

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

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

Name of school:	Brighton Steiner School
DCSF number:	846/6016
Steiner Fellowship number:	N/A
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Peter Jones Supporting Inspectors: Martin Bradley Ted Cohn Eileen McAndrew Lay Inspector: Deborah Leah
Dates of inspection:	10 th – 13 th May 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Brighton Steiner School

Address of the school: John Howard House
Roedean Road
Brighton
BN2 5RA

Telephone number: 01273 386300

Fax number: 01273 386313

Email address: enquiries@brightonsteinerschool.org.uk

Proprietor: Brighton Steiner School Council of Trustees

Name of the Chair of the College of Teachers: Maddy Pettit

Name of the Chair of the Trustees: Paul Levy

Name of Administrator: Rosie Harrison

DCSF number: 846/6016

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3-16

Gender of pupils: Male and Female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 64 Girls: 63
(Part time) Boys: 9 Girls: 13

Number of children under 5: Boys: 16 Girls: 16

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: None

Number of boarders: Boys: N/A Girls: N/A

Annual fees: £3,600-£6,000

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Peter Jones
Supporting Inspectors: Martin Bradley
Ted Cohn
Eileen McAndrew
Lay Inspector: Deborah Leah

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th May 2010

PART 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 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 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:

The Brighton Steiner School is an independent day school for pupils aged from three to sixteen years. The school opened in 1984, and moved to its current premises in Brighton fourteen years ago. There are currently 149 pupils on roll. The school follows the Steiner-Waldorf philosophy and curriculum. Pupils stay in the Kindergarten until the age of six or seven, after which they enter Class I of the school and are introduced to elements of academic learning. The school has been granted exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. By the time pupils reach Classes IX and X, they follow GCSE courses within the overall Steiner-Waldorf curriculum experience. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. This is the second published inspection report for the school, the last inspection taking place in 2007. The school's main aims are summarised as follows: *'our highest endeavour must be to develop creative and responsible human beings who are able to deal with diverse situations and to direct their lives with purpose.'*

Summary of main findings:

Brighton Steiner School is active in pursuing the fulfilment of its aims, and is an improving school with a number of good and excellent features, in particular its outstanding provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school has achieved considerable improvement since the last inspection in 2007 in a number of areas. The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety has improved significantly and is now good, as are the safeguarding arrangements. Teaching, assessment, classroom management and premises and accommodation have also improved. Parents are very supportive of the school. The curriculum is satisfactory but lacks detail and rigour in the identification of the knowledge, understanding and skills pupils are to acquire. Teaching is satisfactory and has strengths, but planning does not identify clearly how the whole curriculum is to be taught to ensure that pupils' progress in learning is consistently good, and that assessment supports this progress.

What the school does well:

- its Early Years provision is outstanding, and demonstrates good practice, including self-evaluation and review of its organisation and planning;
- it ensures that pupils' spiritual and personal development are of high quality;

- it fosters excellent relationships across the school between pupils and with staff; and
- it provides very well for the pupils' welfare, health and safety.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- carry out appropriate checks to confirm the medical fitness of all employees and volunteers prior to the confirmation of appointment (Paragraph 4(2)(a)); and
- review the provision for pupils who are ill, so that it contains a sink and washing facilities as well as being near to toilet facilities (Paragraph 5(l)).

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:

- The school meets the requirements of the DDA.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and is effectively supported in its planning by the published Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The school's ethos and curriculum strongly reflect Steiner's belief in the importance of personal and spiritual growth alongside the academic development of the individual.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, providing pupils of all ages, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, with an appropriate range of academic, creative and practical ways of learning. The themes of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum provide the core learning experiences through the daily main lessons, with the addition of eurythmy from Class 1 to Class 5, religion, French, German and the creative and expressive arts. No provision is made currently for information and communication technology. The good range of themes at the time of the inspection included English, arithmetic, the plant world, Persian myths and history of the Roman period and the British Empire in the Lower School, with more advanced study of Shakespeare and embryology for pupils in the Upper School.

