

Calder Valley Steiner School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Calder Valley Steiner School is an independent day school, which provides part- and full-time education for up to 56 girls and boys aged from three to nine years. There are currently 38 pupils on roll, of whom around half are below compulsory school age. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school was first registered in September 2011. This is the school's first inspection. Previously, there was provision for children aged from three to six years and this was previously inspected as an Early Years setting by Ofsted in December 2010. The school is situated in a former church house adjacent to the church in Cragg Vale. The Early Years Foundation Stage is provided in two Kindergarten classes. There are 20 children aged three and four years who receive government Nursery funding.

The two Kindergarten classes provide four sessions of four hours in duration. One class operates Monday to Thursday and one class from Tuesday to Friday. Children in the Kindergarten range from three to six years in age. For children of compulsory school age who are not viewed as ready for Class One, a fifth session is made available in the other Kindergarten class. Some parents and carers opt to educate their child at home on the fifth day and sign a home-school agreement to this effect. Pupils in Class One, attend three days per week for four hours and two days per week for six hours.

The school aims to provide an education based upon the philosophy and principles of Rudolf Steiner.

'By giving equal importance to the child's social and emotional life as well as their intellectual abilities the education develops the whole child. All subjects are taught in an artistic and creative way. The teacher will remain with the class throughout the whole school, forming a strong bond of trust, love and respect.'

The school has been granted exemption from some aspects of the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Hence, these aspects were not inspected and no judgements were made.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils and fully meets its aims. The provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Due to a good curriculum and good teaching, pupils make good progress. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, their behaviour and the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety are good. The school meets all the regulations for registration as an independent school. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all the requirements.

Quality of education

The curriculum and other activities are good in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils and they cover all the required areas of learning. The Steiner Waldorf Curriculum provides the framework for the tasks and activities, which are organised with the aim of establishing 'good rhythm and balance in all aspects of the child's development.' In Class One each morning includes a 'main lesson' which lasts two hours. There is a theme for every three-to-four week block of main lessons which reflects the seasonal cycles of the year. The content of the main lesson includes learning a variety of basic skills, mental arithmetic, music and drawing. There is a significant emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills through the use of narrative, memory and reciting. Many poems and rhymes are used. Knitting and needlework are regularly taught. Also, in Class One, Spanish and music are taught as discrete subjects. Physical education is integrated into many lessons through skipping, balance and catching exercises. In the Kindergarten, children learn through play and imitation. The staff continually engage with the children in activities which promote oral skills very effectively. Rhymes and songs are at the heart of many lessons. Enjoyment of the natural world is seen as central to curriculum opportunities. Most resources are made of wood and natural materials. For example, the children build tunnels with wooden clothes dryers and they construct towers with large wooden blocks. This supports children's technological learning. The formal approach to the teaching of reading begins in Class One, where a combination of strategies are used. The emphasis is on moving from the recognition of whole sentences to phrases, then words and ultimately letters and sounds. Provision for mathematics focuses strongly on arithmetic and number bonds. In keeping with Steiner principles, computers are not used.

Outdoor education forms a significant part of the curriculum. Every class is timetabled each day for a lesson, which takes place outdoors, usually in the school garden and play area. Additionally, the Kindergarten classes spend a full session outdoors in the local environment. Children are suitably clothed for all weathers so that outdoor activities are a reliable and integral part of the curriculum. Activities include gardening, environmental work, physical play and offer many natural extensions to learning which take place in the classroom. For example, children were seen singing rhymes and playing 'galloping horses' which had formed part of an earlier lesson. While the use of the outdoors is a considerable strength of the

curriculum, provision for sporting activities is limited by the absence of a large space in which to play team games.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment is good in meeting the full range of pupils' needs. The overwhelming majority of teaching seen was good. Outstanding teaching was seen in the Kindergarten classes during outdoor sessions. Staff know the pupils very well and use this information effectively to nurture, guide and support their needs. Relationships between staff and pupils are trusting, friendly and respectful. Good links with parents and carers help staff to gain an in-depth knowledge of pupils' needs. Teachers plan carefully using the Steiner Waldorf guides. The teaching methods used require a whole-class approach, which is supported by the provision of extension activities. A substantial amount of repetition is at the heart of the Steiner approach. Occasionally, for some more-able pupils, this leads to a loss of interest and their progress slows.

Lessons are characterised by calm, well-organised practical activities, which involve all pupils. Teachers are knowledgeable about the Steiner approach to learning and use this well. Pupils enjoy learning and show good attitudes, interest and concentration. For example, in a main lesson activity one boy proudly recited his 'birthday poem' demonstrating excellent memory skills and clear articulation and diction. This is not surprising since teachers model speaking and listening skills extremely well. Teachers prepare thoroughly as seen in a Kindergarten class at the start of one day. The teacher sat painting, and as the children entered the room they sat beside her and imitated her work using thick brushes and three shades of paint. Carefully hanging up their aprons they moved seamlessly to help the teaching assistant cut up vegetables to make soup for lunch before going on to building with the wooden blocks. This illustrates the high level of independence achieved by the youngest children. In the outdoors the self-esteem and confidence of children is seen at its best. This is because teachers inspire children to learn and play through excellent support and guidance in this environment. For example, teachers themselves dressed in cagoules and wellingtons, danced and sang songs in the sandpit as children dug and built models. Meanwhile, other staff helped a group of children to count pebbles on a large stone while a further group weeded the garden vegetable beds. In and among all this activity another group weaved in and out playing a game. The quality of role play and of collaboration in this lesson was outstanding.

