



SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

INSPECTION REPORT FOR ALDER BRIDGE SCHOOL

DfE No: 869/6013

The key inspection judgements for this school are:

The quality of education	Good	2
Pupils' personal development	Good	2
Safeguarding pupils' welfare health and safety	Good	2
Leadership, management and governance	Good	2
Effectiveness of the Early Years' provision	Good	2

Compliance with the Independent School Standards:

The school meets the regulatory requirements of schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Compliance with the Equality Act 2010:

The school does meet the requirements of the Equality Act.

Compliance with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage:

The school meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Date of inspection: 13-15 June 2017

SECTION A: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Alder Bridge School provides a good quality of education. The school has made substantial improvements since its last inspection and now has a number of excellent features. Pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. The quality of the curriculum planning is good. The quality of lesson planning is excellent, with close attention paid to meeting the needs of individual pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. It meets the needs of all pupils well and those with SEND particularly well. This results from teachers' use of the excellent diagnostic analysis and helpful advice provided by the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO). Resources generally support learning well, but require further development for the 5 to 6 year olds in the kindergarten. Many aspects of personal development are excellent and enable pupils to absorb key British values of courtesy, tolerance, respect for others and acceptance of cultural diversity, drawing on experiences in the curriculum and the consistent models of good practice that teaching staff provide. Nevertheless, pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their understanding of the role of key institutions in supporting the social fabric of society, which was a weakness at the time of the last inspection. The provision to assure the safeguarding of pupils is well managed and organised. All staff recognise their responsibilities, receive the appropriate training, know the relevant standards well and the need for vigilance at all times. The short-comings at the time of the last inspection have been fully addressed, apart from the one mentioned above; administration now supports the efficient running of the school very well and planning and assessment are consistently good. Trustees now have close oversight of the educational achievement and personal development of pupils, working closely with senior managers, staff and parents in improving the school. They know the independent school standards well and have improved the quality of planning to take the school forward. Parents express great confidence in the school and what it is doing for their children. Provision in the kindergarten is good overall with some outstanding features, notably the quality of care and children's personal development. Planning in the kindergarten meets the needs of the children well and, together with perceptive assessment using the Steiner Waldorf profile and good teaching by staff who know the children very well, ensures that all children make good progress in their learning, including the 5 to 6 year olds. This ensures that the school is compliant with the independent school standards for the 5 to 6 year olds, but the early years manager recognises there is still room for improvement and is working with colleagues in other schools to achieve this.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the proprietor should:

- continue to improve the age specific curriculum for the 5 to 6 year olds in the kindergarten and ensure that resources support these improvements; and
- provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about the key institutions that support the social fabric of society.

SECTION B: INFORMATION

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service (SIS) in accordance with Section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. It follows the inspection framework agreed by SIS and the Department for Education (DfE). The school was given two days' notice of inspection.

In reaching their judgements, the inspectors observed lessons, held meetings with the trustees, staff and parents, examined relevant documentation and records and reviewed responses to parents' questionnaires completed before the inspection. The inspectors were:

Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ted Cohn
Team inspectors:	Mr Jonathan Palk
Steiner Community Consultant:	Mrs Sally Jenkinson

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL:

Alder Bridge School is an independent, co-educational, non-selective Steiner-Waldorf school for pupils aged 3 to 14. It is situated in extensive grounds in Padworth near Reading and was founded in 1987. The school currently has 64 pupils on roll, of whom 16 are under five and 48 are of statutory age, between the ages of 3 and 11 years old. The kindergarten class includes children aged from three to six. Those up to age five follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with agreed modifications and disapplications. The 3 to 4 year olds attend for some combination of three to five mornings a week. Pupils aged 5 to 6 usually attend the kindergarten for five mornings and one afternoon a week in the summer term. Where this is not so, the school has home-school contractual agreements with parents. The school currently has eight pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom two have Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and four pupils for whom English is not their first language. The school aims to provide an education that accords with the principles of Rudolf Steiner, where staff, pupils and parents work closely together in establishing a learning community in which pupils' learning and achievement are developed in tandem with their self-esteem and self-confidence through a strong emphasis on experiential learning.

The trustees of the school exercise management and oversight responsibilities similar to those of a governing body. The school has no head teacher and senior management responsibilities are discharged by the business and educational managers, working in conjunction with the chair of college and staff with particular mandated responsibilities, who form the collegiate.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf system for naming classes. National Curriculum comparison is given in the following table:

Steiner class names	National Curriculum
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1
Class 1	Year 2
Class 2	Year 3
Class 3	Year 4
Class 4	Year 5
Class 5	Year 6
Class 6	Year 7
Class 7	Year 8
Class 8	Year 9

SECTION C: THE INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

1. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good.