Planning is consistent, conscientious and methodical. All teachers set out a yearly plan and weekly overview of the main lesson themes for each class. These themes take account of the interests of the pupils and include elements from other subjects helping pupils to make productive connections between different areas of learning. Main lesson planning uses an agreed common format which includes helpful categories contributing to teachers' ability to plan effectively for pupils' progress. The aims of the lessons are clearly identified. Learning objectives are also specified but these are often expressed in general terms rather than identifying precisely what pupils are expected to learn. This makes it more difficult to ensure progress in knowledge, understanding and skills in all areas of learning over time.

Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority in main lessons, which follow a theme for several weeks, and in additional lessons, contributing well to pupils' progress. The fundamental skills and techniques in art and crafts are fostered systematically, contributing strongly to pupils' creative and aesthetic development. Aspects of spiritual, social, moral and health education are an integral part of the curriculum in all classes, supporting pupils' good personal development.

The school has taken the decision to follow the Steiner Waldorf curriculum for the oldest pupils with the addition of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses in some subjects. The range of examination subjects is limited due to the school's commitment to following the Steiner Waldorf curriculum as fully as possible, with examination subjects available in English language, literature, mathematics, art, French and German. In addition, pupils who wish to take classics are currently offered a course after school. Responding to the needs of pupils for the next phase of their education, the school liaises with local Colleges of Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges to facilitate access to courses in Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced level in subjects where pupils have followed the Steiner Waldorf curriculum but not a GCSE course, for example in science subjects. All pupils have been able to gain access to courses at local sixth form colleges as required. All pupils have the addition of a course in Lifeskills, which includes a focus on careers

education. Pupils in Class 9 spend five days on work experience, gaining some direct insights into the world of work.

Class visits are an important feature of the curriculum. All pupils from Class 2 onwards have the opportunity to participate in a residential visit which supports and enhances work in their main lesson. The focus ranges from Class 3 pupils' two nights at Plaw Hatch Farm, to support their main lesson work on farming, to the voyage of Class 7 across the English Channel as part of their work on exploration. These first-hand experiences enhance and enrich the work of the classroom and provide excellent opportunities for pupils' personal development.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory, with good and outstanding features in teaching and good features in assessment. Teachers establish excellent relationships with pupils, which are marked by personal warmth and mutual respect. Teachers know their pupils personally very well and generally establish a calm and purposeful atmosphere in lessons, which strongly encourages pupils to behave responsibly and is highly conducive to learning. In some lessons this is combined with a deep knowledge of the subject matter to be taught. In these lessons, planning is good and pupils' progress in learning is at least good and sometimes outstanding, as in the case of rhythmic parts of various lessons, the progress of Class 1 pupils in Kindergarten, and in a range of other subjects.

In some lessons, teachers' knowledge is less secure and planning often focuses more on what the teacher will do, rather than what pupils will learn. Progress in learning is then slow and more able pupils in particular are not fully catered for. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities benefits from the good diagnostic information available and the helpful guidance provided by the special needs coordinator.

The school draws on Steiner Waldorf documents for its assessment policies. Teachers' deep knowledge of the personal developmental needs of pupils often contributes to an intuitive understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainment of pupils. Assessment is also informed by the detailed records which teachers keep, diagnosing weaknesses and strengths in pupils' work. Some but not all teachers have a clear understanding of progress in learning in the subjects and topics they teach, the records they keep are a powerful tool for assessing achievement and adapting future planning. Sometimes teachers' planning does not articulate clearly enough what constitutes pupils' progress and it is then less effective in assessing achievement and adapting future planning to meet the learning needs of pupils.

Reports to parents are encouraging in tone and demonstrate a detailed knowledge of pupils' personal development. They include perceptive diagnostic comments about progress and achievement in areas such as literacy and numeracy and in some other subjects. A lack of clear criteria to identify progress in learning in some subjects reduces the efficacy of comments.

Classroom resources generally support teaching soundly, but the limited range of resources inhibits the progress of pupils at times. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. The management of pupils' behaviour is now a general strength, with few instances of poor behaviour, and the behaviour of older pupils is uniformly good. Lessons are planned more effectively

than before to address pupils' needs, although examples remain of more able pupils not being fully challenged by the work set. Lessons have a clear structure and are soundly organised. The teaching and assessment now meet all of the regulations.