Overall, pupils make good progress in their learning. This is shown in the work in pupils' profiles, photographs of many different activities which are used extensively to illustrate pupils' learning and enjoyment, conversations with pupils and observations of lessons. Throughout the school, good assessment records are kept of pupils' attainment and progress. The questionnaires returned by parents and carers were unanimously of the view that pupils make good progress and enjoy school. Inspectors agree. In particular, children make very strong progress in their personal and social development, which equips them well to have confidence in learning new skills and knowledge. Pupils especially show good standards of speaking and listening as a result of the school's clear priority for developing this skill.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The staff show high levels of interest, care and enthusiasm for pupils. They treat pupils with respect and warmth and in return pupils cooperate well together and show good manners and behaviour. Behaviour is occasionally less than good when a few more-able pupils lose interest in lessons when too long is taken in requiring them to repeat what they already know. Praise is used very well by staff to motivate pupils and to reward their efforts. Consequently, pupils gain in confidence.

Teaching provides some uplifting and spiritually moving experiences for pupils. For example, in one lesson the teacher skilfully sang with the children as they danced in a ring. The song helped the children to sense the wonder of the natural world as the teacher lowered her voice and used her hands to model a bird's nest. The children gazed in awe and wonder as they quietly sang about the new born chick. Parents and carers are right to be totally of the view that pupils are happy, feel safe and behave well. As a result, pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. In particular, pupils' social development is first-class. The school day provides a good range of rich and beneficial social experiences and enables pupils of all ages to make a positive contribution to the school community. For example, at lunchtime the children in Kindergarten sit together with the staff. They light a candle and give thanks for the meal. In turn, the children help to serve each other, the staff and visitors. With admirable concentration the youngest three-year-old children carry bowls of soup taking care not to spill any. Later, the children help the staff to clear away and to wash up. The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. They learn about other faiths and beliefs, raise money for a Nepalese community and celebrate a number of festivals such as Eid and Christmas. Opportunities are limited to learn about other schools and communities of contrasting cultures in Britain. There are only a limited range of visits and visitors in this regard. Pupils learn about British institutions such as the Royal Mail, the emergency services and local elections, which take place in the polling station situated in the adjoining church.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Suitable policies and procedures are in place and these are reviewed annually. The proprietor ensures that the recruitment checks and vetting procedures for staff meet all the regulations. The school premises are regularly risk assessed with appropriate consideration given to any potential dangers related, for example, to fire and security. Staff are trained appropriately for first aid and in respect of child protection requirements. Staff care for pupils vigilantly and pupils say they feel safe in school. Parents and carers' questionnaires show unanimous views that the school helps pupils to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors agree. Homemade healthy lunches, lots of physical exercise and good attention to hygiene, such as washing hands, all show the school's good promotion of this aspect.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required safeguarding checks on staff are made, such as those by the Criminal Records Bureau, and are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The three classrooms are of good size and are equipped with a suitable range of resources. These make an effective contribution to pupils' learning. The small outdoor space is utilised highly effectively to enrich and extend learning. A weakness is the absence of an outdoor or indoor space large enough for pupils to enjoy team games and the skills promoted through these activities. The office is situated in an open area adjacent to the school entrance; it provides suitable facilities but lacks privacy.

Provision of information

The school complies with all requests from Ofsted and the Department for Education for information about the school. Parents and carers are provided with a good range of information. The school has a website which includes helpful information about the Steiner approaches to education. Draft reports are in place for the first year of annual feedback to parents.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's complaints policy and procedures fully meet the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about contrasting cultures and communities in Britain
- provide additional opportunities for pupils to learn through team sports and games.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

School status	Independent day		
Type of school	Primary Steiner school		
Date school opened	September 2011		
Age range of pupils	3-9 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 4	Girls: 5	Total: 9
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 12	Girls: 14	Total: 29
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,700 - £4,300		
Address of school	The St John's Centre Church Bank Cragg Vale Hebden Bridge West Yorkshire HX7 5TF		
Telephone number	01422 882071		
Email address	info@hebdensteiner.com		
Headteacher	Ingrid Lhou (Chair of the College of Teachers; Richard Bunzl (nominee Chair of the Board of Trustees)		
Proprietor	Calder Valley Steiner Education		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 May 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Calder Valley Steiner School, HX7 5TF

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors into your school when we visited you recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and would like to share with you what we found out about your school. We judged that the Calder Valley Steiner School is a good school. These are the main reasons why we judged the school to be good.

- The staff treat you fairly and expect you to be good and achieve well. In return you work hard and concentrate very well.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum is good so that you make good progress in your learning.
- You do exceptionally well when you work and play outdoors.
- You enjoy school, feel safe and behave well.
- You develop outstanding personal skills which will help you in the future such as by being well mannered and cooperative with others.

All schools need to develop and improve and we have asked that there are more opportunities provided for you to learn about other cultures and communities in different parts of Britain. Also, we think that you should be given more opportunities to take part in team games and sports.

Thank you once again for all your help. I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

**John Coleman
Her Majesty's Inspector**