

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:	The Meadow School for Steiner Education
DfE number:	933/6196
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley Supporting Inspector: Mrs Sara Wiggins Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead
Dates of inspection:	7 th to 9 th June 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: The Meadow School for Steiner Education

Address of school: 18-20 High Street,
Bruton,
Somerset BA10 0AA

Telephone number: 01749 813 176

Email address: admin@meadowsteiner.somerset.sch.uk

Proprietor: The Meadow School for Steiner Education Ltd

Name of the Chair of
the College of Teachers: Sarah-Jo Robinson

Name of the Chair of
the Trustees: Fran Steele

Name of Administrator: Priya Shearer

DfE number: 933/6196

Type of school: Independent school associated with the Steiner
Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3-11

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full-time) Boys: 21 Girls: 17
(Part-time) Boys: 10 Girls: 8

Number of children under 5: Boys: 7 Girls: 11

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

Annual fees: £3870 to £4725

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley
Supporting Inspector: Mrs Sara Wiggins
Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead

Dates of inspection: 7th to 9th June 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 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:

The Meadow Steiner School opened in 1993 and was opened by a group of parents who wanted their children to have an education based upon Steiner Waldorf principles. It is likely to move premises by January 2012. Currently it has 56 pupils aged between three and eleven. Twenty-nine of these are in the Nursery and the Kindergarten classes which admit children aged between three and four years and four and six years, respectively. The Nursery children attend part-time for three sessions a week, and nearly all of the Kindergarten children attend for five sessions. At the time of the inspection, the school combined its Lower School 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. None of the children attending the school has a statement of special educational needs. Parent and child groups also meet at the school for several sessions each week. The school has eighteen staff, of whom six work full-time, including the administrator. The part-time staff mainly provide specialist subject teaching.

The school follows a curriculum based upon the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, and its governance is based upon Steiner principles. The school is a registered charity, with three trustees, and is a limited company. The Management Group, which is responsible for day-to-day management of the school, is working towards a mandate system to delegate specific functions and roles as well as to promote effective communication between all those involved in the school. The school states that it is further characterised by its small, tightly-knit community and intensive interaction and personal connection between parents, staff and children. It aims 'to provide a balanced education for the head, heart and hands... [allowing] the individual talents of each child gradually to unfold'. It also has the aspiration that 'this should encourage a deep reverence for the world and inspire a lifelong love of learning'.

Summary of main findings:

The overall quality of education provided at the Meadow School is good. The curriculum is broad and meets the range of needs and interests of pupils effectively. Teaching is often well prepared, with good and detailed planning that is carefully linked to assessment procedures. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Together these factors help the pupils to make good progress in their learning. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good and the teachers carefully plan to meet the needs of all pupils in their mixed age classes. In the Nursery and

Kindergarten classes the staff promote a peaceful atmosphere, which enables the children to concentrate and to persist in their tasks.

The pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. Their cultural development is good. Pupils are encouraged to take pride in their achievements and those of others. They are mature and thoughtful. Overall, their behaviour is outstanding. Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. The school provides a happy and caring environment where the pupils feel safe.

As noted in the last inspection, some documentation was hard to retrieve, making it difficult for the school to monitor its effectiveness.

What the school does well:

- it promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development extremely effectively;
- it encourages the pupils to achieve outstanding standards of behaviour.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill.

What the school must do to meet the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- provide a written summary reporting on each child's progress against the early learning goals.

The school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

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 and is broadly based. Pupils in all classes make good progress across linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative areas. The children in the Nursery and Kindergarten classes make good progress and develop positive attitudes towards their learning. Overall, pupils develop good skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, and each day begins with a Main Lesson of about two hours for the Lower School classes. This lesson follows a theme for up to a month, and the themes cover a wide range of literacy and numeracy work as well as a range of other subjects. The themes also reflect festivals and seasons, thereby reinforcing a fundamental principle of the curriculum in all classes of the rhythm of the day's work, of the week's programme and across the year's curriculum. The Main Lesson is followed by a variety of subject lessons, some of which extend the Main Lesson theme. Others extend work in literacy and numeracy as well as in French and German, religion, handicrafts, drawing and painting, games, cooking, music and circus skills. Class teachers plan carefully and generally consistently, providing good detail which is supported by the broader Steiner Waldorf curriculum documentation. This also creates good opportunities for the pupils to take responsibilities and so prepare for future experiences.

The pupils have opportunities to take part in a number of trips and outings. These have included participating in the Steiner 'Olympics' in Forest Row, visits to Bath, a country park in Dorset, and the Merlin Theatre in Frome. Class 3/4 have also been camping locally. The pupils commented that they would like more trips and outings and also more opportunities for outdoor games, the present site having limited outside space which is available to only the youngest children.

A small number of pupils has been identified by the school as having learning difficulties: none has a statement of special educational needs. The school assiduously prepares Individual Educational Plans where these are required. These are regularly monitored and updated, in consultation with the parents and carers. This is appropriate and effective support.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall in classes 1 to 5. It has some outstanding features, especially where Main Lessons benefit from detailed planning and clear targets for pupils are set both in the lesson objectives and in the indications of the time available for completing work. In several other lessons similarly careful planning and clear classroom procedures support pupils' concentration, enjoyment and learning. In these lessons pupils make good progress and they are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. They develop a wide range of intellectual, physical and creative skills. In Main Lessons and in number and English lessons, work is carefully differentiated to provide content well matched to the range of abilities and achievement in the mixed age classes. Teachers have appropriate expectations, which successfully promote the pupils' learning as does their particularly effective

use of praise whilst providing challenging comments for future work. One girl said: '(the teachers) are honest and say how you could improve'. A significant feature of the well-planned Main Lessons is the extremely good pace of the lesson, supporting a variety of well prepared activities. These often involve physical and verbal tasks to which the pupils respond with enthusiasm. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and resources are adequate overall. In a music lesson, particularly good use was made of percussion instruments which the pupils played sensitively. They also sang unaccompanied extremely tunefully. In an art lesson the older pupils were able to apply their art techniques effectively when beginning to plan a large joint painting for the school entrance. They worked enthusiastically, thinking for themselves when developing aspects of the theme and interpreting it at this early stage of deciding its theme and how to create the painting.

A minority of lessons are planned in less detail and the teacher's expectations are not closely defined. In such lessons the pace of work is slower and the pupils make less progress and their behaviour is occasionally poorer.

In the Kindergarten, class teaching is good. The children enjoy their activities and benefit from the careful support provided by the adults. Praise and encouragement support the children's learning and development effectively. Activities are well planned. The staff know the children very well and they are particularly well deployed to promote the children's learning.

Assessment is consistent and follows the approach recommended by the Steiner Fellowship. A five-point scale is used to assess pupils' understanding and progress. This provides an appropriate means of regularly gathering information which is then used often to good effect in planning. It covers work in both Main Lessons and several other subjects. In addition, teachers provide very regular feedback as pupils work, reflecting their clear expectations and detailed knowledge of individual pupils. The small size of the classes supports this practice. The assessments form the basis of good and accurate class records which include comments on pupils' personal and academic progress. Annual reports are detailed and usefully comment on achievements and points for future development.

In nearly all lessons observed behaviour was extremely well managed following the school's guidance and that of the Steiner Fellowship. Pupils are able to act responsibly. They also comment clearly and thoughtfully on behaviour issues. Pupils show a significant awareness of any problems and ways of dealing with these.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils thrive in a happy, positive atmosphere having a sense of purpose and enthusiasm. In their lessons, around the school and in conversation with adults, pupils showed themselves to be mature, thoughtful young people. From the EYFS onwards pupils grow in confidence and they take pride in their own and others' achievements.

Pupils develop outstanding spiritual awareness. They are self-aware and recognise their own strengths and weaknesses, discussing happily their work and explaining

activities undertaken. Their creative work, ranging from delicately made hobby horses to exceptional art pieces, and their love of music shows the strength of their appreciation of the beauty of the world around them. Spiritual and religious teaching and assemblies acknowledge and value all faiths and diverse life styles, ensuring pupils have a clear insight into the values and beliefs of others. Their spirituality is further developed during snack time in Kindergarten, when the children come together to reflect and give thanks for the food, and as all pupils take part in events such as Candlemas at the Dovecote, Martinmas walks in the local area and through their awareness of the rhythm of the seasons. Self-esteem is encouraged as achievements of all kinds are acknowledged and through the way their teachers support and develop their learning. Pupils respond positively to each other and to adults and grow in confidence.

The pupils' social and moral development is outstanding. It is strongly supported by the way they are encouraged to see the school as their own community and to recognise their own part in it. They distinguish between right and wrong and know that fairness is important. They understand that their actions may impinge on the rights and needs of others. Generally, pupils are exceptionally well behaved in lessons and around the school. On the few occasions when behaviour was less good, it resulted from the way in which the class was managed. They enjoy opportunities for responsibility in many spheres of school life. Older pupils have helped to organise charity events such as raising funds for Water Aid. Through the curriculum, pupils develop their knowledge of public institutions and become outward looking citizens. They enjoy their links with the community, whether through visits to the hospital, singing to the elderly, gardening at the local sheltered housing, or celebrating festivals.

The pupils' good cultural awareness is promoted as they celebrate diversity through a variety of festivals ranging from Diwali to Palm Sunday. Pupils appreciate local culture and traditions as they attend theatre productions and musical events. Study of foreign languages, including French and German, has a successful cultural as well as linguistic purpose, introducing pupils to other ways of thinking and living. Within their curriculum they learn about the faith, lives and thought of many places, peoples and times. Cultural experiences are evident throughout each lesson as through music, illustration and poetry much of their work has an aesthetic dimension.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils is good and they are well safeguarded. The school provides a happy and caring environment where pupils feel safe. Matters relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils are reinforced by an appropriate range of documentation and guidance provided by the Steiner Fellowship. Safeguarding arrangements are mostly thorough and effective. The school takes proper care to keep its pupils safe, through its appropriate child protection policy which is subject to annual review. This policy is well understood and implemented. Although higher level training for the child protection officer has been arranged it has not yet been undertaken. Pupils understand the anti-bullying policy; they feel that it is not an issue and that staff would be very supportive should it occur. The policy relating to behaviour includes matters of discipline and sanctions which reflect the

Steiner approach and pupils feel that they are fair and work well. All necessary measures, including staff training, have been taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. Risk assessments cover many aspects of school life, and health and safety procedures are thorough. The school has a written policy for First Aid. Most staff have up-to-date First Aid Certificates and are trained in paediatric First Aid. Accidents are properly recorded. The school has a suitable three-year plan to fulfil its duties to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. Pupils understand the importance of a healthy diet, supported by the clear rules for snacks and lunches brought to school. The daily lives of all pupils are physically active. Admission and attendance registers are properly completed and stored.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has sought to update the details of all staff and volunteers, including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks, as noted in the report of the inspection in 2008. This has now been done, although information on the Single Central Register is duplicated in paper records. Safeguarding checks are now fully carried out.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises are adequate for the current number of pupils. The small outside area is used by the Kindergarten classes. Older pupils use the nearby playing fields of a local independent school, for break times and on other occasions. Bruton Community Hall is also used for music lessons. As noted in the 2004 Ofsted report, there is no separate area for children who are unwell; instead they can rest comfortably in the school office, which does not have a washbasin. The premises are secure.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all the requirements apart from one.

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

In order to comply with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2010 the school should:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (Regulation 23(k)).

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

A good range of information is available for prospective and current parents. The prospectus and the parent handbook are clear and concise. Policies are available

on the school's website; they are also posted on the school notice board and are available on request from the school's office. Regular newsletters provide information on current and future school and community events. Termly parents' evenings provide specific information on child development and the curriculum for each class. There are also regular general talks on subjects related to education. Home visits and individual consultations take place and annual reports give detailed information on the aims of lessons, what each child has achieved and which areas need further development.

Thirty-two parental questionnaires were returned. Their responses reflected parents' strong support for the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a clear and comprehensive concerns and complaints policy which complies with all the regulations. There were no formal complaints in the last year.

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

Management at the Meadow School for Steiner Education has been founded historically on the basis of shared leadership and consensus decision-making. In April 2010, a governance review scrutinised all areas of school life. The findings showed that, while the educational aspect of the school was strong and flourishing, management and leadership were weak, under-resourced and cumbersome.

The school is now in a period of transition moving towards a tighter, transparent and more manageable mandate system. The educational and the business/operational aspects have been separated. The Trustees are elected by The Meadow School Association, a body open to all in the school community. Trustees, while having legal and financial responsibility, maintain an overall view of the school and its development. They delegate to two overarching mandate bodies: the College of Teachers, who have responsibility for all pedagogical matters, and the School Management Team, who undertake the day-to-day running of the school. These two bodies are defining specific mandates and delegating them to further groups and individuals. The revised system is simpler and allows for greater visibility and accountability. At present there is no Education Mandate holder. Parents, teachers, administrative staff and friends work closely together, thus remaining true to the ideal of shared participation and responsibility.

The ethos of the school is further strengthened through the celebration of the festivals; a close connection with nature; the artistic impulse which permeates the school; and through the teaching and learning exemplified by happy, independent pupils.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes.

The current re-structuring is still work in progress. The Trustees, College, and Management Team might like to consider:

- prioritising the appointment of an Education Mandate holder;
- making it a priority to create an Education Development Plan to the Steiner Waldorf School Fellowship (SWSF) good practice level; and
- ensuring that minutes of meetings are distributed to all relevant parties in a timely and punctual fashion.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The outcomes for children are good and occasionally 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 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. Children display a strong understanding of the wider world, for example, as they prepare to take part in a naming ceremony using handmade dolls for which they have made dresses, jewellery, toys and embroidered blankets displaying their exceptional creative skills. Children approach their learning with enjoyment. They respond very enthusiastically and are eager to talk about their activities, with younger children explaining the requirements for food in a picnic and older children carefully counting the number of cabins on a pirate ship constructed from wooden blocks. They are very self-reliant. The mixed-age group in the Kindergarten is particularly effective in enabling the children to learn from each other, with older children aiding the development of the younger ones. The snacks provided are of high quality and encourage healthy lifestyles. Children respond positively to the high expectations of good behaviour, understand how to keep themselves safe and are particularly well mannered.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision is good. The staff display a consistent approach to behaviour and discipline and promote a peaceful atmosphere that enables children to concentrate and to persist at their tasks. The daily routines enable many opportunities for purposeful play and exploration, and children structure their own games confidently and competently, receiving adult support where necessary. Procedures for monitoring the children's progress are good. Careful and conscientious records are kept and provide clear details of each child's social, personal and educational progress. Although highly informative reports are written, as yet the school has not provided parents with a written summary reporting on each child's progress against the early learning goals and the assessment scales. The curriculum is firmly based on Steiner Waldorf principles which celebrate the rhythm of the seasons and festivals throughout the year. Planning varies in quality between the classes; the best weekly plans involve self reflection and are used effectively to identify individuals and their needs. The children have clear awareness of health and safety and well-being issues, and staff serve as good role models at all times.

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

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in the EYFS is good. A range of policies and practices are in place to ensure safe and efficient management. Safeguarding of children's welfare is good. Staff take thorough care to ensure the safety of the premises and of activities, both in school and on visits. All the necessary employment checks are carried out and recorded. All staff are suitably qualified and the adult-to-child ratios are high, contributing strongly to the learning of the children. Resourcing is mostly good; inside the classroom, children are supported by a range of appropriate equipment, of which they make good use. One of the Kindergartens has direct access to an outdoor area, but this is not as yet a fully developed resource. All children are taken outdoors daily. Self-evaluation is

regular although informal. Staff meet weekly to discuss their setting and seek to improve their practice. There is no written development planning. Partnerships with parents and carers are outstanding, particularly the ways in which the Nursery and Kindergarten staff engage with them. Staff training from both the Steiner Waldorf fellowship and the local authority has a positive impact on learning.

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

The overall effectiveness of the EYFS provision in meeting the needs of the children is good. A high adult-to-child ratio ensures that children's individual needs are well met, and detailed records of observations and assessments comprehensively underpin and inform staff knowledge of each child, ensuring that no child is disadvantaged. The capacity for sustained improvement is appropriately developed through the regular meetings of staff. Supportive and close relationships between the school and parents lead to a shared value for the children's education.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

The school meets all of the requirements except one.

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

- It should provide a written summary reporting on each child's progress against the early learning goals and the assessment scales.

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