Pupils respond well to the teaching. They trust their teachers and enjoy working with them. They are articulate, usually well motivated and concentrate intently from an early age on tasks set. They work well individually and collaboratively from an early age. Pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory, but encompasses a few examples of good and outstanding achievement in areas such as literacy, eurythmy, modern languages, painting and the rhythmic part of main lessons.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils attend well and enjoy their time at school. They develop well as individuals and show self-confidence. They enjoy lessons, appreciate their teachers and feel that they are given helpful support in lessons. The pupils enjoy working as a class. They develop good relationships with each other and their teachers. Older pupils are able to express their own opinions clearly. Pupils' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires show that they feel positively about their education. The school provides Lifeskills and careers lessons for older pupils. They learn about looking after themselves in cookery lessons. Their financial awareness is developed through lessons which cover banking and personal finance.

Pupils' spiritual development is strong, and is a key feature of the school's provision, for example, in eurythmy and story-telling. From the Kindergarten onwards pupils learn about the spirit and about God. Lessons in religion include stories about figures from history who exemplify the importance of faith, such as Gandhi and Mother Theresa, but are non-denominational. The school's large murals evoke an ethereal and spiritual quality. The work pupils undertake often promotes spirituality as, for example, in Class 2 painting where the emphasis on orderly process and respect for materials gave pupils a calm and reflective experience. The timing and planning of lessons emphasise the rhythm of the day and of the yearly flow of seasonal changes and major festivals. The rhythmic parts of main lessons add to pupils' spiritual development.

Pupils generally behave well and the great majority have a strong sense of right and wrong. They are well supported by the school's focus on self-awareness and consideration for others. Classes remain together as a group with the same class teacher as they move through the school, and this helps pupils to feel accountable to others for their actions. Older pupils show good awareness of ethical and moral issues, as, for example, in science where their presentations on embryology and stem cell research were thoughtful and well argued.

Pupils' social development is strong, and they work and play together effectively and with genuine concern for the needs of others. Their social skills are reinforced by regular involvement in trips out of school.

The cultural development of pupils is good. They learn in depth about the background to European culture through the study of many different historical

civilisations including Egyptian, Greek and Roman. Parallels between ancient and modern societies are drawn to provide pupils with a better understanding of concepts such as democracy and the rule of law.

Pupils' knowledge of myths and legends is excellent. They gain a good understanding of a variety of cultures through, for example, storytelling from Jewish, Hindu and Norse traditions. Questions about British identity are explored, for example, in history. The pupils gain good awareness of a range of cultures through the harmonious multi-cultural school community.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and of all other pupils are good. The school places a strong emphasis on the importance of healthy lifestyles. Pupils learn about growing food in gardening lessons and grow crops of vegetables. They learn about preparing healthy food in regular, timetabled cookery lessons. As part of their studies older pupils produce a day's menu which is nutritionally balanced and uses no ready-made or convenience foods. Pupils recognise that the school helps them to eat healthily by providing good quality meals cooked on site. Pupils are consulted about menus and their preferences shape the menus.

As part of the Steiner curriculum pupils undertake regular exercise. They do stretching and co-ordination exercises in class, as well as eurythmy and outdoor games. From Class 5 pupils have timetabled games lessons of 90 minutes each week.

There has been significant improvement in the welfare, health and safety of pupils since the last inspection. The school has in place the necessary policies to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The child protection policy and safeguarding procedures are now good. The administrator and the health and safety co-ordinator between them maintain a close watch on policies and practices, ensuring good standards of welfare, health and safety. The school has a suitable anti-bullying policy, and pupils say that any bullying is dealt with effectively. Designated child protection officers and staff receive training which meets regulations. Pupils are very clear that they feel safe and secure in school and have someone to turn to if they are worried or concerned. Relationships are excellent. Pupils show respect for each other and for their teachers and other adults. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has clear procedures for staff recruitment and for the checking of all trustees, staff and volunteers at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau. All the additional required checks have been carried out for the teaching staff but not all other employees and volunteers have been checked for medical

fitness. The school is addressing this matter imminently. The single central register complies fully with the regulations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

