

## **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:	<b>York Steiner School</b>
DCSF number:	<b>816/6008</b>
Inspection team:	<b>Reporting Inspector:</b> <b>Eileen McAndrew</b>  <b>Supporting Inspectors:</b> <b>Cecile Corfield</b> <b>Tony Hubbard</b> <b>Peter Jones</b>  <b>Lay Inspector:</b> <b>Helen Weatherhead</b>
Dates of inspection:	<b>8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009</b>

## **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: York Steiner School

Address of the school: Danesmead  
Fulford Cross  
York YO10 4PB

Telephone number: 01904 654983

Fax number: 01904 654994

Email address: info@yorksteinerschool.co.uk

Proprietor: Council of Management of York Steiner School

Name of the Chair of the Interim Management Partnership: Sue Morvan

Name of the Chair of the Trustees: Kevan Lari

Name of Administrator: Maurice Dobie

DCSF number: 816/6008

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

Age range of pupils and students: 3 to 14

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 64 Girls: 79  
(Part time) Boys: 31 Girls: 25

Number of children under 5 Boys: 23 Girls: 17

Number of post-16 students: None

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: None

Annual fees: Contribution from nil to unlimited

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

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Eileen McAndrew  
Supporting Inspectors: Cecile Corfield  
Tony Hubbard  
Peter Jones  
Lay Inspector: Helen Weatherhead

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009

## **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. 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:**

York Steiner School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and fourteen years of age. The school was established in 1980 and is situated in Fulford in York. The school is inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as interpreted through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. Admission is non-selective. The school allows fourteen pupils of compulsory school age, who are also being educated by their parents, to attend school part-time. The parents of these pupils clearly understand that they have the responsibility for ensuring that their children receive a suitable education. At the time of the inspection there were 143 full-time pupils on roll. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school aims *'to nurture all the faculties of the child: artistic, practical and intellectual as complementary aspects of a spiritual whole'*.

The school was last inspected in June 2007.

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

York Steiner School achieves its aim of providing a good education within an affirming environment. The curriculum is of good quality and ensures interesting and imaginative learning experiences for all pupils through the creative interpretation of the Steiner Waldorf themes. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Teaching is predominantly good and occasionally outstanding and, as a consequence, pupils of all abilities make good progress. Pastoral care is a particular strength of the school. Pupils' health, safety and welfare are satisfactorily safeguarded and appropriate procedures for welfare, health and safety are in place. Pupils enjoy coming to school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

The school meets all but two of the regulatory requirements.

### **What the school does well:**

- its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding;
- its curriculum is interesting, imaginative and of good quality;

- its quality of teaching is predominantly good; and
- its pupils make good progress.

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

- ensure that the checking and addressing of potential safety hazards and fire risk assessment are carried out as identified in the body of the report

## **PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

#### **The quality of the curriculum**

The curriculum is of good quality, and provides an imaginative and sometimes innovative vehicle through which pupils learn effectively. It provides a series of intrinsically interesting learning experiences through the themes outlined in the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, religious education (RE), French, German and Latin. Aspects of personal, social and health education are integral to all areas of the curriculum. The broad provision also includes eurythmy, handwork, gardening and the creative and expressive arts.

Curriculum planning is a significant strength throughout the school. Long term planning outlines what will be covered across the year having careful regard to the age-appropriate themes of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. Each of these themes is assiduously developed into a detailed programme of work which explores specific aspects of the topic, making connections where appropriate between different subject areas. The essential *Formative Assessment* stage of planning is the process through which teachers identify the extent and level of pupils' current knowledge, and what it is they intend pupils should know, understand and be able to do. Though the level of detail varies, the formative assessments are all satisfactory and the majority are highly informative and precise. They include the special needs of each group or individual within the class so that the work may be more precisely planned to meet these pupils' particular needs, interests and stage of maturity.

The *Block Plan* specifies clearly the learning objectives or outcomes for lessons across the three or four week period allocated for each main lesson theme. Central elements such as differentiating for pupils of differing abilities, assessment of learning and the evaluation of lessons are methodically set out. This helps to ensure continuity and progress over time.

The *main lesson* has two hours each morning and a given theme lasts for about three weeks. The broad range of themes includes for example, a focus on English, mathematics, geology, revolutions and myths and legends. Learning in other subjects is integral to all main lessons helping pupils to make links between different aspects of their work. Structured planning is in place for subject lessons in English, mathematics, religious education (RE), music, French, German, Latin, physical education (PE) and the creative and expressive arts.

Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority, being taught in main lessons and in discrete subject lessons. This strong focus contributes to the pupils' good progress. Personal development is consistently fostered through the ethos of the school, the emphasis on all aspects of pupils' individual, social and health education, RE and assemblies, adding significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development. Support for pupils who may experience learning difficulties is good; provision for pupils whose behaviour causes concern is less directly planned for and addressed.

The school and pupils place great importance on the visits planned for the class as part of each year's expected rhythm. Visits to places such as the Yorkshire Sculpture Park enrich pupils' experience of the aesthetically beautiful, while visiting the mining museum helps them to understand and appreciate important aspects of industrial life in Britain in the recent past. In Class 3 pupils had an overnight visit to

Botton farm and recalled their pleasure and excitement in conversation with inspectors. These regular first-hand experiences enrich pupils' education and add immeasurably to their personal and social education. Longer residential visits in conjunction with the European Comenius project to Turkey, Hungary and Lithuania give pupils extended opportunities to explore the cultural heritage of Europe and its neighbours, as well as increasing their appreciation of natural and built environments.

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

The quality of teaching is good overall, occasionally outstanding and never less than satisfactory. Teaching encourages good and responsible behaviour and pupils show mature attitudes, reflecting the care teachers take to engender positive attitudes and good habits of working.

Lesson planning is good and well designed to support the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Teaching is consistently planned to encourage focus and concentration, and successfully reflects the Steiner philosophy and approach to learning, encouraging pupils to think reflectively.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and secure expertise in the use of Steiner techniques for learning. There is good and sometimes outstanding teaching in activities which give pupils real strengths in creative development. Painting, drawing, handwork, woodwork, poetry writing and recital are taught well through teaching that often displays remarkable expertise.

Teachers employ a good range of strategies to ensure pupils are involved in their learning, and exceptional skill is shown in some practical demonstrations of scientific or geographical phenomena. For example, in one outstanding lesson, the metamorphosis of sedimentary rocks and the difference between the Earth's crust and mantle was taught through pupils' making bread and butter pudding. The pupils were then able to draw parallels with geological processes by considering the effect of heat on the mixtures and layers of materials. Extended projects, as for example in physics, ensure that theoretical scientific content is linked to practical everyday applications of science, the better to ensure pupils' learning

Teachers make good use of distinctive Steiner techniques which include rhythmic learning where group activities such as voice exercises, clapping games, mental mathematical games and recitation of poetry from memory to reinforce learning. Pupils develop secure skills in literacy and numeracy through conventional teaching techniques with an emphasis on strengthening memory. The curriculum makes secure provision for physical development through eurythmy lessons, games and gymnastics.

Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well and use this knowledge effectively to ensure learning needs are met. Teachers develop a deep understanding of the physical, emotional and learning needs of their pupils. The school has in place a system for the identification and support of the individual needs of pupils with learning difficulties. This is already proving effective and is being developed further through the work of a part-time learning support teacher. Sometimes teachers are less confident in meeting the specific behavioural needs of pupils and this indicates a need for some further professional support for teachers.

The classroom resources are of good quality and reflect the distinctive Steiner ethos. There are suitable resources for the development of literacy and numeracy. The creation of a calm and peaceful classroom environment aided by the quality and colour of furnishings and fittings is carefully considered, particularly with the younger classes. Natural materials such as beeswax, clay, wool and wood are used effectively in teaching handcraft techniques such as brick-making, modelling, knitting, crochet and rug making.

The school has a pleasant library, but the collection of books is of variable quality with some redundant stock. Better use could be made of the library to encourage pupils to use and borrow books. The school is not well resourced for information and communication technology (ICT), but this is a conscious decision in line with the Steiner philosophy.

Teachers keep extensive good quality records of pupils' progress. Every pupil has an individual education plan which accurately identifies areas of difficulty and priorities for improvement. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and retain appropriate examples to illustrate pupils' progress over time. In an annual assessment of progress, teachers compile an outline account of the curriculum and the progress of the whole class with additional detailed comments about individual pupils. All of the assessment data informs the excellent and extensive written reports for parents. Assessment is used well in planning future work and reflects the very good knowledge teachers have of their pupils' learning needs.

***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 outstanding because of the importance given by the school to individual personal development. In their lessons, around the school and in conversation with adults, pupils are exceptionally mature, aware and thoughtful young people. In keeping with the Steiner curriculum and methodology, teachers respect and promote the development of each child according to his or her nature. This is strikingly evident in the reports from kindergarten to Class 8, in which teachers analyse the personal development of their pupils and link it to their academic and physical progress. Pupils experience their lessons, especially in the two-hour main lesson of each day, as a development of spirit and mind together, through their saying of prayer, singing, rhythmic movement and recital of poetry.

Pupils show high levels of awareness of self and others. Their self esteem is constantly reinforced by the way in which teachers help them to learn. For example, teachers often respond to a struggle or misunderstanding as something they themselves have not explained well enough, and try again so that pupils' confidence is never undermined by the difficulties they may experience. The pupils are reflective thinkers, not without a sense of humour.

Pupils understand and observe the values and rules of the school, and have respect for the individual and for the consideration of others. The pupils are spirited, and generally 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. There is little emphasis on reward or sanction, because the school seeks to have pupils acquire an autonomous and reflective sense of right and wrong. In that they are successful.

Each class is a social microcosm, operating and being taught socially as well as academically. Every class has a duty rota so that pupils experience accepting small responsibility. Pupils in Class 8 support the younger pupils in the playground and take turns in pairs to serve lunch to Classes 1 to 3 at their weekly luncheon. Two pupils represent the school at the annual York Youth Council. All pupils in the classes above Class 2 have a residential experience which marks an important formative milestone in their social development. They are widely educated about public affairs, through their history lessons, in which they learn about the formation of political systems, as through their joint study of the American and French revolutions. They learn to be enterprising young people. One class has made mock stamps and set up a "Christmas postal service" within the school to raise funds for a class trip, keeping careful accounts of income and outgoings.

Pupils' days are full of cultural experiences. Through music, illustration and poetry much of their work has an aesthetic dimension. Study of foreign languages, including French, German and Latin, has a successful cultural as well as linguistic purpose, introducing pupils to other ways of thinking and living. Within their study of history and religious education they learn about the religion, lives and thought of many places and times, for example, through their contact with the Indian saga, the Mahabharata, or their work in Eid. The most distinctive strength of personal development is that tolerance of otherness is a natural consequence of understanding the uniqueness of the individual person.

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

Yes.

**The welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The quality of welfare, health and safety in the school is satisfactory with good features, most particularly the quality of pastoral care. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are being appropriately safeguarded. Teachers care for their pupils well; pupils like their school and trust their teachers. They feel confident to approach teachers to sort out any personal problem. The strongest element of pastoral care is the close contact between the class teachers and their pupils. Teachers, especially class teachers, know their pupils very well, and usually develop this understanding over a long period of time, because they stay with their classes as they move up through the school. Issues and problems that cannot be resolved at the class level are discussed through the school's Interim Management Partnership, and carefully recorded and reviewed.

The policy to guard against bullying is clear and effective and pupils report that any such problems are rare and, where necessary, have been resolved by talking to a teacher. The school is effective in maintaining good behaviour through its clear and simple rules, with few sanctions which are rarely applied. In the year before the inspection no pupil was excluded and no serious misdemeanour had been recorded in the official log for over two years.

The school takes proper care to keep its pupils safe, through its appropriate child protection policy which is subject to annual review. The suitably trained child protection officer maintains strong links with social services. All staff have the necessary training and are familiar with the policy. In most respects the school was found to be safe and to operate appropriate measures to minimise risk. However, as at the last inspection, some issues of health and safety were raised with the school. These were rapidly dealt with but indicated a need for greater vigilance and rigour. Fire equipment is checked and termly fire drills are held and recorded, but the most



recent full fire risk assessment is out of date. Suitable procedures are made for medical matters. The school has an appropriate written First Aid policy. Most staff have up-to-date first aid certificates, and sufficient numbers are trained to a higher level. Kindergarten staff are trained in paediatric First Aid. Accidents are carefully responded to and details recorded.

Pupils are well aware of the importance of healthy eating. The food served in the kitchen is Vegan and well prepared and pupils may not bring fizzy drinks and sweets in their lunch packs. Their daily lives in the school are physically active and further developed through their eurythmy classes. However, several pupils feel they would like to have more opportunity for sporting activity such as soccer in breaks or after school.

The school has a suitable three year plan to fulfil its duties to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

***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 fully with the Independent Schools' Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *ensure that the checking and addressing of any potential safety hazard is rigorous (Paragraph 3(4)); and*
- *carry out a yearly fire risk assessment of the premises under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (Paragraph 3(5)).*

**Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. The school's employment procedures ensure that all required checks are carried out prior to appointment. The single central register meets requirements.

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

Yes.

**Suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The school is housed in a former secondary school building. The classrooms are adequate in size for the numbers of pupils on roll. The building is maintained to a satisfactory standard, although a few areas are ready for redecoration. Washroom facilities are appropriate for staff and pupils and a suitable medical room is provided.

Classroom furniture and fittings are appropriate for the different age ranges of pupils, including the nursery and kindergarten rooms. Flooring is satisfactory throughout the school and stairways are clear of clutter. The library and laboratories are spacious as is the dining hall. The attractive shop and parents' room provide good opportunities for community activities.

The building is accessible for those with special needs and there is a lift to the first floor.

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

Yes.

### **The quality of information for parents**

Overall provision of information is good. The school handbook and the Directory contain useful contact numbers and reference material for parents. Some statutory policies are in this handbook but all are available in the Parent Information Folder. Parents are free to take away copies of policies or simply to view them in school.

The prospectus contains a concise overview of the York School: its history, aims, ethos and curriculum. A useful fortnightly newsheet gives details of current and forthcoming events such as festivals and other community occasions. Regular informative Parents' Evenings provide opportunities to familiarise parents with the curriculum and update them on their children's progress. Comprehensive annual reports are compiled with a detailed account of the individual pupil's progress in all areas of academic and personal development. These are well informed by teachers' close knowledge of each pupil in their class and give parents a full and insightful account of their child's progress.

The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were pleased with the education their children were receiving.

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

Yes.

### **The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure**

The school's complaints policy and procedures comply fully with regulatory requirements. There were no complaints during the last year.

#### ***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**

York Steiner School is both a charity and a company limited by guarantee. The ten members of the Board of Trustees, who meet monthly, hold financial and legal responsibility for the school. They are elected by the School Association, membership of which is open to all parents, teachers and other staff.

The school is committed to a policy of financial inclusion: no family is denied admission for their child's education solely on grounds of finance. Every family makes an annual financial contribution. Parental involvement is high with a number of initiatives, for example the Business Wing, School Shop and Fundraising Group, established with the objective of fulfilling some of the long term aims of the school. These include increasing educational provision for younger children and older pupils.

Traditionally, and in line with Rudolf Steiner's thinking, matters of educational policy and practice have been dealt with solely within the Pedagogical and College meetings. Over the last six months, however, in order to address communication difficulties between the College of Teachers and the Board of Trustees, the school has courageously embarked upon a path of change. It therefore finds itself in a transitional stage. The Interim Management Partnership meeting (IMP), consisting of five Trustees and seven College members, has temporarily replaced the College meeting. While dealing with wide-ranging issues, they are also working on the establishment of a mandate system. There is a recognised need for an Education Mandate which would include quality assurance. This is expected to be in place by the end of the academic year.

The new arrangement has been invaluable in helping to restore good collegial working relationships. It is also acknowledged, however, that a dedicated time needs to be created where teachers can rekindle the College impulse. Teachers can then give delicate and confidential matters, as well as policy decision-making, the essential focus and attention that are not possible in a general interim management partnership meeting.

The school tries to be as fully inclusive as possible in its intake, but it has to be sure that the education of other children is not compromised by the needs of a few. Where there are children with special needs, whether in relation to learning or behaviour, it is crucial that teachers have appropriate support, guidance and training. Sharing best practice in-house through peer mentoring and observation is one means of providing this. It also serves to promote team working and a feeling of shared responsibility for all pupils.

Despite past difficulties, the school appears to be full of goodwill and determination to make its new processes work, while maintaining the integrity of the education provided.

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

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

- improve the management of the school by implementing as soon as possible the mandate system to include key mandate areas such as education, human resources, finance, estates and public relations;
- Improve the mandate system by the inclusion in the education mandate of systems for performance appraisal, personal professional development planning, peer mentoring and self evaluation, appropriate training for those with key positions of responsibility;
- Improve the management of the school by the reconstituting of the College of Teachers.

## **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 Nursery and Kindergarten classes is good with outstanding features. The curriculum closely follows Steiner Waldorf principles and staff are conscientious when planning for festivals and celebrations over each term. Weekly meetings are held to discuss planning and to evaluate what has already been covered. The staff work very well together to ensure that activities are available to all children. The Early Learning Goals recommended nationally for this age range do not always match the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and the school has applied for exemption from communication, language and literacy; problem solving; reasoning and number and ICT. Exemption has not yet been granted. However, the Steiner Waldorf curriculum provides a firm foundation for future learning by promoting the children's initiative, curiosity, enquiry skills and self-confidence.

Teaching is good with some outstanding features. Teachers have a love of childhood and understand the needs of the children in their care implicitly and explicitly. A calm, nurturing atmosphere pervades the setting in which the children flourish. The rhythm of the day is understood by the children and this promotes their self-confidence. Practical activities abound, mostly child initiated, during which the imagination is allowed to develop freely. Teachers are facilitators rather than organisers and freedom of choice is evident in all areas. Activities proceed at an appropriate pace. Teachers make excellent use of the Steiner resources and the rooms are attractive, welcoming areas.

The mixed-age groups enable the children to learn from each other and older children are helpful to the younger ones. All children make good progress in developing a sense of responsibility and caring attitudes. They help to keep their room tidy and clear away most efficiently. The children learn to share and serve each other at snack times. They generally talk to each other in moderate tones and one child was heard to say "Be calm, be calm" to another child who raised her voice. Language development is good. Most children speak articulately as a result of the teachers' good modelling of language on a daily basis. Over time the children make good progress in their personal and social skills. This is a major strength of the provision in the nursery and kindergarten settings. Safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of the children is a high priority and all due care and attention is given to health and safety matters, including child protection. All food and drink is nutritious and wholesome. The children are encouraged to wash their hands after toileting and outdoor play and before eating and drinking.

Leadership and management are conducted successfully through collaboration and collective responsibility. The teachers have introduced a mentoring system whereby they monitor each other's provision and have fruitful discussions to improve their practice. Each member of staff writes a self-evaluation each term to promote their personal and professional development. This is good practice. They have recently introduced more efficient recording of the children's progress through termly evaluations and reflective observations. A mini-study of each child is undertaken each week and individual learning journals celebrate the child's achievements and experiences over time. Parents are kept fully informed through many opportunities to meet with staff, fortnightly newsletters, informative parents' evenings and home visits. A useful new initiative is the opportunity for parents to write observations on their children and provide the staff with details.

The overall effectiveness of the nursery and kindergarten is good with some outstanding features. The outcomes for the children are at least good. The curricular provision is good and teaching is of a high quality. The capacity for sustained improvement is good and effective steps are taken if any weakness is perceived. The involvement of parents and the wider community is excellent.

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

*Yes, while the current application for exemption is under review.*

**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 Inspection Service website: [www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk](http://www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk).**