

# School Inspection Service

## **HANDBOOK OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INSPECTION RELATING TO THE EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT OF PRIVATE FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES WITH A STEINER, MONTESSORI OR EURYTHMY BASIS OR BACKGROUND**

The School Inspection Service (SIS) is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Border Agency to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England, with a Steiner, Montessori or Eurythmy basis or background.

SIS inspections are required to:

- report on the extent to which colleges comply with SIS Standards for private colleges;
- assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- where applicable, make recommendations to colleges outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

### **Background to Steiner Waldorf (SWS)**

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was an Austrian scientist and philosopher. The first Steiner school was set up in Stuttgart in 1919 to meet the needs of workers in the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory, hence the dual, Steiner/Waldorf, designation. Steiner's philosophy is known as anthroposophy, working towards social, cultural and spiritual renewal. There are approximately 1000 Steiner Waldorf Fellowship schools worldwide and many more Early Childhood settings not attached to schools.

The Steiner-linked colleges that are subject to inspection by the School Inspection Service offer different forms of training mostly linked to anthroposophical thinking. The colleges seek to follow the Steiner philosophy. All have international recognition for their Steiner work, but this does not necessarily include validation from the Steiner Fellowship. A significant proportion of their students are from overseas. Courses provided by these colleges are not aimed at training mainstream teachers.

### **Background to Montessori**

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was born in Chiaravalle, Italy. She entered the University of Rome to study mathematics, physics and natural sciences, but

changed to study medicine, specialising in paediatrics in her final two years. In 1896 she graduated as one of the first women with a degree in medicine. She was particularly interested in children and studied the work of earlier European practitioners and philosophers, for example, Jean Itard (1775–1838) and Edouard Seguin (1812–1880), both of whom considered that observation was crucial to treatment, and regarded ‘mental deficiency’ as a pedagogical problem rather than a medical one, and who used graduated exercises to aid motor development. Montessori also studied Rousseau’s (1712–1778) ideas on individualized learning, Pestalozzi’s (1746–1827) view of training the senses using increasingly difficult formal exercises, and Froebel’s (1782–1852) work which emphasised play, using specially developed toys and materials, and who regarded learning as a series of developmental stages leading to self-awareness. Montessori reviewed the ‘prepared environment’ and the structured approach to child development, focusing on what she considered children really need. A common thread in the ideas of these practitioners and educationalists is the child’s inner potential to develop in their own natural manner, if appropriately guided and supported.

Most Montessori Colleges, inspected by SIS, offer English-recognised NVQ diploma qualifications at Level 4 part-time and/or full-time, although the validating bodies may differ. All are currently recognised by the Children’s Workforce Development Council.

### **The Characteristics of Inspection**

Inspection by the SIS is designed to strengthen the quality of education on offer to international students through Tier 4 of the points-based system for student visas. Inspections provide an objective educational oversight of the college and its welfare provision for students, and subsequently make a judgement on the college’s fitness for Tier 4, the ‘most trusted’ sponsor status designated by the UK Border Agency. Inspection judgements are set out in a report published on the SIS website, submitted to the UK Border Agency and made available to all interested parties, including students, parents and prospective parents. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success. Reports aim to help colleges, their staff and governors/proprietors to recognise and build on strengths and to identify and remedy areas where improvement is needed. Reports also address the issues relating to the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of students including, where applicable, those under eighteen and vulnerable adults. Further details relating to the purpose and content of reports can be found in the SIS ***‘Framework and Guidance for Educational oversight of Private Further Education Colleges’***.

Inspections are organised and run by inspectors who have in-depth knowledge of independent schools and who have knowledge and experience of the educational philosophies of both Steiner Waldorf and Montessori education. They are former members of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) or

have key knowledge of independent and further education; they have no special expertise in financial or legal matters.

The principles underpinning inspections carried out by SIS are set out in the '**Framework and Guidance for the Educational Oversight of Private Further Education Colleges**' under 'The principles governing SIS inspections'. The principles emphasise that quality assurance and control is built into all inspection activities to ensure that these principles are met and that the inspection process is constantly developed.

### **The Organisation of Inspection**

Inspections are usually conducted over two days spent at the college and are staffed by two inspectors - a reporting inspector (RI) who is responsible for the organisation of the inspection, assembling an evidence base and writing the report, and a supporting inspector (SI). However, the inspections could be longer and the number of inspectors increased according to the circumstances and needs of the college (detailed in the Framework and Guidance document).

Care is taken in planning inspections to ensure that inspectors are not involved in inspecting colleges with which they have had any previous connection of any kind.

The Code of Conduct for inspectors during inspections and guidelines for colleges with regard to their role need to be referred to in the SIS '**Framework and Guidance for the Educational Oversight of Private Further Education Colleges**'. Both sets of guidance should be understood and followed by the inspectors and the college.

SIS monitors the quality of its work, both in terms of inspection practice and the quality of reports in line with its established procedures. It will monitor the views of colleges as part of this process.

### ***Before the inspection***

The first contact with the college will be by the Chief Inspector (CI) of SIS or his representative. Seven working days before the inspection is due to take place, he will contact the principal of the college to be inspected, informing them when the inspection will take place and ensuring that they have the following information (sent by email):

- the dates of the inspection;
- the names of the reporting and supporting inspector(s);
- the scope and purpose of the inspection;
- a copy of the SIS '**Framework and Guidance for the Educational Oversight of Private Further Education Colleges**';
- details of the SIS complaints procedure;
- details of the specific needs of inspectors for accommodation within the school during the inspection;

- copies of the student questionnaires.

It is the responsibility of the RI to liaise with the SI. Discussions held between the RI and SI prior to the inspection will ensure that both are well prepared for their inspection activities and are familiar with the characteristics of the specific college.

The college will be asked to send a completed version of the College Information and Self Evaluation Form (CISEF) to the RI before the inspection. This document provides details of the information that must be made available during the inspection itself. The RI will use the information received as a key part of his/her preparation for the inspection. At the time of notification, questionnaires will be sent to the college for distribution to students in order to seek their views.

Soon after the college has received notification, the reporting inspector will contact the head of the college to discuss detailed arrangements for the inspection. This will enable him to clarify matters relating to the inspection as well as to support the planning of inspection activities. The RI will ensure that the college is reminded of the documentation that must be available for inspectors' scrutiny. It is important that the RI will remind the head of the college of their responsibility for informing their staff about the details of the inspection, including outlining the procedures for lesson observation.

The RI has one day provided in which to complete preparation for the inspection, and it is therefore important that the CISEF and any other documents asked for are provided promptly by the college.

### ***During the inspection***

Inspections will be carried out in accordance with the '***Framework and Guidance for the Educational Oversight of Private Further Education Colleges***'. During two days in the college the inspectors will:

- observe teaching and learning;
- hold discussions with managers and key members of staff;
- scrutinise a range of documentations and information that the college has been asked to provide;
- examine the quality of students' work; and
- speak with students, formally and informally.

Inspectors will look at a range of teaching sessions, although they may not see all teachers. Inspectors focus on the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning, rather than on the performance of individual members of staff. Brief feedback will be offered to teachers whose teaching sessions have been observed, but staff should understand that the focus of observations is on the quality of teaching not on individual performance. A brief outline of the teaching session and its objectives should be provided by teachers to support the lesson observations. In addition, inspectors should

receive evidence of planning, marking, assessments and records that are kept by staff and the college, of students' progress.

During the second day of the inspection, inspectors will begin to put together their evidence and, at a time determined by the RI in discussion with the school management, they will meet the principal to feed back the main inspection findings. The head of the college may wish to invite governors, and/or senior staff to attend this meeting. The SI should keep a record of any comments or responses made during the feedback.

### ***After the inspection***

The RI has a day to write the first draft of the report, following the format set out in the SIS guidance. It is then sent to the reader for checking, to arrive by the beginning of the following week. On the return of the report, the RI completes any highlighted amendments/corrections and forwards it to the CI. On completion of this process, the CI forwards a draft copy of the report, prior to publication, to the principal of the college for a check of factual accuracy. A final copy of the report will then be sent to the college and the UKBA and published on the SIS website. The process to publication should normally be within 25 working days.