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

- *for all appointments from 1 September 2003, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), carry out checks and keep evidence to confirm identity, medical fitness, employment history, character references, and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references. For appointments from 1 May 2007, carry out an additional check to confirm the right to work in the United Kingdom (paragraph 4(2)(a)).*

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are satisfactory, being safe and conducive to effective learning. These have been improved since the last inspection, when two aspects did not meet the regulatory requirements. The standard and maintenance of decoration have been improved in all areas. Building maintenance is satisfactory. Flooring has been upgraded and the up-to-date maintenance schedule indicates that the remaining major improvements will be completed during the current year. Planning permission is being sought to provide more permanent accommodation for woodwork and pottery. Care has been taken to ensure that classrooms are of a reasonable size for the age and numbers of pupils using them. Outdoor areas are used well, with good provision for the youngest children, and other areas serve a range of purposes including games and gardening.

The kitchen is particularly effective in providing a good variety of hot and cold meals each day. In the Kindergarten and playgroup rooms, food is prepared hygienically and the results are greatly enjoyed by the children.

The present facilities for pupils who are ill do not meet the regulatory requirements as the medical room is being used to store electrical and other equipment and it is not near to a toilet. The library is also used for children who are unwell but who do not require a bed or washing facilities. The school has identified ways in which it can meet the requirements, but the proposals are at a very early stage.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements except one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

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

- *review the provision for pupils who are ill, so that it contains a sink and washing facilities as well as being near to toilet facilities (paragraph 5(l)).*

The quality of information for parents

The provision of information for parents, carers and others meets requirements. The school has maintained the loose-leaf prospectus referred to in the previous report, and has updated its website, which is both welcoming and informative. Besides descriptions of the school, curriculum and ethos, photographs show a wide range of activities, which include lessons in class and outdoors at school, and educational trips for all classes.

Key policies are available in summary, and some in full versions. The weekly newsheet to parents notifies them of relevant dates and events, and conveys efficiently, in hard copy and via email, important notices, explanatory articles, encouragement to helpers, and warm expressions of thanks following supportive actions, from fundraising to attending a 'Vision Meeting'. A good programme of open talks enriches parents' understanding of topics related to the education provided at the school.

Parents' Evenings are held termly for each class. These support home-school co-operation and share insights into child development to be shared. Additionally, Lower School class teachers make home visits. Parental class contacts meet from time to time, linking up classes and families.

Parents receive annual reports about their children, which describes the work undertaken by the class throughout the year. Progress, achievements and effort are recognised, as well as areas needing to be developed further. Insights into the pupil's individual character and personality are included, with comments about his/her relationship to work and learning. Social, academic and practical strengths and weaknesses are addressed. Kindergarten teachers write detailed profiles, which provide valuable information, especially when children 'graduate' to begin formal schooling.

Teachers' extensive reports demonstrate deep sensitivity, imagination and some humour. Many parents expressed appreciation of how they are informed of their child's progress. The best reports clearly specify individual learning aims and objectives for the coming school year. One or two parents feel that they do not understand the school's procedure regarding complaints, but the great majority of parents are very supportive of the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The complaints policy and procedure meet the statutory requirements. There have been two formal complaints during the past twelve months. No complaints have required a panel meeting in recent years.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

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 Trustees hold the legal responsibility for the school, which is a registered charity. They are elected by members of the association. Their objectives are clearly defined as: maintaining a secure home for the Brighton Steiner School, and furthering Steiner Waldorf education in the locality. Their monthly meetings are usually in two parts: one addresses business, administrative and financial matters, and the second part aims for a strategic overview of the school, both short- and long-term. Financial sustainability, Upper School development and public relations are some current issues. Trustees, teachers, staff and parents are included in these Council meetings; the Chair of Trustees occasionally attends meetings of the College of Teachers and receives regular financial and practical updates. Designated Trustees oversee finances, health and safety, child welfare and protection, and site development.

The Board of Trustees monitors and reviews its activities thoroughly. Key issues recently identified and acted on include seeking to recruit new Trustees with expertise in fund raising, law and finance, and in Steiner Waldorf education. Trustees have recognised that they can serve the school in various capacities, for instance in maintaining an overview, offering advice and engaging practically in helping to carry out school procedures.

The management of the school supports positive relationships with all staff. Much good will is evident. The College of Teachers acts as a 'listening ear'. Each week its members hear concise reports from a number of groups: Early Years, Lower School, Upper School, Staff care, Space Planning, Administration, Health and Safety and the (interim) Management Team (IMT). The school administrator is a college member and belongs to most of these groups. Besides weekly meetings there is much frequent informal verbal communication. This effectively promotes mutual understanding. Proactive initiatives help to defuse and resolve minor problems. Minutes are taken with actions noted for checking at the next meeting. Actions are carried forward until they are completed or reconsidered. The IMT was created two years ago to deal with the day-to-day running of the school. The two current members report to the College and are accountable to Council. The IMT consults appropriately and then sets fee structures, deals financially with outside bodies, looks at future developments and assesses potential for new sites, staffing levels and budgets.

The ethos of Steiner Waldorf education is upheld throughout the school and its many varied activities. Teachers meet regularly to develop their teaching skills. Trustees explicitly invite advice from experienced Steiner practitioners in their meetings and decisions; respect for all is expected, with conscious care of pupils and colleagues; great efforts are made to communicate and work closely with parents.

There are regular teacher appraisals, and full use is made of the Advisory Service provided by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The College and Trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestion as to where specific improvement could be made:

- review whether current management practices are sustainable in the longer term, given the complexity of school management and the demands on the time of a few highly committed people.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall effectiveness of the provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage

The school has a playgroup for children aged from three to four years and two Kindergarten classes which provide for children aged between four and six years. Together their overall effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children is outstanding. Their capacity for improvement is excellent and is evident in the ways in which the structure of the day has been modified during the year and in the review of other aspects of planning. Although the sessions are long, lasting four and a half hours, the rhythmic pattern of activities provides a varied programme which sustains the children's interest and promotes their concentration extremely effectively. The process of applying for exemptions and modifications from aspects of the learning and development legal requirements has enabled the school to work with the Brighton local authority to review its approach. Staff are taking part in Brighton's Quality in Learning and Teaching programme. At present they are working on a module to evaluate their aims, values and principles in the Steiner context. This has encouraged them to reflect on their practice, and the support given by the local authority has been highly valued.

At the time of the inspection, the school had been granted exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements, and these were excluded from inspection. However, applications relating to problem solving, reasoning and numeracy were rejected. Inspection evidence shows that children are able to meet these requirements where they refer to mental addition and subtraction, using simple language to refer to these processes. Although the curriculum does not make direct provision for recognising numerals, some children are able to do this.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The staff work well together. They share planning and assessment, but interpret these to meet the needs of their particular groups of children. By constantly reviewing their practices they are able to promote improvement. Resources are good, as is the promotion of equality and diversity. Safeguarding is a strength: on arrival parents sign a register to indicate that they have brought their child and the daily class attendance registers provide a check on this. Self-evaluation is good. The staff have outstanding relationships with parents, which often begin in the thriving parents and toddler group, which meets daily, and develop further through home visits by the staff.

Outcomes are outstanding. The children achieve well and their enjoyment in learning through open-ended activities is evident. They feel safe and are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles throughout the daily sessions: snacks are nutritious and thoroughly enjoyed in a well-mannered and relaxed atmosphere. The children contribute very effectively to the organisation of the groups by working together extremely well and by helping to tidy up. The outdoor sessions where the playgroup children join the older ones in the Kindertartens promote cooperative play very effectively with the older children providing good role models for the younger ones. Through such activities the children develop outstanding social skills.

Children develop extremely positive attitudes towards learning. They are polite and caring for one another. In their play and learning they are supported by the day-to-day rhythm of the sessions and are introduced to the patterns of the year through seasons and festivals. Outdoor activities, including gardening and planting herbs and

vegetables as well as harvesting the produce, support the children's developing awareness. The transition into Class 1 is supported by the 'Long Day' each week when the older children from both Kindergartens come together as a group and begin to establish relationships with one another, staying until the end of the school day. The overall quality of the provision is outstanding.

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 Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the school, or from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk.