

# 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>	Exeter Steiner School
<b>DfE number:</b>	878/6212
<b>Inspection team:</b>	<b>Reporting Inspector:</b> Dr Martin Bradley  <b>Supporting Inspector:</b> Mr Tony Hubbard  <b>Lay Inspector:</b> Miss Deborah Leah
<b>Dates of inspection:</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> to 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2011

### 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: Exeter Steiner School

Address of school: 80 Merrivale Road,  
Exeter, Devon, EX4 1PT

Telephone number: 01392 427200

Email address: [exetersteinerschool@phonecoop.coop](mailto:exetersteinerschool@phonecoop.coop)

Proprietor: Iain Jamieson

Name of the Chair of the  
College of Teachers: The school does not have a College

Name of the Chair of the Trustees: Iain Jamieson

Name of Administrator: Jenny Salmon

DfE number: 878/6212

Type of school: Independent school associated with the  
Steiner Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3 to 12

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 8 Girls: 10  
(Part time) Boys: 6 Girls: 7

Number of children under 5 Boys: 5 Girls: 7

Number of pupils with statements of  
special educational need: Boys: 1 Girls: 0

Annual fees: £3,660 to £4,305

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Martin Bradley  
Supporting Inspector: Tony Hubbard  
Lay Inspector: Deborah Leah

Dates of inspection: 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 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:**

Exeter Steiner School is located in the St Thomas district of Exeter and has developed from ITS Early Years' provision. It was registered as a school in 2008 to admit older pupils and is now registered for five to twelve year olds. It has 31 pupils, of whom twelve are under five. There are three classes; the Kindergarten caters for three to five year olds (Nursery and Year R in National Curriculum terms); the Lower School has two classes: Transition/Class 1 (Years 1 and 2) for six to eight year olds; and Class 2/3 (Years 3 and 4, but which also has one Year 5 pupil) for eight to ten year old pupils. The school was last inspected in December 2009, and Ofsted made a further visit in June 2010 leading to a progress report.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and is affiliated to the Steiner Fellowship, being sponsored by the Rudolf Steiner South Devon School. It is a registered charity with six Trustees and is supported by three 'school elders' who provide advice and support. It does not have a College of Teachers, due to its small size, although the regular teachers' meetings fulfil much of this role. The school aims to *'foster in the children a sense of awe and reverence towards the world that surrounds them, a keen sense of interest and a love of learning, and a sense of personal and collective responsibility'*.

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

The quality of education provided at Exeter Steiner School is satisfactory, with several good elements. The pupils make satisfactory progress. The curriculum meets the range of interests and needs of the pupils effectively, and the organisation of the mixed age classes seeks to take account of these needs by adapting the Steiner curriculum. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory, with good elements. The relationship between teachers and pupils is a strength of the school; teachers know the pupils very well. In the most effective lessons, the pace is good and the working atmosphere promotes pupils' learning and the development of their skills and knowledge.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is their behaviour. The overall welfare, health and safety of the pupils are good. Safeguarding is effective.

The outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are good and the overall provision is satisfactory. The children enjoy coming to the Kindergarten and develop good attitudes and skills which support their later learning. This also lays the foundations of the good relationships which the school has with parents and carers.

**What the school does well:**

- it promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively;
- it ensures that the pupils' behaviour is good;
- its provision for welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding, is good;
- it promotes healthy eating and lifestyles extremely effectively; and
- its relationships with parents and carers are very strong.

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

- Provide and use a framework for the regular assessment of pupils' progress in the school's skills chart, using this to inform planning and to guide improvement.

**What the school must do in order to fully meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage:**

- ensure that all of the learning requirements of the EYFS are taught; and
- assign a key person to each child in the EYFS.

**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:

- seek to develop further teachers' awareness of expectations appropriate to each age group in all classes;
- plan the pupils' work with more detailed attention to specific learning objectives related to the Steiner curriculum; and
- increase the pace of work in lessons and ensure that these start promptly.

## **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 satisfactory and it is broadly based. The school is guided by the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, adjusting this where classes are combined. The small classes enable teachers to know their pupils very well and to plan appropriately for their individual needs. Provision for the pupil with a statement of special educational needs is good. The oldest children from the Kindergarten are combined with the Class 1 age group to form a Transition/Class 1 group. They followed a broadly Kindergarten curriculum for the first part of the year and, by the time of the inspection, moved on to follow the Class 1 curriculum. The older class combines Class 2 and 3 age groups and also has one Class 4 pupil. In both classes the teaching is supported by appropriate schemes of work. The Transition/Class 1 curriculum initially focused on promoting neurological and movement development as well as the social skills of group learning and independent work. This has enabled the pupils to gain confidence in dealing with new knowledge and situations. More recently the early skills of reading and writing have been introduced, and the Transition/Class 1 pupils can recognise letters and numbers as well as read simple books earlier than would generally be the case in Steiner schools. The loss of these older children from the Kindergarten class has constrained the development of aspects of cooperative play which these children generally provide in Kindergartens as well as teaching the Transition pupils aspects of reading, writing and number work which they would not have had in Kindergarten.

Not all pupils in the Kindergarten attend for five sessions a week, and the Transition/Class 1 pupils attend for seventeen and a half hours a week. In both cases, where the children do not attend full-time, their parents home-educate them when they are not at school.

In the Kindergarten, there is a strong emphasis on the rhythm of the seasons and festivals throughout the year as well as on daily and weekly routines. These provide the children with a strong sense of stability and continuity. On most days, food is cooked and the children greatly enjoy sharing the snack time which is an important part of the daily routine. It also helps to sustain the children through the long five hour sessions.

The curriculum offers particularly good experiences in creative, aesthetic and practical areas. These are developed in both Main Lessons and in subject lessons. The Main Lessons follow a theme for between three and six weeks and are conducted daily, lasting for up to two hours, although they may last for less than this. They underpin the rest of the curriculum and seek to integrate subjects where appropriate. This supports the pupils' satisfactory development of skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. In Transition/ Class 1, besides the Main Lesson, music, handwork, German and Tai Chi are taught as well as gardening and games. In addition, Class 2/3 also has cooking, art, painting and origami. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught through both the Main Lessons and subject lessons, such as cookery, as well as through social education and the promotion of good behaviour. In both the Transition/Class 1 and Class 2/3 the effectiveness of lessons is reduced when time is lost by lessons starting later than planned. Overall, pupils make at least satisfactory progress.

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

The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory and enables pupils to make progress in accordance with their various abilities. Teaching has a number of important strengths, among which the most significant is the good quality of relationships between teachers and pupils. Teachers and their assistants create a spiritually calm atmosphere in their lessons, and are very patient in supporting their pupils' progress and development. At times the pace is too relaxed; such lessons cover less ground than they could. Teachers have a good knowledge of what they teach and understand the principles of development upon which Steiner Waldorf education is based: the pupils are highly responsive to the links between cognitive, physical and spiritual growth. Teachers prepare their lessons thoroughly and strike a good balance between exposition and encouraging pupils to use their own ideas and imagination, with reference to a useful skills chart, based on Steiner Waldorf guidance. However, the teachers recognise that the planning of blocks of work and of individual lessons is not sufficiently detailed in showing how these are to be taught and assessed.

Teachers are effective at ensuring that new skills, such as those of learning multiplication tables in mathematics, are supported by strong conceptual foundations that relate them, for example, to shape, symmetry and asymmetry. This enables pupils of all abilities to make secure progress in their numeracy. Pupils make good progress in their reading and become good listeners. Teachers enable pupils to make secure progress in writing for a variety of purposes. Several of the sessions observed did not provide sufficient scope for pupils to extend their speaking skills.

Teachers create a generally good working atmosphere, in which the pupils are well behaved and work effectively both alone and with others. In the best lessons, teachers ask challenging questions and give their pupils the time and space to consider their answers. In a lesson dealing with symmetric and asymmetric patterns the pupils were reaching for the distinction between shapes governed by rules and those derived without rules. Teachers make good use of a range of materials available to them and fully utilise the premises to create and extend opportunities for learning. This is particularly evident in the work all pupils have done on planting parts of the grounds with a range of fruit and vegetables.

Teachers know their pupils and their needs very well from their constant contact with them and through the child studies that they carry out. This knowledge is apparent in the detailed reports they write for parents. Some continuous assessment is carried out and teachers carefully review each lesson, using this to adjust future planning. They keep spreadsheets related to the Steiner objectives showing where pupils may have a problem. However, the teachers are aware that they lack a specific framework to assess either continuously or at intervals each pupil's level of attainment in each subject area, and also that they do not have the means to identify areas for further development in pupils.

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

*No.*

***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 and use a framework for the regular assessment of pupil's progress in the school's skills chart, using this to inform planning and to guide improvement (*Paragraph 3(g)*).

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

The quality of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy their education. They respond strongly to the spiritual aspects of their work, which root their growth in awareness of their relationship to each other and to nature, the elements and the seasons. This is evident in their reverence at the beginnings of the Main Lessons. The spiritual dimension often is apparent in the art work inspired by the stories told by teachers. Pupils think and talk easily about their own and others' feelings, confident in their own worth. Pupils have a secure understanding of the difference between right and wrong and respect the school rules, based on kindness, consideration and orderly learning. They are well behaved in lessons and about the school, and are polite and considerate to visitors.

Social maturity is a particular strength of pupils' development: the school is an extremely closely knit family community of pupils, parents and teachers. This was apparent at a lunchtime cafe when pupils ate with parents. They have ample opportunities to interact with pupils of all ages and to contribute to their community through performances to each other and to parents and by fund raising, most of which goes towards improving resources for the school. The school is seeking ways to engage more with the wider community. Older pupils take a share of responsibility for the well-being of younger ones through the 'buddy' system, which includes helping them to read once a week. The school has a suitable written programme to inculcate understanding of public services and institutions appropriate to their ages.

The school community is very tolerant, so that different individuals are treated with equality and respect. In accordance with Steiner Waldorf practice, pupils encounter the differences and diversity of the world through the many stories they hear, drawn from a wide variety of cultural traditions, North American, African, European and Asian.

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

Yes.

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

The quality of welfare health and safety is good and meets the aims of the school. Teachers and all staff have a deep knowledge of their pupils' personalities and needs and provide them with very good emotional support. As a result, all pupils express confidence in their teachers and would not hesitate to go to them with a personal or academic worry. In the inspection survey, parents also indicated their strong confidence in the loving care staff devote to their children.

At all stages, the arrangements for communication ensure that all staff have the information they need about the well-being of pupils. Each child has more than one member of staff who knows them extremely well, not least because of the exceptionally generous ratio of adults to pupils in the Lower School. Good records are maintained, and teachers' records of lessons in the Lower School, even though lacking some academic detail, provide a clear account of the personal needs and personal development of pupils. Any matters of concern are discussed and recorded at teachers' meetings, and all pupils are from time to time subject to an extensive child study. School policies successfully promote good behaviour and records show that where any pupil has emotional or behavioural problems, these are managed effectively. The school's records show that no sanction for serious misdemeanours has been imposed for a long time. The policy to minimise bullying is very effective and pupils feel that bullying is rare.

The staff take good care of the health and safety of the children, and provision for healthy living is outstanding. The snacks and meals, and the values of the education provided, strongly promote understanding of the importance of a healthy diet, which is supported by the children's families. Pupils and parents ate with relish the tasty aubergine soup pupils in Class 2/3 had prepared in a cooking lesson. Pupils' understanding of healthy eating is further promoted by their growing and using a wide variety of fruit and vegetables. Similarly, the value attached to the development of body and mind together enables pupils to benefit from healthy physical exercise. In break times all pupils are vigorously active, taking advantage of the many opportunities for climbing and balancing, while all from Transition to Class 3 benefit from the sessions in Tai Chi at the beginning of most days.

The school takes good care to safeguard all its children. Its safeguarding policies are rigorous and in line with the locally agreed procedures. All staff are familiar with the arrangements through regular training. There are two designated persons trained in interagency working. There are good links with the local authorities. Trustees, who include one nominated for safeguarding, review the policy and its implementation annually. Careful risk assessments are made and secured by all staff. Fire safety is properly checked and in the regular fire drills, evacuation is consistently rapid. The school has a written First Aid policy and arrangements for first aid training and for the admission and recording of any accidents or the administration of any medicines are sound. The school has a strong and effective policy for equality of opportunity. It has a thorough and broad access plan, which addresses both physical access and ensures that the curriculum includes any pupils with learning disabilities as much as possible.

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

Yes.

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

The school has completed appropriate checks on all staff, trustees, volunteers and others associated with it. These are contained appropriately in a single central register. Safeguarding checks are fully carried out.

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

Yes.

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

The school has two buildings which provide sufficient accommodation for the present numbers of pupils, as well as having space for a hall and parent and toddler groups to meet. Outdoor provision is good and includes a range of equipment and well cultivated garden areas. Good use is also made of the neighbouring play provision in the grounds of the Youth Centre.

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

Yes.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements, and provides good information to the parents about many aspects of school life. New parents receive a copy of the detailed Parents' Handbook which contains many practical points, a description of festivals celebrated by the school and a list of books on Steiner Waldorf education. The handbook is on the website, as are key policies. A complete folder of policies is available in the school administration office. The 'Friday Flier' keeps all members of the school community in touch with events and news. Emails and noticeboards are well used for day-to-day postings.

Parents receive an annual report from the teachers on each child in Class 1 and above. This describes the curriculum aims for the past year; the individual pupil's strengths, progress and attainments are matched against these in some detail.

Returns to the parents' questionnaire indicate that they feel well-informed about their children's learning and progress. The majority feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions.

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

Yes.

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

The school complies with the regulatory requirements. It has a complaints policy and procedure and there have been no formal complaints during the past twelve months. Minor issues are dealt with promptly, usually by the administrator or by the class teacher as appropriate.

***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 school is a registered charity and is working towards becoming a limited liability company. It has a board of trustees who are legally responsible for the school's affairs; they have a duty to ensure it acts according to its agreed aims and ethos. Trustees meet half-termly.

Many improvements have been introduced in the past two years which aid the school's organisation, most significantly the formation of the Management Group. This consists of the treasurer (who is a trustee), a teacher, the administrator and a business adviser; it has delegated responsibility for day-to-day financial decisions, budgeting, site maintenance issues and directing marketing and publicity. It meets at least fortnightly and reports to the trustees. According to the terms of reference of the Management Group taking on these responsibilities enables the trustees to focus on the overall wellbeing and direction of the school; it also leaves the teachers free to concentrate on their work with the children. The school does not have a College of Teachers and has yet to establish effective leadership processes with regard to its Steiner Waldorf practice.

A business and development plan (2009-2011) led to greater financial clarity and budgeting. The treasurer gives updated financial reports at every trustees meeting. There is now a fund-raising co-ordinator, and a finance administrator. The plan includes a realistic analysis of the catchment area and population reach of Exeter Steiner School. It considers current economic trends as well as the precedent of the Rudolf Steiner South Devon School at Totnes, 26 miles to the south. The school community has become more aware of its values, strengths and weaknesses, especially around management, through the development and review of the school plan.

There is a budget for staff training and continuing professional development. Several teachers have attended workshops related to Steiner Waldorf classroom practice this year. Staff appraisals have been undertaken, with help from the Elders, experienced members of the school community who are not staff, trustees or parents. They freely support the school's spiritual life and the welfare of the community. The school has made regular use of the Steiner Waldorf Advisory Service. A further visit is due.

Given the small size of the site, a lot of communication happens effectively on a frequent and informal basis. However, more formal and written reporting rests on two members of the management group: a teacher and the administrator, who both attend many meetings in the course of each term.

### ***Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?***

Yes.

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

- consider the importance of study and pedagogical leadership, and how these can be further developed;
- provide a structured, but flexible, timetable for mentoring, external advisory visits, appraisals and teachers' visits to other Steiner Waldorf schools as part of the school's continuing professional development programme;
- continue to delegate administrative responsibilities and accountability, so that the present administrator can focus on effective forward planning and management; and
- make written notes and minutes of meetings more easily available for consultation.

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

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

The outcomes for children in the EYFS are good. The children enjoy their learning and achieve particularly well in the social and emotional aspects. These are supported by the care the staff take to ensure that children feel safe and confident. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, especially when they help to prepare the main snack each day. The snack is particularly important as the daily sessions last for five hours. The children are aware of healthy eating and greatly enjoy the snacks prepared. They make an appropriate contribution to life in the Kindergarten, helping to keep the rooms tidy and orderly. Their good social skills and attitudes towards learning underpin their later acquisition of more complex skills and knowledge. Many of the children have developed good speaking skills. The school has not sought exemption from any of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS, despite not teaching those referring to reading and writing in communication, language and literacy, computation in problem solving and numeracy, and information technology in knowledge and understanding of the world. In 2009 it received a letter of support for these exemptions from Devon County Council, but it has not taken this further.

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

The quality of provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. The children are supported by clearly articulated routines and rhythms for the day, the week and throughout the year. The school's decision to transfer the oldest Kindergarten children, aged rising six and above into a Transition Class has taken away the role models for cooperative play which these older children provided. Many of the Kindergarten children at the time of the inspection were relatively young and still acquiring skills of sharing and imitative play. The staff ensure that both the classroom and the outdoor environment encourage learning through creative play and this is beginning to have an impact on the ways the children interact with one another. Assessments are made and the Early Years Profile is shared with parents. The welfare, health and safety of the children receive good attention. Risk assessments are appropriate. Personal hygiene, including encouraging children to wash their hands after toileting and before eating and drinking, is good.

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

The Kindergarten staff work as a team and share many responsibilities, including assessment and planning. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively and the class makes good use of its resources. Safeguarding procedures are good. At present staff do not work as the 'key person' for a group of children. They hold regular discussions to develop their practice and have good relationships with parents, many of whom bring a snack to have when they collect their children at the end of the daily session whilst the children play. This is a most useful time for discussion. There are good means of communicating between parents and staff. Staff undertake a good range of training, although support from the Steiner Fellowship and the sponsor school has not been pursued recently. As a result, self evaluation has tended to be internal without an external overview, although the local authority's monitoring of the Early Years Profile was reported to have been most helpful.

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

The Kindergarten class meets the individual needs of its children effectively. The staff's commitment supports its capacity to continue to improve.

***Does the school meet the statutory requirements?***

No.

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

- since the school has not sought exemption from any learning requirements of the EYFS, it should ensure that all are taught; and
- the school should assign a key person to each child in the EYFS.

**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](http://www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk)**