Pupils' learning and achievement

Pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress in their learning overall and achieve well in relation to their age and ability. This is particularly so in the development of their speaking and listening skills, building on the good start in the Early Years, so that pupils are confident and articulate speakers, who listen intently to teachers during activities such as story-telling and discussions or when being given instructions. They make good progress in English and mathematics, quickly developing basic skills, so that by class 5 they are writing lively, imaginative prose with good levels of technical accuracy and display a good mastery of the basic four rules of number and the capacity to use them in a variety of contexts competently. They develop a good understanding of the biological sciences through studies of the changing seasons and effects on plant and animal life, founded on practical experiences such as the growing of crops and work in the woodland area, helping to develop ideas such as the importance of close observation and prediction. Pupils also make very good progress in developing their artistic and aesthetic skills and understanding through art and design, drama, music and technological activities, producing work of a high quality. Other activities like physical education, rhythmic movement, eurythmy and dance help pupils to effectively develop their fine motor skills.

In the kindergarten older children, particularly the 5 to 6 year olds, take on more responsibilities and are provided with opportunities to take their learning on, so some children were counting to 50 and beyond, whilst others were reading in lessons observed. All 5 to 6 year olds also carry out a personal craft project, requiring the development of skills that are often excellent for their age group

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and some aspects of it are excellent. Its quality has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are well qualified, with a good understanding of the principles of Steiner Waldorf education and how to implement them effectively in the classroom. They have a very good understanding of individual pupils' learning needs and how these are to be met. This understanding is helped considerably, particularly in relation to pupils with SEND, including those with education and/or health care plans, by specialist input from the SENDCO, who assesses pupils' needs and develops specific strategies for teachers to use in the classroom as part of a continuing dialogue with class and subject teachers. Learning support assistants (LSAs) are deployed very effectively to support the delivery of particular learning tasks with pupils identified by the teacher. This helps to ensure that all pupils are fully challenged, and is a strength of the classroom practice. The support for the small number of pupils with English as an additional language is also very effective. Since the last inspection, the quality of support for pupils with SEND has improved significantly. The support for gifted and able pupils is not as closely organised, but often the tasks they are given are deliberately open-ended to enable these pupils to produce work of a good quality. Lesson plans include differentiated

tasks to ensure that these pupils are fully and suitably challenged, which is clearly evident in their work. This is not so to the same extent for the 5 to 6 year old pupils in the kindergarten, but the open-ended nature of tasks and the unobtrusive guidance of teaching staff help to ensure that they make good progress and that by the end of Class 1 these pupils have made the expected progress in their learning.

Teachers establish a calm and purposeful atmosphere in classrooms, which, combined with a good and often excellent relationships with pupils, creates an ethos that is highly conducive to learning. Lessons are well organised, with clear objectives, and generally proceed at a good pace. Behaviour is managed very well, so the few potentially difficult pupils stay on task and gain satisfaction from what they do. Teaching is consistently supported by good lesson planning, which is particularly strong in relation to the structure and purpose of the lesson.

Resources generally support teaching and learning well, but more resources are needed to meet fully the recent changes to the curriculum for 5 to 6 year olds in the kindergarten.

Assessment is good and very well supported by the SENDCO and LSA team in relation to pupils with SEND. Assessment is also used well to review progress in pupils' learning and inform teachers' future planning, including for the 5 to-6-year olds. The Steiner Waldorf profiles used in the kindergarten indicate that the 5 to 6 year olds are making good overall progress in their education. Marking is regular and oral comments help pupils to improve their work effectively.

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is overall of good quality and the Steiner Waldorf curriculum is implemented well. The planning sets out very clearly what topics are to be studied and how these might be approached. Curriculum planning has improved significantly since the last inspection. Teaching and learning have benefited significantly from the more consistently good quality of curriculum planning, which in turn enables pupils to make consistently good progress. Curriculum planning for the 5 to 6 year olds is not yet quite of the same quality, but still ensures that pupils' progress and achievement are good and that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

The curricular experience of pupils is greatly enhanced by the wide variety of trips and visits they make, such as the trip made by class 4/5 during the inspection. They slept under canvas close to the River Thames and carried out various activities such as the making of a mediaeval bow, using traditional materials and tools. This was carried out skilfully, and pupils focused intently on their task. It was clear that the group had a good knowledge of bows and the wood that makes good bows, with one boy who had been to the Marie Rose exhibition demonstrating how parents can help pupils to amplify and extend what they learn at school. The creation of a woodland classroom in the school grounds has helped to improve the quality of learning about nature; a major focus of scientific learning for the pupils.

2. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pupils' personal development is of good quality. Several aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Spiritual development is a key aim of Steiner education and is reflected in its emphasis on living in harmony with the world around us and our changing seasons, which pupils imbibe as they go through the school. Developing pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge is another linked key aim and this is done well, so that pupils are confident learners who work well individually and collaboratively. They also learn, from an early age, the difference between right and wrong and the need to respect and accept each other's' views, whilst taking increasing responsibility for their own behaviour. In achieving this they learn much from the courtesy and gentle firmness of staff, who provide excellent role models for pupils to emulate. The importance of understanding the difference between right and wrong and being kind and courteous are also reinforced through the many stories with morals that pupils encounter and in discussions in ring time and elsewhere in the curriculum, which form part of pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE). A wide range of topics is covered through the curriculum including how pupils keep themselves safe and learn avoid sexual exploitation and discount extremist views.

As they move through the school, pupils develop their sense of social responsibility very effectively, which is reflected in their excellent behaviour. The older kindergarten pupils have a list of chores that they undertake in turn such as filling water jugs, sweeping floors after snacks and lunch or feeding chickens. Older pupils in the main school fund-raise for the school and charities that they have selected, as well as preparing for Open Days and the Advent Fayre. Out of school activities such as camping provide many opportunities for pupils' personal and social development, as witnessed in the camp observed during the inspection, where the pupils had been involved in setting it up and in determining the activities to be undertaken.

The rich variety of cultural and religious backgrounds of pupils, from some 20 countries with a large number of different cultural and religious traditions, provide a valuable resource for cultural development, which teachers exploit effectively so that pupils share their own experiences, whilst gaining valuable insights into other societies as part of a multicultural world. Work done in various subjects about different societies across time, geographical space and the major religions, further develop this understanding. This is combined with a wide range of trips or visits to such places as a local Hindu temple, Buddhist priory and the British Museum, as well as the celebration of festivals of various cultures and religions, as well as those of the Christian religion.

The school makes various contributions to the local and wider community, such as the art work for the 'River of Rainbows' project for adults with special needs, support for refugees and its involvement in the local residents' association of Mill Lane where the school is situated, convened by the school. Less well developed is pupils' knowledge of the institutions of the local area and the country and how they create the social framework that helps society to cohere, such as the work of the police, doctors, nurses, hospitals, social care institutions and local councils. This weakness contrasts with the many other excellent features of personal development, which

help pupils become well-balanced, socially responsible and caring individuals with a strong moral code, reflecting the best of British values.

3. SAFEGUARDING PUPILS' WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The school's provision for safeguarding the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is good. The safeguarding team of the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), two deputies and a trustee with named responsibility for safeguarding are all qualified at the appropriate level and know the relevant officials in the local safeguarding board (LSB) well. They understand their roles well, consult with each other, other staff, parents and officials of the LSB when circumstances require it. The safeguarding team has effectively briefed other staff about safeguarding, so that, for instance, they are well aware of the enhanced responsibilities as expressed in Keeping Pupils Safe in Education 2016. Safeguarding issues are a standing order agenda item at teachers' meetings and the well-being of the pupils is a key aspect of the child studies, which over a period of time cover every child in the school. This is supported by ongoing discussions with parents that contribute to teachers' excellent knowledge of pupils as individuals and people, as well as learners. Staff have also been well briefed about Prevent and Channel awareness. The strong emphasis of the school and its parents on courtesy, kindness, openness, honesty and respect for others of different cultures and religions, reflect the best of British values and act as a strong bulwark against extremism and terrorism.

The school has comprehensive behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Bullying is regarded as highly antithetical to the ethos and values of the school. Parents and pupils regard such behaviour as highly unusual and state that it is dealt with quickly and efficiently if it happens. This is partly because pupils from an early age learn about the importance of effective conflict resolution and practise the skills well. The school has appropriate policies for e-safety and training has been provided for staff. E-safety training for pupils is planned from Class 6 upwards, when they have access to computers in school, but the school has recognised that pupils may well have some access to computers and other electronic devices elsewhere before this time and has planned a meeting with parents to discuss earlier E-safety training at home.

Arrangements to ensure that the school recruits only staff and volunteers who are suitable to work with pupils are comprehensive and effective and at least one person with safer recruitment training is a member of any interview panel. The single central register, confirming that all the necessary checks have been carried out in a timely manner, is in good order and the school is fully aware of its relevant responsibilities with regard to safeguarding.

The school has a range of other policies and procedures that help to keep pupils safe, such as the regular testing of electrical equipment, sound fire safety policies and regular fire drills, whose records indicate quick and efficient evacuation procedures. There is a good range of first-aid equipment, more than sufficient staff with up-to-date training in first-aid, including some with paediatric training and a well-equipped sickroom. At the time of the last inspection risk assessments of school activities were thorough, but those for educational visits were not always so. All risk assessments now are now comprehensive, thorough and detailed and were being

implemented effectively in a camping trip with classes 4/5 that was visited during the inspection. All risk assessments for visits and trips are now scrutinised by one of the trustees who must agree to their good quality before the trip can take place. Admissions and attendance records are in good order and meet fully the regulatory requirements, which they were not at the time of the last inspection.

4. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The quality and effectiveness of leadership and management are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. The school's leaders support the development of appropriately challenging work for the older children in the kindergarten and ensure that the teaching enables them to make good progress and the ISS to be met. Trustees work closely with senior managers and those with specific mandated responsibilities in a fruitful collaboration that benefits the school's day-to-day running and its strategic planning for the future, while sustaining the principles and practice of Steiner Waldorf education well. Continuing professional development (CPD) has been used very effectively to ensure that trustees and all staff have a very good understanding of all aspects of safeguarding and how to implement these successfully in order to keep pupils safe at all times. Similarly, in college meetings reflective discussion about the personal growth and progress in learning of individual pupils has helped to deepen understanding and support the development of effective strategies for dealing with individual need, which has been significantly enhanced by the specialist input of the SENDCO.

The administration and day-to-day management of the school have improved significantly since the last inspection and make a valuable contribution to its overall effectiveness. The newly created and defined roles of business and educational manager, are working well to sharpen procedures, ensure that the independent school standards are met and improve efficiency. Staff appraisal and performance management were weak at the time the last inspection. Since then there have been significant improvements, so that the school now has an effective staff appraisal and performance management system that is a major responsibility of the educational manager and is helping staff to reflect productively on their teaching.

Development planning was at an early stage at the time of the last inspection and the school has made considerable progress in this area. The strategic five-year plan, to which trustees, staff and parents contributed, has clear aims and objectives and is helpful in focusing the vision and educational direction of the school, although it has no clearly delineated timelines for the completion of particular tasks. This is compensated for in part by detailed timelines, which provide careful assessments of what has been achieved and what is left to do in the annual action plans, which indicate that the school is making good progress. Overall the planning provides both a clear vision and educational direction for the school, supported by all participants, leading to significant improvements.

The premises and accommodation are in good order and provide a very pleasant environment for the pupils' education. Classrooms are attractive places for learning and the school hall provides a large and flexible space, which can be used for a wide range of practical activities. The extensive grounds also provide a rich and varied

learning environment for a wide range of activities, from gardening to science, creative and imaginative play and physical education. The school has developed a woodland classroom since last inspection, where pupils can take part in a wide variety of practical, craft, scientific and other activities, including learning about the importance of woodland and trees in the history of humankind.

Links with parents are very strong. Parents expressed very high levels of support for all aspects of the school in the parental questionnaires completed before the inspection and in meetings during the inspection. They regard themselves as very well informed about all aspects of their child's education and greatly appreciate the open and friendly manner in which teaching staff discuss their child's progress in their educational achievement and personal development. They are well informed about all aspects of their child's education through lively and informative newsletters, information about trips, visits and achievements of all kinds, on-going dialogue with teachers, termly formal meetings and annual school reports. The school's website makes a valuable contribution to this information and a list of staff qualifications is now available for parents from the school office, which it was not at the time of the last inspection.

The school has a well-thought out complaints procedure, which meets all the regulatory requirements. There has been one formal complaint in the last year where these procedures were followed rigorously and the complaint was close to resolution at the time of the inspection.

Governance

The quality of governance is good and improving. Trustees now ensure that all the ISS are met, the integrity of the Steiner Waldorf approach is sustained and that pupils are well safeguarded. As part of their induction process trustees are provided with a copy of the ISS, which are discussed with them. Meeting the ISS is a standing agenda item at the trustees' monthly meetings and any issues related to these are drawn to their attention by the business manager, who has formal oversight of them being met, or by others such as the educational manager in relation to teaching, staff development or performance management. Individual trustees have oversight of particular aspects of standards and monitor these aspects closely. The number of trustees is relatively small and the Board has been actively engaged in increasing their numbers, having identified through a skills audit the areas in which expertise is lacking. At the time of the last inspection trustees were not monitoring effectively that all the ISS were met, the school had an administrative arrangement that was not very effective and trustees were only beginning to develop a vision and educational direction for the school. Significant improvements have been made in all these areas. Trustees have ensured that the school has good resources overall to support teaching and learning, but recognise that more funding is needed to meet fully the new requirements consequent upon the recent changes to the curriculum for 5 to 6 year olds in the kindergarten. They are now well placed to continue improving the school in a productive, collaborative partnership with senior managers, staff and parents.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS' PROVISION

The effectiveness of the early years provision is good. Children make good progress in their learning and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. They are enthusiastic about the work they do and learn how to work well individually and collaboratively. Staff provide an interesting and well-structured environment, where children feel safe and happy, greatly enjoy their learning and coming to school. Safeguarding and welfare arrangements are comprehensive and effective. Leadership and management are effective in supporting all aspects of the EYFS provision and that for the 5 to 6 year olds in the kindergarten.

The leadership and management of the EYFS provision in the kindergarten are good and have ensured that the provision has improved since the last inspection. A significant contributory factor in this improvement is the introduction of the performance management of staff and enhanced opportunities for reflection on and critical review of practice. The staff work well as a cohesive team, complementing each other's skills very well. The school's checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children have been carried out meticulously. The model of collaborative management adopted by staff is effective in ensuring a strong consistency in the quality of planning, teaching, assessment and the considerate care of all the children, including their safeguarding and welfare. The Early Years manager and her colleagues are aware that provision for the 5 to 6 year olds, whilst meeting the relevant regulations, would benefit from further development and are working to achieve this.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teaching staff have a very clear understanding of the purposes and objectives of the Steiner Waldorf kindergarten curriculum and the parallel EYFS guidance on learning and development. They have high expectations of what the children can achieve over the three years they spend in kindergarten. They know the children and their personal and educational capabilities very well. This informs their planning and the tracking of children's progress, which contributes to the children's good achievement. The teacher and teaching assistants plan, teach and review children's work collaboratively, creating a highly effective teaching team. Together they provide a range of activities that engage children's interest and encourage a positive learning environment where children work well individually and collaboratively, developing their capacity to think creatively and critically and their oral skills. The Steiner-Waldorf profiles provide detailed and helpful information about children's personal development, but are less consistent in recording progress in what they know, understand and can do.

The children's personal development and welfare are outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent overall, and this reflects also the highly skilled approach by staff to managing some potentially difficult behaviour. The children have confidence in the staff who care for them and want to please them. Staff provide excellent models of courtesy and respect within a framework of rules of conduct that make it clear what is right and wrong. The children emulate this in their own behaviour and this also helps the children to develop their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness. Through tasks that they carry out, such as helping to prepare snacks, laying tables,

serving other children and tidying up, older children learn about social responsibilities. The promotion of the British values of courtesy, equality, celebration of diversity, fairness and justice are embedded in the aims and ethos of the school and are very much reflected in the practice of early years staff and their expectations of children. These values provide a strong protection against extremism and radicalisation.

The outcomes for children are good. Throughout the EYFS children achieve outcomes, particularly in the areas of communication, social and manipulative skills that are good and sometimes excellent in relation to their ability. All children, including those with SEND, make good progress in all aspects of their learning and personal development, so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Address of school:	Bridge House, Mill Lane Aldermaston Wharf Padworth Berkshire RG7 4JU			
Telephone number:	0118 971 4471			
Email address:	info@alderbridge.org.uk			
Web address	www.alderbridge.org.uk			
Proprietor:	Alder Bridge Association			
Person registered with DfE as proprietor under paragraph 20 of Part 4:	Dorit Ferreira			
School Business Manager	Jayne Mills			
Early Years Manager	Ann Morgan			
DfE Number	869/6013			
Type of school	Independent school			
Annual fees	£3,600 – 7278 pa			
Age range of pupils	3-14			
Gender of pupils	Mixed			
Total number on roll	full-time	40	part-time	24
Number of children in registered nursery				
Number of children under-5	Boys:	10	Girls:	6
Number of compulsory school age pupils	Boys:	25	Girls:	23
Number of post-compulsory pupils	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	Boys:	1	Girls:	1
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Boys:	2	Girls:	2
Type of inspection	Section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008			

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, and members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship or Cognita group. The report is available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk.