

# Exeter Steiner School

Independent school inspection report

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DCSF registration number 999/26  
Unique reference number 135686  
Inspection number 341996  
Inspection dates 8–9 December 2009  
Reporting inspector Jonathan Palk HMI

**Age group:** 3–11

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**Published:** December 2009

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**Reference no:** 090070

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A<sup>1</sup> of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

Exeter Steiner School is situated in what was formerly a family centre in the St Thomas district of Exeter. The school has evolved from long-standing early years provision on the current and a previous site. The school has twelve children of compulsory school age and twenty-one children aged three and four who are funded under the Nursery Scheme. As is usual with Steiner schools, the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is provided in the Kindergarten. 'Parent and child' groups meet at the school for several sessions each week.

The school was registered in September 2008 to admit five to twelve year-olds. At that time there were some regulatory failings that the school sought to address through its action plan submitted in March 2008. The pre-school children and the Nursery group were last inspected under Ofsted Early Years arrangements in January 2005.

The school has a distinctive philosophy, following the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. The school is affiliated to the Steiner Fellowship, with an established Steiner school at Dartington acting as its support partner. It follows a curriculum based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and its governance is guided by Steiner principles. The planning group, with members drawn from parents and trustees, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. The 'college of teachers' deals with the curriculum and matters of pedagogy. The school is further characterised by its mission statement: '*Education is a journey and not a race.*'

## Evaluation of the school

Exeter Steiner School successfully meets its stated aims and provides a good quality of education for its children. However, the school fails to meet a number of regulations, including those relating to safeguarding arrangements. As a consequence, the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate. The provision for welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The school has made unsatisfactory progress in addressing regulatory failings following its registration visit, although there is now a clear development plan to guide future

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

development. All children make good progress in their learning as a result of good teaching and assessment. They have very positive attitudes and their needs are met well through the Steiner curriculum. The good curriculum underpins children's good personal development and sense of well-being.

## **Quality of education**

The good quality curriculum makes effective use of the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. The systematically planned curriculum provides interesting learning experiences across the academic, aesthetic and practical areas of learning for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in classes one and two. The curriculum encourages good personal development, ensuring children are confident when facing new challenges. A daily 'main lesson' is provided which includes a focus on particular topics which are taught in rotation. The topics serve as the vehicle for teaching reading, writing and number using activities such as clapping rhythms, singing, movement, games, plays, poetry, painting and drawing. The topics take close account of the National Curriculum. All children learn German, which contributes well to their appreciation of other cultures. There is a good balance of individual learning, group and classwork. The eurythmy (rhythmical movement) sessions and Tai Chi add to other experiences that develop in children an impressive awareness of their physical and spiritual nature. Planning sets out objectives clearly for the main subject and for other related learning. Support for children with a statement of special educational needs is good.

Children make good progress in all aspects of the Steiner curriculum. The emphasis given to reading and writing for a purpose and on speaking and listening skills ensures they have a secure grounding in literacy skills. The children gain practical experiences in applying their mathematics skills at a satisfactory pace. Practical work in the garden and a keen appreciation of the seasons ensure good progress in observation and investigative skills. There is good additional provision for those with learning difficulties and support teaching is effective in helping children reach their goals.

The quality of teaching is good, enabling all children to make good progress. Adults are skilful at combining Steiner pedagogy with children's natural enthusiasm for learning and exploring ideas. The excellent relationships children have with each other and adults encourage them to develop independence in their thinking and creativity. Adults take time to explain clearly and they question and probe to ensure that children fully understand what they are doing.

Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Assessment is well considered, with a good range of information including assessment on entry, regular teacher assessment and individual child studies where appropriate. Assessments required for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are regularly completed. Teachers and assistants know their children very well, and adapt their teaching effectively to meet their needs. The teachers are diligent in assessing learning against the Steiner

framework of curriculum objectives and this ensures they maintain an overview of what children have learnt. While adults are clear about the main thrust of the learning, they do not always adapt the work to match the ability of all the children. As a consequence, some of the work is too easy.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. There are many valuable opportunities throughout the day when children learn to reflect and to promote their spiritual development. For example, during morning greeting and at the end of lessons as well as in their eurythmy sessions and music lessons. What is particularly good is the ease with which children, as a class, come together to join in quiet reflection, singing and chanting. The consistent and clear structure of these activities helps to promote the children's self-worth, respect and awareness of others. Adults provide very good role models. This promotes children's understanding of right and wrong and helps them to manage their own behaviour towards others.

There is much good social development through the many opportunities to work together. As a result, they have positive attitudes towards school and are respectful and courteous. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy contributing to daily communal tasks, such as preparing food and tidying up. They play well on their own or with others and respect each other's differences and are particularly accepting of new children, including children learning English as an additional language. They contribute extremely well to the daily routines. Older children frequently check and advise each other on how they can improve their work. These arrangements have a significant impact on children's personal development. Attendance is good. Children are eager to attend and enjoy their time at school. The school has excellent relationships with parents and this is helping to minimise the number of days lost to holidays. Parents are overwhelming in their support for the school.

Children's behaviour is good. Challenging behaviour is managed in a sensitive and non-confrontational manner, which ensures adults are trusted by children. They acquire a strong sense of community through participating in fund-raising activities and because parents frequently join together with their children for events. Cultural awareness is promoted well through the Steiner curriculum, which provides them with a good understanding of both their own and other cultures, and respect for the beliefs and lifestyles of others. Children have limited understanding of public services and institutions in England as provision for this area of development is not planned for systematically. Children develop as self-assured and confident individuals, enjoy their learning and are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase in their education.

## **Welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The provision for children's welfare, health and safety is inadequate. The school's systems are too weak, and staff are not sufficiently well-trained to safeguard or promote children's welfare, health and safety. Arrangements for ensuring the suitability of the proprietor and staff to work with children are not sufficiently rigorous. As a result, children are potentially at risk.

The good quality of day-to-day care for all children is seen in the high level of commitment of staff through their daily contact and the regular meetings held to discuss the welfare of children. The school has a range of policies that are in keeping with Steiner principles, but some details and aspects of implementation are weak. Children are supervised well in school and on outings. While risk assessments are tailored to the activities undertaken, both in and out of school, they are not routinely reviewed.

Instances of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare, and the school deals with any that do occur swiftly and effectively. All children are keen to achieve healthy lifestyles and talked to inspectors about how they eat healthily and enjoy physical activity. Children are encouraged to eat wholesome food and appreciate it all the more as they contribute to preparing it. There are no significant health and safety hazards in the school. Fire safety requirements are fully met. The school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be reviewing the possibility of further improving access.

## **Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school does not meet the majority of regulations for carrying out the required checks on all staff and volunteers with regard to their suitability to work with children. It does not maintain the statutory single central register of all the checks made.

## **School's premises and accommodation**

The classrooms comfortably accommodate the small numbers in each class. This enables teachers to move around and support individual learners quickly and calmly. The kindergarten classrooms are bright and resourced well to encourage creative and imaginative play. The school now meets the requirement to provide suitable accommodation for any child who may become ill during the school day.

## **Provision of information for parents, carers and others**

Parents, prospective parents and others are provided with a range of information. The parents' handbook pack does not fully meet regulations because it does not include all of the required information. Parents can view information and other documents on request but the school does not publish the school's safeguarding

policy. Both the website and the handbook set out very clearly the principles of Steiner education and parental involvement. Parents receive a good quality report on their child's progress. The reports are clear about achievements and complement the many opportunities parents have in the year to talk with their child's teachers.

## **Procedures for handling complaints**

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which complies with all of the regulations. Any complaints that are made are dealt with effectively and the outcomes are recorded and shared with all parties concerned. The school acts on the recommendations made.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The Kindergarten provides the youngest children with some excellent opportunities to explore their ideas and also observe copy and learn from the very good adult role models. The partnership with parents and knowledgeable staff makes an important contribution to the provision. The children are curious and motivated and remain engaged in their activities for a long period of time. They often express their enthusiasm for creative and imaginative play. Children make excellent progress in their personal and social learning through the home-like environment.

Teaching is good and enables children to meet and even exceed the expected learning goals in some areas of their learning and development. Teaching assistants provide highly effective support. Although planning is thorough and incorporates a daily focus on children's learning and development, it does not fully comply with statutory requirements regarding learning, development and achievement for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Assessment information is shared well between the adults, who provide good emotional support to meet the needs of each child.

Adults' knowledge of safeguarding requirements is inadequate. Systems are weak and policies and procedures are out of date. As a consequence, provision for children's welfare, health and safety is inadequate.

The very experienced Steiner practitioner provides good support for all staff. Self-evaluation is accurate and clearly focused on raising the quality of outcomes for children. However, management at a wider strategic level is inadequate as it has failed to ensure the proper care, welfare and safety of the children. As a consequence, the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve planning for pupils to have a general knowledge of public institutions and services in England (paragraph 2(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance, Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- review risk assessments covering individual pupils, the premises and curriculum activities both on and off-site (paragraph 3(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (including volunteers), ensure appropriate checks have been completed to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure that an enhanced criminal record check has been made by the trustees in respect of all members of staff appointed to a position at the school (paragraph 4(2)(b))
- ensure that no members of staff or volunteers carry out work, or intend to carry out work, at the school in contravention of any direction made under section 142 of the 2002 Act(a) or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction (paragraph 4 (2)(d))
- ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out for staff not directly employed by the school (paragraph 4A(3-5))
- ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out on the suitability of the proprietor (paragraph 4B(2 and 3))
- ensure that appropriate checks have been carried out on the suitability of the trustees who form the proprietorial body (paragraph 4B (4 and 5))

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<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)