

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools associated with the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Alder Bridge Steiner School
DfE number:	869/6013
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Eileen McAndrew Supporting Inspectors: Martin Bradley Sara Wiggins Lay Inspector: Ewout Van Manen
Dates of inspection:	4 to 6 May 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Alder Bridge Steiner Waldorf School		
Address of school:	Bridge House Mill Lane Padworth Berkshire RG7 4JU		
Telephone number:	01189 714471		
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Email address:	info@alderbridge.org.uk		
Proprietor:	Trustees of Alder Bridge School		
Name of the Chair of the College of Teachers:	Ann Morgan and Sylvie Barwick		
Name of the Chair of the Trustees:	Nick Swift		
Name of Administrator:	Samantha Freemantle		
DfE number:	869/6013		
Type of school:	Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship		
Age range of pupils and:	3-12 years		
Gender of pupils:	Male and female		
Total number on roll:	(Full time)	Boys: 19	Girls: 22
	(Part time)	Boys: 6	Girls: 11
Number of children under 5:		Boys: 8	Girls: 5
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:		Boys: 2	Girls:1
Annual fees:	£3,993 to £6,672		
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002		
Inspection Team:			
	Reporting Inspector:	Eileen McAndrew	
	Supporting Inspectors:	Martin Bradley Sara Wiggins	
	Lay Inspector:	Ewout Van Manen	
Dates of inspection:	4 to 6 May 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. 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:

Alder Bridge Steiner Waldorf School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged from three to eleven. Its educational practice is inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and expressed through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The school was established in 1987. The school is situated in Padworth near Reading in Berkshire. There are seventy-one pupils on roll. Thirty children, of whom thirteen are in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are accommodated in the two Kindergarten classes. Class 1 and Class 6 are single age groups; Class 2 and 3 and Class 4 and 5 have pupils of mixed ages. Admission is non-selective. Three pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school aims *'to educate the child in an holistic manner...to nurture and develop head, heart and hands...to encourage independent thought, self-confidence and skills for future life.'*

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	Year 3/4
Class 4/5	Year 5/6
Class 6	Year 7

The school was last inspected in May 2008.

Summary of main findings:

Alder Bridge Steiner Waldorf School succeeds in providing a good quality of education for its pupils. The philosophy of Rudolf Steiner guides and supports the school's ethos and shapes its provision. Pupils make good progress as a result of good and occasionally outstanding teaching, supported by a curriculum with good features. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good; pupils become increasingly self-confident learners who enjoy coming to school.

Procedures to safeguard pupils' welfare are satisfactory and pupils feel safe in school but some policies are overdue for review and do not have clear regard to the most recent DfE guidance. Assessment is conscientious and regular but there is no formal system in place to ensure common and consistent practice. Parents are highly supportive of the school and appreciative of the commitment of the staff. The school meets almost all the requirements for registration.

The quality of the school's provision has remained largely unchanged since the last inspection with minor changes in the quality of the curriculum and teaching.

What the school does well:

- it provides good and occasionally outstanding teaching;
- it provides consistently good support for individual pupils;
- it develops good relationships between adults and pupils; and
- it encourages creative and aesthetic achievement particularly in music.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- ensure that risk assessments are fully completed for all educational visits;
- ensure that all matters relating to fire safety are addressed as a matter of urgency and reviewed on a regular basis;
- ensure that all the attendance registers meet the requirements; and
- present a statement of income and expenditure for the local authorities who provide funding for pupils with statements of educational need.

Next steps

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- to devise systems to support more rigorous and consistent curriculum and lesson planning across all classes;
- to agree a policy for assessment and recording across the school; and
- to review all welfare health and safety policies annually.

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 with some good features. It is broadly based and follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. By the end of Class 6 the pupils have acquired a wide range of literacy and numeracy skills. These are supported by well developed social skills and together contribute to pupils' preparation for adult life. Pupils make effective progress across scientific, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative areas of their development. Aspects of personal, social and health education are an integral part of the curriculum. Provision for French, German and music is good. Work in some subjects, particularly natural sciences, is largely through non-scientific approaches, narratives and stories. Whilst this may be appropriate for some of the work, insufficient consideration is given to what constitutes evidence in this area, leading to limited overall rigour. This is most evident where curriculum planning is brief, and it is also found in the approaches to history and geography.

The Steiner Waldorf curriculum forms the basis for all planning. Teachers' planning varies in quality. All teachers devise plans for the term and for each day, but some plans are brief and are not evaluated. The better quality, more detailed planning includes weekly plans in addition to those for the term and the day, specifying learning objectives, and evaluating both these and individual pupil's progress. At present there is no clear system for ensuring that curriculum planning is consistent across all classes. The teachers know and understand their pupils' strengths and areas of weakness very well. Recording this knowledge varies in detail and precision. Although all staff maintain records, these are not consistently kept in all classes, nor is a standard format used.

A good emphasis is placed on the rhythm of the day, week and year, which is particularly evident in much of the Main Lesson work. This takes place for about two hours each day and is preceded by introductory activities which are generally well organised and promote a good range of skills in speaking, listening, language and mathematics. Besides the Main Lessons, a wide variety of subject lessons is provided. At the time of the inspection, these included English, mathematics, French, German, handcrafts, art, games, music and gardening. The school orchestra, formed by classes 3, 4, 5, and 6, is of high quality, and includes string instruments, piano and recorders. Its work is well planned and several pupils play two instruments, and some are learning three.

Support for pupils with learning needs is good. Procedures are in place for the effective referral of pupils who may need additional support. Where necessary, pupils receive one-to-one support provided by the Special Educational Needs coordinator (SENCO), supported by another part-time teacher. Detailed records are maintained and the procedures are currently under review to improve their effectiveness still further.

The curriculum is effectively extended through day and residential visits. The pupils in Class 5 join other Steiner Waldorf schools at the annual Steiner 'Olympics', and visits have been made to the British Museum and the Welsh Big Pit coal mine. A

sailing course adds a further distinctive and enhancing learning experience. Residential visits have also been made to France and Switzerland, giving pupils some experience of other European language and culture. All pupils benefit from the use made of local woodland and the extensive school grounds which provide good opportunities for environmental exploration, gardening and keeping chickens.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and occasionally outstanding and, as a consequence, pupils of all abilities make good progress. Specialist teaching, especially in French, German and music adds significantly to the quality of teaching.

All teachers plan conscientiously, following the principles of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum but the quality of lesson planning varies from good to adequate. Where planning is most effective teachers identify what they intend pupils should learn and interpret the main lesson themes in ways which will engage and foster the interests of the pupils. Such planning also supports pupils in using their knowledge and understanding in one area of the curriculum to make connections which illuminate and extend learning in another. Where lesson planning consists of a brief list of the topics to be covered, it lacks the detail which would make clear what pupils of different ages are expected to learn. This in turn makes it more difficult to assess precisely the progress pupils have made. The better lesson planning, which identifies specific learning objectives, contributes to continuity in pupils' experience, which is particularly important during staff absence or change.

The majority of teachers are skilled in using a range of approaches to ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn in different ways. They use the familiar range of rhythm, song, recitation and recall to support learning effectively and to develop and reinforce positive attitudes and habits. In the best lessons, for example in French, German and music, teachers' subject knowledge is very good; learning is planned to ensure an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils; the pace is brisk and the expectations of teachers high. As a consequence, pupils are highly motivated, work hard and achieve high standards. In the small minority of lessons where teaching was less than good, pupils spent too long on routine tasks which demanded too little of them, causing their attention to flag and their rate of progress to decline.

The number of pupils in each class is small and teachers know individual pupils well, so are able to give them direct and timely support. Pupils have productive opportunities to work in pairs or groups contributing to each others' learning, as well as undertaking individual projects where they can work independently and develop aspects of particular interest. However, in mixed-age classes, pupils almost always undertake the same tasks and are rarely given specific and more challenging tasks planned for older or more able pupils. As a result, these pupils sometimes work at a level which is insufficiently demanding while less able pupils struggle to complete the task. Currently, no system is in place for monitoring teaching and learning, but the school has a mentoring and training programme and follows the Steiner Waldorf practice of having regular advisory visits from outside advisers.

The strong emphasis on speaking and listening helps pupils to become effective listeners and articulate and confident speakers, eager to express a view or explain what they think to others. Pupils are lively and enthusiastic learners who enjoy their work and take satisfaction from their achievement.

Assessment of pupils' work is methodical and conscientious, but there is no agreed policy or format to ensure consistent practice across the school. All teachers carry out regular assessment of pupils' progress in academic, emotional, social and physical development, but comments on academic learning are often expressed in broad, general terms with little specific detail about individual strengths and areas for improvement. Individual child studies are occasionally carried out if concern is expressed about a pupil. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and application to their work are monitored in each main lesson block and in subject lessons. In addition to recording observations of individual pupils, some teachers regularly grade pupils' effort and achievement but there is no general agreement about the use of these grades and individual teachers use different scales according to their preference. Similarly, there is no marking policy so individual teachers devise their own practice. In discussion with inspectors, some older pupils said they did not really know whether they were making progress because they were not sure how they would know. In some areas, such as mathematics, teachers often write comments and sometimes give marks, but in other areas of learning this is much less usual. Where teachers do comment in pupils' books, the comments are often encouraging but rarely explain why work is good or what would improve it further. In some classes, for example Class 6, pupils are learning to look at each other's work critically so that they will be able to assess each other's work. This in turn helps them to be aware of the factors which contribute to improvement and then apply them to their own work.

The assessment of pupils' progress is made within a framework of teachers' expectation of what a pupil of a given age should achieve in relation to the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum. The school is aware that their current practice lacks precision and consistency and recognises it as an area for development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. The distinctive and well-established ethos of the school creates and fosters a strong sense of community. All pupils have opportunities for reflective periods each day and become increasingly aware of their own spirituality. Pupils in Class 4 and 5 responded with interest and engagement when they learned about meditation in the lives of hermits. They explored for themselves a little of the benefits of stillness, quiet and reflection. All pupils recite the daily verse in class with unselfconscious ease and attention.

Narratives with an overt moral theme celebrate virtuous characters and introduce pupils to notions of compassion, understanding and tolerance, helping to broaden their perspective of their own and each other's conduct. They develop a clear sense of right and wrong supported by good quality policies for behaviour and the prevention of bullying. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and the atmosphere of trust contributes to the sense of security which pupils feel. Behaviour in class and around the school is good. Pupils say that they enjoy school and their good attendance supports this. They cooperate very well when working in pairs or groups and are swift to give credit and praise to each other in recognition of achievement. Pupils' growing self-confidence and self-esteem is effectively fostered through opportunities to contribute to the wider school community through concerts, festivals and performances throughout the school year.

Pupils learn about life in modern day Britain through some main lesson themes, but their knowledge of institutions and services is limited and they are given few opportunities to explore these aspects of everyday life in England. Main lesson themes include the study of ancient cultures, expanding pupils' understanding of different beliefs and traditions. Visits to a Hindu temple and a Buddhist priory brought the excitement and immediacy of first-hand experience to pupils' learning as well as a valuable opportunity to appreciate diversity and value the achievements of cultures other than their own.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for welfare, health and safety is satisfactory overall. Day-to-day safety and the care of pupils is good and pupils' welfare is appropriately safeguarded. Not all of the regulations are fully met. The school is aware of most of the issues and had begun to consider ways of addressing these prior to the inspection.

At the last inspection it was noted that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had not issued a final report of satisfaction with the school's fire action plan. Although this has since been issued, the Fire Officer noted that it should be reviewed at least annually. Whilst an annual review was conducted in 2010, there is no evidence that hazards to be reviewed more frequently have been checked, and that individual staff are able to undertake the large number of checks for which they have sole responsibility. The planned system for thoroughly reviewing fire risk has yet to be fully implemented. The school has held occasional fire evacuation drills. The action plan indicates the intention to carry these out twice a year, but this has not been implemented and termly evacuations have now been proposed following this inspection.

The school has a good range of policies for welfare, health and safety. These usefully identify the person responsible for updating them but most have not been updated in the last three years, and some of those named as responsible no longer have that role. Several documents do not refer to the latest government guidance on their subject, although they generally cover the appropriate points. At present there is no effective monitoring of policies and their review.

The school's food policy promotes healthy eating and the pupils are well aware of the foods which contribute to a good diet. Similarly, they are aware that exercise plays an important part in a healthy life.

Both the Kindergartens and the older classes have good policies for anti-bullying and promoting positive behaviour. Accident books are well maintained. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure the proper supervision of pupils.

Risk assessments are not made for each visit. The school has used generic risk assessments for some outings, such as to the nearby woods. All daily registers are completed but not all fully comply with the requirements.

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:

- *complete risk assessments for all activities outside the school (regulation 12).*
- *ensure that fire risk assessments are fully carried out and that fire evacuations are held regularly (regulation 13).*
- *ensure that all attendance registers are completed in accordance with the DfE guidance (regulation 17).*

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

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. The school carries out other essential checks prior to the confirmation of staff appointments.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation serve the needs of the school well and are in keeping with the aesthetic and creative aspects of the Steiner philosophy. The buildings include a listed house which accommodates one classroom and administrative offices, and a newer building containing classrooms and a hall. All are well maintained.

Space is used well to create appropriate learning environments where pupils' work is displayed and celebrated. The hall provides a flexible space for drama, eurythmy and music. The extensive grounds provide pupils with a good range of outdoor learning experiences and an interesting and well-equipped place to play.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The provision of information to parents is generally good. Information on school policies is readily available on the website and in school office. Some of the policies have not been reviewed and updated. Information on school events is usefully displayed on notice boards throughout the school campus. The Parents' Handbook is very informative and the school prospectus can be downloaded from the school website and is also available from the school office.

A fortnightly newsletter with notices and current information is emailed to all families. Annual reports provide information on the pupils' challenges and successes and how the child has developed within each subject. The reports usefully include a summary of the year's curriculum.

The school does not prepare a required statement of income and expenditure for the local authorities which provide funding for the pupils with statements of special educational need.

The pre-inspection questionnaires for parents and carers showed considerable support and appreciation for the school although there were not as positive as they might have been about the running of the school.

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:

- *prepare an annual account for two local authorities of income received from them and expenditure incurred by the school in relation to pupils with statements of special educational needs.(regulation 24(1)(h))*

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

Alder Bridge School has a good concerns and complaints policy and procedure which meet requirements. One complaint is currently being processed in an appropriate manner. No other formal complaints have been made in recent years.

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

Alder Bridge Steiner Waldorf School is owned by Alder Bridge Association for Steiner Waldorf Education, a registered charity and a limited company. Membership of the association is open to parents, staff and friends of the school. The Trustee board, which consists of five parents and two independent members, has overall responsibility for the management of the school. Unusually, the Trustees are involved with much of the day-to-day management of the school. The school has recently re-founded the College of Teachers and this body discusses educational matters and makes recommendations to the Trustees or to a combined group of teachers and trustees known as the Joint Management Group (JMG). This group meets every half-term in order to discuss and decide issues that cover the educational as well as management areas of the school.

The College of Teachers safeguards and strengthens the Steiner Waldorf ethos in the school. The current chairs of College have a central role in the school and facilitate many areas. Trustees and other members of the school community have stepped forward to work on mandate groups and use their skills in a variety of management areas such as personnel, finance and outreach.

There is an active Parent, Teacher and Friends Association.

The Trustees with their legal responsibilities and their involvement in day-to-day management and the College of teachers show a strong commitment to do what is best for the school. However, the two groups seem to work from different perspectives with each group protective of their own area of expertise. The work of the JMG has the potential for resolving this but it appears that this is not always accomplished. There are several people carrying extra responsibilities with a lack of clarity about roles, gaps where actions may not be taken, and staff who state that these deficiencies result in stress and anxiety. The school has job descriptions for various roles, but not for all. A school development plan has not yet been devised, though this was recommended as a future improvement at the time of the last inspection. There is evidence from the pre-inspection questionnaire for parents that some would like the management and organisation of the school to be strengthened.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes.

The College of Teachers and Trustees might like to take into consideration the suggestions set out below as to where specific improvement could be made.

- improve management by producing a school development plan that outlines the educational vision and supportive actions for the school's future development. It might be constructive to engage someone with the appropriate expertise in uniting the school community to facilitate this work;

- improve clarity of purpose in providing clear written job descriptions outlining responsibilities and decision-making areas for those staff and trustees with specific extra responsibilities so as to enable effective management;
- Improve management practice by including the school administrator in more of the management meetings. This would help to support her work and would help to create an effective channel of communication between the Trustees and the teaching staff; and
- Provide a basis upon which to find the most appropriate and effective management structure for Alder Bridge School by developing a relationship with, and visits to, other similarly sized Steiner Waldorf schools to explore different models of effective administration, management and leadership.

These suggestions are offered as ways to support the management of the school and perhaps contribute to alleviating staff anxiety. This in turn should have a beneficial effect on the work of the school.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

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

The outcomes for children are good. The Early Learning Goals recommended nationally for this age range do not always match the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. At the time of this inspection, the school had been granted exemption by the Secretary of State from parts of the learning and development requirements of the EYFS. These sections were excluded from this inspection. Apart from these elements, the school delivers the EYFS learning and development requirements effectively. All children, including those with SEN make good progress achieving the early learning goals. Children approach their learning with excitement; they develop high levels of self-confidence and independence which enable them to take responsibility for appropriate tasks and develop skills for the future. Their concentration is excellent as they listen intently to stories and as they take part in ring time. Children are imaginative and creative in using role play highly effectively to enhance all areas of learning. They understand the importance of keeping safe; competently peeling and cutting apples under the careful supervision of teachers. Older pupils make a highly positive contribution to their school community as they support those younger than themselves in situations ranging from serving them snacks to supporting them in action rhymes and developing their play activities. Pupils respond positively to the high expectations of good behaviour and are particularly helpful and well mannered. They help to keep their room tidy and clear away most efficiently.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage:

The quality of provision is good. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum provides a firm foundation for future learning by promoting the children's initiative, curiosity, enquiry skills and self-confidence. Staff create a highly peaceful atmosphere through the activities provided and the creative use of song which help children to concentrate and to persist at their tasks. The indoor classroom environment encourages good learning through creative play and focused activities which enable children to structure their own games confidently and competently, mostly receiving adult support where necessary. Planning varies across the classes: focus on the outdoor environment is not always clearly identified and not all plans involve self-reflection nor are they used appropriately to identify individuals and their needs. Procedures for tracking the progress of children differ for each year group and assessment data are not fully evidenced or used coherently. However, children are well known to all staff, regularly discussed, detailed individual child studies are carried out, and at times focussed observations take place. Priority is placed on children's health, safety and well-being; mostly, clear procedures and practice ensure their awareness of good health and hygiene and how to stay safe. All snacks and drinks are nutritious and the children have access to drinking water throughout the day.

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

Leadership and management are satisfactory. They are conducted collaboratively according to principles of collective responsibility. This promotes sound improvement. Relationships with parent and carers are strong. Parents are kept fully informed through many opportunities to meet with staff, and through home visits and clear reports. Satisfactory links have been established with other agencies. The Steiner resources are used effectively and are well maintained. As the classes contain mixed age groups and abilities, good consideration is given to the needs of

individual children, thereby promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. Adequate arrangements are in place for safeguarding and the staff are well trained in their roles. However details are missing from policy documentation. Risk assessments are not always appropriately reviewed and currently there is no reference to child adult ratios on outings. All the necessary employment checks are carried out and recorded. Self evaluation of the EYFS is informal and no development plan has been written; however, regular staff discussions ensure that all within the EYFS review their work and consider the needs of the children effectively.

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

The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is good. The uniqueness of each child is acknowledged and catered for through well-designed activities. The capacity for sustained improvement is informal but appropriately developed through the regular meetings of staff.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

No.

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

In order to fully meet the statutory requirements the school should:

- ensure that risk assessments for outings are reviewed before each specific outing and include an assessment of required child adult ratios.
- make sure that appropriate procedures for the emergency evacuation of children in the event of fire are regularly checked.
- ensure risk assessments are reviewed regularly and keep a record of when particular aspects of the environment have been checked.

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