say: this supports the quality of interaction in classes and confirms to the pupils that their views are valued.

The positive relationships that exist between teachers and their pupils are a key support to teaching and learning. On the whole teachers employ good classroom management strategies which support the generally good behaviour in classes. Methods used for managing behaviour are good and follow the school and Steiner Waldorf guidance. On occasions teachers show remarkable calmness and patience in dealing, for example, with interruptions caused by a small minority of pupils. Teachers without exception use positive language, such as when encouraging individual pupils to make more effort or to re-engage with activities.

Assessment practice is good and relevant to the small size of the school and learning needs of the children. Some features of assessment are very strong, for example there are frequent opportunities for teachers to speak to individual pupils about their work and progress. There is an appropriately detailed framework for assessment which contains clear expectations regarding feedback to pupils about their work and progress. The small size of classes supports this practice. Teachers meet very regularly to discuss the progress of pupils, including those who require additional support for special learning needs. The Class 1 and 2 teachers receive useful information, including statistical evidence from the Early Years Profile, about pupils' attainment at the end of their time in the Kindergarten. Such data show their excellent progress and overall attainment which is often above national expectations. This information is available to teachers to support their planning.

Teachers keep good and accurate individual class records for each stage of learning which include helpful comments about pupils' overall development and their approach to the learning covered. The detail of information within these written records varies. The detailed annual reports have been reviewed to improve their quality. They reflect the teachers' outstanding knowledge of the pupils' personal and academic development. They celebrate the achievements of each child with respect

to each subject and other aspects of learning and development. New teachers have quickly developed an understanding of the learning needs of the pupils in their classes.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with some outstanding features. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this was strongly endorsed by parents in their responses to questionnaires provided at the beginning of the inspection. Overall, the school is successful in its aim of encouraging children to enjoy learning and to approach their work with enthusiasm, which strongly reflects the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. Pupils grow in self-confidence and self-esteem as they move through the primary years, supported by the positive encouragement of their teachers. The curriculum contains strong emphasis on the development of moral values. Teachers reinforce the moral and social development of pupils, through the examples they set and their clear guidance about what is right and wrong, reinforced through the curriculum and listening to stories with a moral basis.

Pupils' spirituality is developed through reflection on the changing seasons and related colours in painting lessons, which is reinforced through their regular opportunities to visit local woods. Older pupils' opportunities for learning about a range of religions and beliefs are very good. Pupils' spiritual development is further enhanced through writing poetry to express their feelings and through singing joyfully and playing their recorders. In a lesson on the theme of nature, Class 5 pupils developed their awareness of living things through learning about the senses of the octopus. Most pupils behave very well and on occasions when classroom responses fall below what is acceptable, they are later encouraged to reflect on their actions and the impact of these.

Pupils learn to support their own community and there are some excellent examples of links with the wider local community. They have shown their initiative and independence by baking cakes to raise money successfully for additional school resources. Wherever possible, the emphasis is on pupils organising activities themselves and developing their independence. They have visited a nursing home for elderly people in the local village to sing during the celebration of Martinmas and they have played their musical instruments for the public in Cambridge. Pupils develop a good knowledge of public institutions and services in England through the rich learning experiences provided by the curriculum. They have made visits to local craftspeople, for example a blacksmith and a stone engraver. In the past the school has been visited by representatives of the local council, but this positive dimension of pupils' learning and development has not been pursued recently. Pupils have very good opportunities to learn about a range of cultures and religions. The curriculum places strong emphasis on developing a respect for the cultural heritage of others, for example through the annual Whitsun multicultural festival.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school has made considerable progress in developing its management of the welfare, health and safety of the pupils in the last year and this provision and its implementation are now good, having been inadequate at the last inspection. Risk assessments are made but the records do not always refer to specific conditions, as for the woodland activities where changing weather, such as snow, may require further comments. However, staff check on conditions at the site well before the children arrive. A significantly high proportion of responses to the parents' questionnaires indicate a very strong sense of the care taken by staff to ensure the safety of the children at all times. Appropriate policies are now written and implemented for all other relevant areas, including safeguarding and child protection, and the school is now able to promote the welfare, health and safety of the pupils effectively. Healthy eating is successfully promoted and parents provide wholesome lunchtime food. The school has an appropriate policy to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002, as amended by the Equality Act 2010.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

Since the last inspection, and particularly during the last year, the school has significantly improved its provision for checking the suitability of staff and the proprietors. The school now has a complete single central register recording all the required information for staff, Trustees and volunteers.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The quality of the accommodation is good and is suitable for safe and effective learning. The school occupies a purpose-built former special school on the edge of the village of Fulbourn. It has well-developed outside play areas, including a central courtyard. These were originally designed for the former usage, and the school has sought to develop these, for example by planting willows. It also has the use of a nature reserve at the opposite end of the village and the Kindergartens in particular make outstanding use of this provision which is similar in many aspects to a 'forest school'. This significantly extends the children's experience and adds considerably to their learning and development. The school premises are more than adequate for the current numbers of pupils, and include a hall and support rooms for craft and special educational needs as well as a meeting room and a community room. The library is mainly a resource for teachers. It contains a wide ranging and often rather dated collection of fiction and non-fiction materials, including resources for teachers and books related to Steiner Waldorf education. When finances permit, the school intends to review the library's current materials. A room for children who are unwell has now been provided and this fully meets the regulatory requirements.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **PART 6 - The quality of information for parents**

The school meets the requirements in its provision of useful and good information to prospective and current parents and carers. Key policies are on the school's website. The prospectus summarises the essential features of Steiner Waldorf education, with photographic illustrations of school activities. It emphasises the importance of the home-school relationship as part of the community-building which supports the children's education.

Separate handbooks are given to EYFS and primary school parents each year. These are attractive, informative and clearly written. They cover many topics, from attendance to safeguarding. The EYFS handbook includes medical articles by a Steiner Waldorf school doctor. A weekly bulletin is emailed to parents, with hard copies handed out personally on request. Each term a colourful magazine is published; it contains pupils' work, teachers' class reports and other school news.

Parents feel well-informed about their children's learning and progress. The annual pupil reports are excellent in their depth and detailed understanding of each child. Teachers encourage individual parent consultations. They also make home visits. Parents' evenings are held regularly for individual classes.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

The policy for dealing with complaints meets the statutory requirements. During the past twelve months there has been one formal complaint. This was resolved through discussions without recourse to a panel.

***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 Cambridge Steiner School is well managed. Clear policies and procedures are in place to support the education, and communications among those responsible for the children are good.

The school is small, and this allows many issues to be dealt with quickly and informally, including face-to-face conversations with parents when appropriate. Several regular meetings involve parents besides the teachers' own meetings. These encounters are a powerful factor in a small community where many structures are new and still being developed. Formal records are kept and meeting times are used to share important knowledge of the pupils.

The school has recently had many changes of staff; the majority of the trustees are new since June 2009. Much work has been done skilfully by staff and parent volunteers to renew school policies and procedures. An atmosphere of commitment and enthusiasm is palpable. Individual strengths are welcomed where they meet the needs of the school. This contributes to the healthy community-building sought by the school.

The Board of Trustees runs the school effectively in close collaboration with the Faculty of Teachers. They have clear objectives and strategies for improving the school's management structure and financial management. Named trustees oversee key areas and report back to the board. Minutes of their monthly meetings are accessible to the whole school community on its intranet. Actions are assigned and checked.

The school management team forms the hub of day-to-day running. It consists of the Faculty Chair, the EYFS co-ordinator, the administrator, the financial manager and a trustee. These members link with teachers, EYFS staff, the administration team and the Board of Trustees respectively. Additionally, joint meetings of trustees and Faculty are held each half-term.

After an extended period of review and evaluation, led by trustees, a three year Development Plan for 2010-2013 was formed. This identifies major strengths in the school as well as areas for improvement, with time scales. Teachers' needs for support and guidance are recognised. Substantial time has been allocated so that an experienced teacher, the education facilitator, can work with colleagues on areas of management directly connected to the pedagogy. These include teacher development. Full use is made of the Steiner Waldorf Advisory Service. Several times during the year an experienced teacher spends up to a week in the school, visiting lessons and advising teachers.

The Steiner Waldorf ethos is upheld in the striving of the teachers to understand and meet the needs of the children. The weekly Faculty Meeting includes study of Steiner's work in relation to children's healthy development. Much meeting time in the course of each school week brings colleagues together, sharing their knowledge

and actively working with Steiner Waldorf values, as expressed in school policies. These promote inclusion, celebrating human diversity and mutual respect. Active community building is apparent in recent work days with parents, and also in artistic workshops, talks and seasonal festivals.

The good quality of pastoral care is recognised by parents. The school works with them 'to provide a solid base from which the child can venture into the world'. Home visits, parents' evenings and individual consultations with teachers are regular events. Healthy eating and lifestyles are encouraged, with particular emphasis on the outdoors.

***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:

- strengthen and embed the work of the school management team in order to help trustees to carry out their expressed aim to withdraw from management tasks and assume their recognised role of governance; and
- further develop the role of the education facilitator to promote teacher development.

## **PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

### **The outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The outcomes for children are outstanding. 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 provider has applied for exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. These parts were excluded from this inspection. A particular feature of the school is its use of nearby woodland throughout the year to enable the development of exceptionally high quality outdoor activity work supported by a member of staff trained in Forest School work. This work, which began in September 2009, is the first Steiner Waldorf Woodland Kindergarten project in the United Kingdom and has been enthusiastically supported by parents. The children clearly benefit greatly from the experiences offered.

The curriculum is firmly based on Steiner Waldorf principles which are used highly effectively, both inside and outside. It strongly promotes the children's future learning skills, high levels of self confidence and exceptional initiative and curiosity. They greatly enjoy their learning and make excellent progress in their personal and social skills. They have a highly developed sense of responsibility and extremely caring attitudes. The mixed age groups enable the children to learn from each other and older children are helpful to the younger ones. Language development is excellent particularly since many children are bi-lingual. Children speak extremely articulately and in calm tones as a result of the teachers' good modelling of language on a daily basis. Extensive use of the excellent outdoor woodland facilities at all times of the year considerably enhances the learning experiences of the children, promoting their highly developed physical skills. Safeguarding is robust and they rightly feel safe and secure to play and learn beyond the immediate supervision of adults. They make a highly positive contribution to their own education: they participate, co-operate and respond very effectively to the expectations of their teachers. Their behaviour is excellent.

### **The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The quality of the provision is outstanding: teachers and classroom assistants strongly promote a peaceful and nurturing atmosphere within an environment which is designed to enable children to flourish. The classroom and the outdoor environment encourage highly successful learning through creative play. Festival celebrations such as Diwali and Hanukkah provide opportunities for parents to talk to children about their celebrations at home and to join with them in creating a festive snack. The carefully planned routines enable children to structure their own games confidently and competently, receiving adult support where necessary. Procedures for monitoring the children's progress are good. Staff have recently introduced more efficient recording of the children's progress through termly evaluations supported by weekly observations including photographs and detailed notes. Assessments, shared with parents form part of the weekly planning. Health and safety are organised efficiently and risk assessments are appropriate. Safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of the children, including child protection, receives good attention. The children are encouraged to wash their hands after toileting and outdoor play and before eating and drinking. Snacks prepared by children as well as adults are of high quality and encourage healthy eating.

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

The outstanding leadership and management are conducted successfully through collaboration and collective responsibility, for example regarding matters such as safeguarding and resourcing. Teachers have regular helpful discussions to improve their practice in the continuous drive for further improving the quality of learning. Each member of staff evaluates their provision regularly, resulting, for instance, in highly beneficial changes to the structure of the day. Parents are kept fully informed through many opportunities to meet with staff, informative parents' evenings and home visits. Information provided to parents is of high quality, including reports and a parents' handbook, and they are further supported by a most helpful website. Staff receive appropriate training on a wide range of issues from both the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship and the local authority.

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

The overall effectiveness of the Kindergartens is outstanding promoting excellent outcomes for the children and meeting their individual needs successfully. Their capacity for further improvement is excellent due to the commitment of all involved with the school.

### ***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.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk](http://www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk)