

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:	Lancaster Steiner
DCSF number:	888/6040
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Simon Bennett Cecile Corfield Lay Inspector: Ewout van Manen
Dates of inspection:	8 th to 10 th February 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of the school: Lancaster Steiner

Address of the school: Lune Road, Lancaster, LA1 5QU

Telephone number: 01524 841351

Fax number: n/a

Email address: lancastersteinerschool@yahoo.co.uk

Proprietor: Council of Trustees

Name of Chair of the College of Teachers: Rowan Brook -Thompson

Name of Chair of the Trustees: Bruno Jackson

Name of Administrator: Alice Granger

DCSF number: 888/6040

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

Age range of pupils: 3 to 14

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time)	Boys: 6	Girls: 19
(Part time)	Boys: 8	Girls: 5

Number of children under 5: Boys: 8 Girls: 7

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

Annual fees: Sliding scale of fees, top fee = £3798
EYFS Vouchers for 3-5yr olds

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell
Supporting Inspector: Simon Bennett
Cecile Corfield
Lay Inspector: Ewout van Manen

Dates of inspection: 8th to 10th February 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 Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). 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. His 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:

Lancaster Steiner School is an independent school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Schools' Fellowship. It began as a toddler group in 1991 and progressed in small stages to be first registered as an independent school in 2003. Situated in a residential street relatively close to the centre of Lancaster, it occupies buildings that have been converted from a former Methodist chapel. There are thirty-eight boys and girls attending the school between the ages of 3 and 11. Twelve children are below compulsory school age and attend the kindergarten classes on a part-time basis. There are no pupils with statements of special educational need, although the school identifies two pupils as requiring additional support for special learning needs (SEN). The school aims *'to support the development of individuals who have a sense of purpose, morality and respect for self and others'* and who show *'initiative and creativity and appropriate relationships with authority'* and *'have the appropriate skills and motivation to achieve their potential'* in their future education and lives.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf system for naming classes. The corresponding National Curriculum names for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection are:

Steiner class names	National Curriculum
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1
Class 1	Year 2
Class 2,3,4	Years 3,4,5
Class 5	Year 6

Summary of main findings:

Lancaster Steiner School is a successful school which provides a good quality of education for its pupils and which meets the aspirations of the parents for their children's development. It receives the overwhelming support of its parents. Pupils of all abilities, including those identified as having learning difficulties make good progress throughout the school. The curriculum is good and carefully planned to reflect the view of Rudolf Steiner for child development, although eurythmy (a form of dance specific to Steiner) is currently not taught. The quality of teaching is good and

frequently outstanding supported by the excellent relationships that teachers have with their pupils and which exist in the school at all levels. Teachers show great commitment to the pupils and demonstrate a very effective understanding of their educational as well as personal needs. The welfare and the pastoral care of pupils are good and procedures for safeguarding secure. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Their behaviour and response is exceptionally good. Older pupils in the lower school cite the calm and positive learning environment provided by the school as an important support to their progress and enjoyment of learning. Because pupils enjoy their education, attendance is good.

The school has made good progress since the inspection by Ofsted in September 2007 and now meets all but one of the regulations for independent schools.

What the school does well:

- it ensures that teachers plan their lessons well to meet the learning needs of all pupils, including those in mixed age classes;
- it provides good assessment procedures with outstanding features that are well matched to the size of the school and the expectations of the Steiner curriculum;
- it provides a notably calm learning environment in which pupils thrive;
- it ensures that older pupils are confident and are well prepared for their future education and lives; and
- it provides a firm foundation in the kindergarten for children's learning and progress.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- provide suitable facilities for pupils who may become ill.

Next Steps:

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

- provide eurythmy in the curriculum when possible.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good and meets successfully the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities. The subjects studied by pupils are well planned and carefully set out to ensure that they correspond to the Steiner Waldorf view for child development. Appropriate schemes of work are provided and well supported by a range of guidance, including a clearly written curriculum policy. The good quality of planning ensures that all pupils experience a very wide range of learning opportunities. In the lower school, the main lesson, known in the school as a 'block' of learning, occurs every morning for the first two hours. Each block of work is covered progressively over three to five weeks. Through these lessons pupils study English, mathematics, history, geography and science as appropriate to the age of the child and as set out within the Steiner curriculum. Main lessons have a regular rhythm which begins each day with a morning verse and 'circle' which can include songs, poetry, movement and dance, rhythmic work, musical instrument practice and mathematics based games. Circle activities encourage pupils to relate to one another and ensure that every child in a group, irrespective of their age or ability, is fully involved.

The progressive development of learning in the main lesson is emphasised by concentration during the first two years in the lower school on the development of spoken language and comprehension, learning to form letters, writing and reading, arithmetic and the natural sciences. In class 4 pupils study Norse Mythology, aspects of zoology and local history and geography. In class 5 history, they study the ancient world, classical Greece and ancient Greek mythology, regional geography and the British Isles, and the science curriculum broadens to include botany. Pupils learn about a range of religions with a strong emphasis on Christian/Judean traditions and beliefs.

Main subjects are complemented by a programme of English and mathematics practice, art, music, drama, games, environmental studies, craft, handwork, and religious studies. In addition, subjects specific to Steiner are taught; for example form drawing is taught throughout the school as a separate subject and supports the development of letter formation, cursive handwriting skills, spatial awareness and observational and geometrical drawing. German is taught as the main foreign language. It is studied orally up to Class 3 and additionally in written form to pupils in Classes 4 and 5. In addition pupils experience a range of other languages, such as French, Hebrew and Sioux, a North American Indian language, through singing during the main lesson. Pupils practical and creative development is well supported through the range of activities provided. Boys and girls in Class 5 use tools well to shape wood using traditional techniques. The school is currently unable to offer eurythmy, although dance and movement feature both as part of main lessons and throughout the curriculum.

The curriculum is planned effectively and good use is made of the adequate range of learning resources available in the school. The curriculum provides well for speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. Communication skills are well developed and children become very capable at expressing their views and ideas. They

become good listeners. Typical of many small Steiner schools the school has one mixed year group which combines classes 2, 3 and 4 and planning for the wide range of age is dealt with very effectively. Aspects of personal, social and health education are effectively woven into the curriculum at appropriate moments relative to the child's age and stage of development.

The provision is enriched significantly by a range of visits made by the pupils directly linked to curriculum themes and by visitors to the school. For example, a representative of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds supported a nature study 'block' for pupils in classes 2, 3 and 4 and class 5 visited the Lake District visitors' centre as part of their study of the geography of the British Isles. Local museums in Lancaster are well used by the school to provide a rich range of opportunities to study, for example the history of measurement.

The school has good procedures for the identification of pupils with SEN. Pupils are given effective support by class teachers and by the two special educational needs co-ordinators for the lower school and kindergarten. Individual education plans have appropriate targets and these are reviewed regularly. Parents are fully involved in decisions about their children's support and the school makes good use of outside agencies for further support when necessary.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good and has a number of outstanding features. Teachers show a good understanding of the subjects that they teach and the principles underpinning the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. The generally high quality of teaching throughout the school is a key factor in ensuring the good progress made by pupils of all abilities, ages and stages of development. Pupils' progress is effectively monitored to assess their developing understanding and the skills learned in subjects. The good quality lessons are underpinned by the excellent relationships that teachers develop with their children. Because the teachers make lessons interesting and the pupils are happy, they want to learn. Lessons are invariably conducted in a tranquil and positive learning atmosphere. Within the constraints of the relatively small building, classrooms are carefully decorated to reflect Steiner Waldorf principles and to support teaching and learning styles. The good quality of learning atmosphere created is a key factor in supporting the growing self-confidence in pupils initially identified as having special learning needs. Behaviour is excellent due to the pupils' generally high expectations about what they will learn and to the calm atmosphere in lessons.

The quality of interaction and dialogue between teachers and their pupils is excellent. Discussion between the teachers and their pupils and progressive questioning ensures that pupils' intellectual development is the equivalent of and often beyond their chronological age. Their creative and physical development is assured through the varied curriculum provision. Teachers plan their lessons very well to meet the needs of all abilities and to ensure, for example, where there is a mixed age group, that all the pupils' needs are addressed. The small size of classes is an important feature of the school which ensures that all pupils can receive individual attention from the teacher, have verbal feedback on their work and be fully involved in learning at all times. Resources for learning are sufficient and used well to support teaching and meet pupils learning needs.

The quality of assessment is good with outstanding features. Pupils' work is regularly reviewed by teachers and marking and feedback provided where and when

necessary, for example to correct spelling. A clear framework for assessment in the lower school sets out the school's aims for pupils' development within the views of the Steiner Waldorf philosophy for children's development. Records of pupils' progress in all subjects are carefully maintained and kept up to date, for example through daily evaluations and at the end of each block of work. Recorded evaluations of individual pupil's progress in each subject flow elegantly into end-of-year assessments, and because these evaluations clearly and succinctly reflect on what a pupil has achieved, so into annual reports to parents. Annual reports to parents are supplemented by formal termly parents' meetings and other frequent informal meetings between teachers and parents. Care is taken throughout to ensure continuing evaluation of individual pupil's progress in speaking and listening, writing and reading and grammar.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding throughout the school, including for the youngest children. Pupils are self-confident and assured relative to their ages, and they respond positively to each other and to adults. Their behaviour is both responsive and responsible. Staff set examples of high quality, and exhibit understanding, patience and care. The curriculum enables pupils to reflect, to participate and share and to show initiative within structured and exciting routines. Spiritual awareness is developed further through participation in festivals, through awareness of the rhythm of the seasons, the significance of light and of patterns in nature.

Circle time and form drawing coupled with singing, movement and dance, increase the awareness among pupils of the importance of their own and others' use of space and operation of team work. Activities are shared with enthusiasm, and there are key moments in which listening enables pupils to adapt to a different pace. Pupils generally exhibit strong powers of concentration.

Moral and social awareness is seen in their understanding of what is right and what is wrong, and of the relevance of their actions in a social context. They enjoy their links with the community, whether through visits to local businesses, singing in local care homes, or baking cakes for events and charitable causes. When the school is opened to the wider community for fairs, the pupils actively participate. They enjoy opportunities for responsibility in many spheres of school life.

Pupils' cultural development is good. Older pupils have pen pals in Kenya. Pupils are involved in the preparation for the complementary health fair, and visit libraries, museums, galleries and markets. The festivals in which they participate include Hindu, Muslim and Christian. They have also enjoyed the visits of the fire service. Their understanding of public services and institutions is good.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The quality of the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good and is well safeguarded. The school provides a happy and caring environment where pupils

feel safe. The school has good procedures in place for all aspects of safeguarding pupils and staff are vigilant in carrying out supervisory duties. Two members of staff with specific responsibility for the safeguarding the welfare of pupils have been appropriately and recently trained by the Local Authority. Matters relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils are reinforced by an appropriate range of documentation and guidance provide by the Steiner Fellowship. All teachers and staff have received general training and thorough guidance in relation to child protection.

All policies relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils are in place and implemented. The First Aid policy is supported by appropriate training for staff. All policies include an annual review date. An anti-bullying policy is clearly included within documentation and guidance relating to 'promoting good behaviour'. The policy relating to behaviour is thoughtfully written, and includes matters of discipline and sanctions which reflect the Steiner approach. The detailed health and safety policy identifies clearly designated tasks for staff and the necessary procedures for fulfilling them. All training completed by staff is clearly identified. The school places emphasis on ensuring that staff are kept up to date on new welfare procedures, in particular those relating to the independent school regulations.

Fire and safety procedures are properly established and procedures for risk assessments adequately detailed. All the required checks of fire equipment are undertaken annually and regular fire drills evaluated. The school receives regular visits from a local fire officer who provides helpful recommendations where necessary. There is now a clear policy supported by guidelines for visits made by pupils out of school. Records show that risk assessments are appropriately prepared for each visit.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes all the required checks, including with respect to the medical fitness of new staff. The checks completed include all the detail required by the regulations and are recorded in an appropriate register.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a well converted wooden building, previously used as a Methodist chapel. The building has character and atmosphere. It has been subdivided to good effect to provide a range of classrooms, all of which are of good size, have plenty of floor space and are airy. There is no central assembly hall, but most of the classrooms are large enough to accommodate the whole school for meetings. There is a small outside hard surface and a larger garden which serves as a strong resource for study and for play. The garden is in the process of being developed further as a place in which to grow vegetables and to provide a fruit garden and environmental centre. The local cricket field, 100 yards away, is used for PE and games. The school also has an allotment where older pupils grow fresh vegetables. The school grounds are fenced and secure.

The school has created space in the staff room for pupils who are ill to lie down, but this does not yet meet the requirement. The school is considering using the facilities of the disabled toilet and washroom as an additional and alternative provision. It offers privacy, running water and a washbasin. There are currently no disabled pupils in the school. Since the last inspection, a new and rainproof roof has been provided for the entire building.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all 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' Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide adequate facilities for pupils who are ill, which meet the requirements in all respects (paragraph 5(l)).

The quality of information for parents

Parents have easy access to a wealth of information which covers all aspects of the school, its daily life and procedures. Annual reports about their children's progress are provided. Ample information is provided on notice boards, in the Parent Handbook, on the school website and in the extensive 'parent information' file which is placed for free access in the school's reception area. This file includes all the policies required for registration and several more. The website has just been redesigned and is attractive as well as functional.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school's complaints policy is clearly written and procedures meet the regulatory requirements in all respects.

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

It is evident that the Lancaster Steiner School is committed to providing quality Steiner Waldorf education within the context of its resources and size of the school building. The school is managed cooperatively by the staff, with a close, supportive, working relationship with the parents.

Overall legal responsibility is held by the trustees, who engage actively with the running of the school, in particular within the areas of finance, employment and health and safety. Trustee meetings are attended by the chair of college and the administrator, *ex officio*.

The educational management is carried out by the College of Teachers who concern themselves with child study, admissions and general pedagogical development. The College elects a chairperson who manages the meetings and also serves on the school management team.

Day-to-day management is carried out by the management team that consists of the administrator, the College chair and the chair of trustees. The College is consulted on issues of policies all of which are regularly reviewed. The management team is efficient and well informed. Communications and teamwork is very good.

In most areas the school adheres to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Code of Practice at basic or good practice level. The school has two other Steiner Waldorf Schools within travelling distance and there has been support from both schools in the area of mentoring and staff development.

New staff are given an helpful short induction which involves a briefing on all current policies and procedures. The school community has regular school development meetings and has drawn up an outline of future development.

Overall the quality of the organisation and management is good.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes.

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

- improve the professional development of the staff by creating a staff appraisal system and a policy on professional development.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

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

The quality of the provision in the kindergarten is good, with some outstanding features, and enables the children to make good progress. The curriculum is firmly based on Steiner Waldorf principles which celebrate the rhythm of the seasons and festivals throughout the year. The kindergarten provides excellent opportunities for the children to be active in meaningful imitation of others, a foundation of learning at this early stage of education. The classroom and outdoor environment encourage successful learning through creative play. At the time of this inspection, the provider has been granted exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. These parts were excluded from this inspection.

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. The 'Journals' introduced recently for each child include photographs and detailed notes. These will form an important part of the assessment process. Assessments are shared with parents and form part of the kindergarten's excellent liaison with parents. Thorough and perceptive child studies are undertaken if a child is perceived to need extra support and understanding.

Teaching is good and enables the children to make good progress in all areas of their education. Activities are well-planned, prepared and taught. The teacher and classroom assistants promote effectively a peaceful and nurturing atmosphere in which the children flourish. Many activities are organised by the children who develop excellently in self-confidence and awareness of the needs of others. Activities that are more structured by the staff are conducted in a quiet, peaceful manner promoted by the teacher's well-modulated voice. The classroom environment is planned to promote calmness and well-being. The well-organised afternoon club continues with suitable activities that supplement those provided by the kindergarten.

Matters concerning all health and safety issues are organised efficiently and regular checks and reviews take place. The kindergarten fully recognises the importance of constant vigilance. All snacks and drinks are nutritious and the children have access to drinking water throughout the day.

The leadership and management of the kindergarten are good. Staff receive appropriate training on a wide range of issues from both Steiner Waldorf and the local authority. This provision is welcomed by the staff, especially the links with the local authority's Inclusion Team who provide valuable support.

The overall effectiveness of the kindergarten is good, with some outstanding features, which promotes good outcomes for the children. The capacity of the kindergarten for further improvement is good due to the commitment of the teacher and teaching assistants.

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.