

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of Cognita schools and 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:	Lancaster Steiner School
DfE number:	888/6040
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Ted Cohn Supporting Inspector: Mrs Elisabeth Linley Lay Inspector: Mr Ewout Van-Manen
Dates of inspection:	24 to 26 June 2014

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Section C: The quality of organisation and management

Section D: Early Years Foundation Stage

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Lancaster Steiner School		
Address of school:	Lune Road, Lancaster, LA1 5QU		
Telephone number:	01524 841351		
Email address:	lancastersteinerschool@yahoo.co.uk		
Proprietor:	Council of Trustees		
Chair of the College of Teachers:	Mrs Su Eastham		
Chair of the Trustees:	Mr Andrew Taylor		
Administrator:	Ms Alice Granger		
DfE number:	888/6040		
Type of school:	Independent school associated with the Steiner Fellowship		
Age range of pupils and students:	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils:	Male and female		
Total number on roll:	(Full-time)	Boys: 11	Girls: 12
	(Part-time)	Boys: 10	Girls: 9
Number of children under 5		Boys: 8	Girls: 9
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:		Boys: 0	Girls: 0
Annual fees:	£3,300 to £4,450		
Type of inspection:	Section 162A of the Education Act 2002		
Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ted Cohn		
	Supporting Inspector:	Mrs Elisabeth Linley	
	Lay Inspector:	Mr Ewout Van-Manen	
Dates of inspection:	24 to 26 June 2014		

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:

Lancaster Steiner School is an independent co-educational school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. It began as a toddler group in 1991 and progressed in small stages to be first registered as an independent school in 2003. Situated in a residential street not far from the centre of Lancaster, it occupies buildings that have been converted from a former Methodist chapel. There are 42 pupils attending the school between the ages of three and eleven. Seventeen children are below compulsory school age and attend the kindergarten classes on a part-time basis, as do two over-five year olds with agreed home-school contracts. The school is non-selective and has no pupils with statements of special educational need, but it identifies three pupils in need of additional support for special educational needs (SEN). The school aims to ensure the development of children who have a strong sense of purpose, morality and respect for themselves and others, who show initiative and creativity, and have the appropriate skills and motivation to achieve their potential in their future education and lives. 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	EYFS, Year 1
Class 1/2	Year 2/3
Class 3/4/5	Year 4/5/6

Summary of main findings:

Lancaster Steiner School is clearly successful in meeting its aims. It provides a good education for its pupils, which includes a number of outstanding features and is much appreciated by parents. The curriculum reflects closely the Steiner Waldorf philosophy and is broad and balanced, allowing many opportunities for learning and is particularly strong in the expressive arts. Planning is of good quality and supports the successful learning of pupils of all ages and abilities well, including those with special educational needs. The quality of teaching is always good and sometimes

outstanding, particularly in developing speaking and listening skills and in the expressive arts. Relationships between pupils and teachers and pupils' behaviour are excellent. Assessment is good and the tracking of pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy has improved since the last inspection, but not to the same extent in other areas of the curriculum. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent as is the welfare and pastoral care of children. Pupils are generally well safeguarded by the effective implementation of well designed policies. The administration and management of the school is satisfactory, but at a time of transition the demarcation between the responsibilities of staff and trustees is not always clear.

What the school does well:

- the teaching is consistently good with some outstanding features;
- pupils enjoy coming to school, their behaviour is excellent and they develop into good independent learners; and
- the school has developed a strong learning and social community.

The school complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Next Steps:

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

- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of trustees, including clear demarcation between the day-to-day running of the school and strategic planning;
- strengthening parental involvement in the assessment process in the kindergarten; and
- developing the tracking of pupils' progress in learning in the lower school in areas other than literacy and numeracy.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good and follows closely the principles of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. In the school the main lesson, a period of two hours in the morning, is the key feature of planning and delivering the curriculum. It involves a morning verse and a series of introductory activities that can include singing and poetry, movement and dance, rhythmic work, the playing of musical instruments and mathematics-based activities, often helping pupils to learn their tables. These activities also involve pupils in group activities that help them relate to each other and become focused on learning. The rest of the main lesson covers a wide variety of activities planned in three to five week blocks. Activities cover the required areas of learning, with particular strengths in aesthetic and creative areas, notably in art and music and speaking and listening. Main lessons are supplemented by lessons which consolidate and take on work done in main lessons, particularly in English and mathematics. They also extend the curriculum through subjects and aspects such as form drawing, French, drama, music, and hand craft, nature walks and gardening, which enrich and extend learning opportunities for pupils. Physical development is furthered well through a range of dancing and other rhythmic and balancing exercises at the beginning each day, swimming, running and other sports activities using a local sports field.

Teachers plan the curriculum carefully for the mixed age classes they teach, so that they can meet the learning needs of pupils of all ages and abilities effectively, including those with special educational needs. Planning includes ensuring that relevant topics in personal, social and health education are integrated into the overall provision. This is aided by the specific tracking and identification of relevant themes and topics, which has been developed since the last inspection and has improved planning for progressive learning.

The curriculum is enriched greatly through various visits to museums, a local county show and nature reserve, local traditional community festivals and notably the three-day visit to Botton Village on the North Yorkshire Moors, where, amongst other things, pupils can explore the flora and fauna of a very different environment from their own as part of their botany science topic. The work on the allotment in gardening develops pupils' understanding of how to grow and tend your own fruit and vegetables, as well as all the science associated with this.

The school provides a highly appropriate programme of activities for pupils below school age, which meet their educational needs and support their personal, social, emotional and physical development and their communication and language skills well and often very well.

Through its careful collaborative planning, the curriculum ensures that all pupils have good opportunities to learn and make progress, whilst preparing them well for adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The teaching is good, with some outstanding features. Teachers have a good understanding of the Steiner Waldorf philosophy and the subjects that they teach. They plan lessons thoughtfully and thoroughly, so that they engage the interests of pupils well. They also know their pupils well and the strong bond of mutual trust, respect and affection create a classroom ethos that is highly conducive to learning. Teachers use their deep knowledge of the pupils in their planning effectively, so that subject content in lessons is well tailored to meet the diverse needs of pupils and engages their interests well and sometimes very well. They provide clear and helpful explanations, such as those concerned with making Celtic knots in form drawing and photosynthesis in science, often supplemented with attractive chalk drawings, which amplify explanations well. Questioning is also used effectively to test and consolidate knowledge, extend understanding and encourage pupils to develop their own ideas, such as different ways of doing multiplication.

During lessons teachers move around the class purposefully, providing much advice and support, which helps address the needs of individual pupils well. They also manage behaviour well and create a quiet calm atmosphere where pupils work well and often intently, whilst their calm gentle firmness and evident interest in their pupils' learning encourage pupils to produce work of quality. Another factor which encourages learning and achievement is the effective management of time, so that lessons encompass a range of activities that add variety to the learning experience. Because the management of transition from one activity to another is managed very efficiently, the pace of learning is maintained, as is pupils' interest.

Fundamental to pupils' positive attitudes to learning is the successful manner in which teachers encourage them to take responsibility for their learning and pride in their work, which is reflected in high-quality presentation of pupils of all abilities. Resources to support teaching are adequate and are used effectively by teachers.

Assessment has developed further since the last inspection and the school now has a highly effective way of tracking pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy, which teachers, pupils and parents are finding very helpful. Such assessment tools have not yet been developed to measure progress in subjects such as the humanities and science in the same way, which the school acknowledges as an area for further development. Overall, the framework to assess pupils' work provides helpful support for future planning at individual and group level.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and learning. Pupils of all ages and abilities, including those with SEN, make consistently good progress in their learning across the curriculum, and this progress is notably good for many pupils in speaking and listening and the expressive arts.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

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

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school's ethos and values promote strongly the pupils' spiritual development by

engaging the pupils in the Steiner 'head, heart and hands' programme. As a result, from an early age pupils develop self-esteem and self-confidence and a strong sense of spiritual beauty through their creative and artistic experiences, something that is clearly reflected in their paintings. Throughout school, the celebration of seasonal and religious festivals that occur during the year further enhance the pupils' experiences and development.

The pupils enjoy school and their behaviour is excellent. The school's ethos and high expectations of pupils' behaviour, that are explicit in the calm authority and courtesy shown by staff, encourage the positive attitudes pupils develop to their work and towards others. From an early age, pupils learn to take responsibility for their own conduct and become increasingly aware of the impact that it has on other people. Through the curriculum and the many stories and myths that are shared, pupils learn of moral dilemmas that others have faced and of their resolutions. This enables pupils to develop a clear sense of right and wrong and an appreciation of the importance of respecting rules and ultimately the law.

Pupils' social development is excellent. Of particular note is the way in which pupils throughout school work together, which contributes very well to their own and each other's learning. From Kindergarten upwards pupils expect to support each other and do so with enthusiasm and care. They also have the opportunity to engage with the local and extended community. Seasonal visits are made to a local care home, for example, to deliver harvest baskets at Michaelmas, to sing carols before the Christmas holidays and to enjoy maypole dancing. A five-day residential trip to Botton School in the Botton Camphill village community provides the older pupils with valuable educational and life experiences. The pupils also grow produce at the school allotment, then harvest and use it at school festivals, for example, at Michaelmas, or sell it as a fundraiser for more seeds and equipment. Such work provides an opportunity for pupils to develop practical skills and knowledge of great value in the adult world.

Pupils' cultural development is good and is promoted well through the curriculum. The main lesson and work in subjects such as religion, history and the arts promote pupils' effective understanding of their own and other cultures, whilst ensuring that partisan political views are not promoted. Visitors to school, such as a former pupil who works in Malawi, enable pupils to develop an appreciation of how others live and the difficulties they may face. Learning a foreign language from an early age deepens the pupils' cross-cultural understanding. All of these activities and the school's own ethos of respect and consideration of others help to develop in pupils key British values, such as the importance of democracy, toleration and celebration of cultural difference and community solidarity in a well ordered society; important safeguards against political bias and extremism. Pupils develop a sound knowledge of public institutions and services in Britain. This is promoted through visits to local institutions such as the post office or fire station. The school has recognised that this is an area that would benefit from further development and it has been identified in the school improvement plan for action.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils is good overall, with some notable strengths. The staff make very good provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils, and are clearly effective in creating a calm and caring atmosphere, where pupils feel highly valued, respected and very safe. Policies to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare are clear, detailed and comprehensive, providing helpful guidance and advice across the full range of safeguarding issues from the roles of designated safeguarding persons and other staff to dealing with allegations of abuse by staff and e-safety. Much of this information is also included in the parents' handbook. These policies are implemented effectively by staff, whose central concern is the welfare, health and safety of their pupils.

The designated safeguarding person and her deputy have undertaken recent refresher training for the role at the appropriate level. They also lead annual training for the rest of the school and the training of new staff as part of the induction process. In addition the various requisite checks are carried out on volunteers who need to be checked because of the nature of their contact with pupils.

The school has a detailed and helpful document outlining its policy on behaviour, which is complemented by an equally helpful document about bullying, how to reduce it and deal effectively with it, if it occurs. These policies are implemented very effectively, although current pupils interviewed were quite clear that they had no experience of bullying.

The procedures for the supervision of pupils are clearly delineated and staff carry out their supervisory duties effectively. Detailed risk assessments are made for activities in the school and school visits and trips. Risk assessments for individual trips and visits are reviewed by the college of teachers before the visits take place, but this review is not always recorded on the risk assessments themselves, and this is an issue raised at the last inspection that has only been partly resolved.

Detailed and appropriate fire and safety procedures are in place. There is helpful guidance in the first aid policy and staff have had first aid paediatric training recently. The required checks on electrical and fire fighting equipment are carried out, whilst the school has a nominated fire officer who is aware of their responsibilities and has had relevant training. A local fire officer visits regularly and fire drills take place each term. These are carefully evaluated and any issues duly addressed.

Admissions and attendance registers are in order and the school meets the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

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

All the requisite checks for the suitability of staff and trustees have been carried out and the central register is in order. Some of the well established safeguarding procedures for the recruitment of staff have recently been devolved from the administrator to trustees.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a converted chapel which provides well for the pupils' needs and is well maintained. The school's washroom facilities meet regulations and suitable accommodation for the short-term care of pupils should they become ill while at school is now in place; this reflects an improvement since the last inspection. The classrooms are sufficient in size for the number of pupils who attend. They are light and well ventilated and provide effective environments for teaching and learning. Clearly identified drinking water is available in each classroom at all times.

The school's allotments and the school garden provide exciting environments in which pupils can play, explore and learn. Other facilities enhance the school's provision, for example, the adjacent cricket field that is used on occasions and the local swimming pool, which is used on a regular basis.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

Parents are well informed about the various aspects of the school. The website, which is in a process of further development, is informative and accessible. Key policies such as admissions, assessment, behaviour, positive handling, safeguarding and inclusion are all available to read and download. Some of the documents on the website have not been updated to reflect the most recent version, but the web-site makes it clear that all policies are available for parents at the school office.

The parents' handbook is a good source of information for parents, both on the school website and also in hard copy form the school, as are all the school's policies on request. There are three notice boards with useful information such as events, courses and details of the proposed Steiner Academy Lancaster. The school also has a Facebook page which provides news and information about the school and Steiner education.

Parents are kept well informed about the children's progress and development at the termly parents' evenings and the yearly school reports. The school reports also describe what pupils have studied in some detail.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

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

The complaints procedure meets all aspects of the requirements for registration and there have been no formal complaints in the last year.

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.

Lancaster Steiner School is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The Trustees of Lancaster Steiner School carry the legal and charitable responsibility for the school. It is the task of the trustees to ensure legal compliance in areas such as health and safety, safe recruitment of staff, special needs and disability, safeguarding, complaints, exclusion and financial viability.

The trustee body consists of seven members, two of whom are independent members. The trustees meet monthly and aim to focus on more strategic aspects of the school as well as finances.

In common with most Steiner schools there is no head teacher. The management structure is set up so that day to day management is in principle delegated to the management group which consists of the administrator, the lead kindergarten teacher and the bursar. The administrator has a thorough understanding of the school and the regulatory procedures that are required and is a key person in ensuring the smooth running of the school. The college of teachers currently consists of five teachers and the school administrator. The college deals with pedagogical and pastoral matters and protects and nurtures the ethos of the Steiner Waldorf philosophy in the school, but the school currently has no Steiner Waldorf School Fellowship (SWSF) representative to liaise with and become actively involved in the SWSF. There is also a group of trustees and parents who are working on a proposal to develop the school into a state funded Steiner Academy.

The lower school teachers work closely together and there is a clear and documented peer appraisal system in use among the teachers. The kindergarten is well led and managed.

The school is in a period of transition in its administration and management. Currently some of the regular management meetings are not taking place and there is not full clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of staff and trustees in the administration and management of the school.

The school has a good school improvement plan, although some of the actions have not been implemented in a timely manner. There is also a lack of consistency in the nomenclature used for the governing body, which is confusing for parents and other outsiders.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The trustees might like to consider the following recommendations which will help the school to continue to flourish as well as follow a process of development:

- ensure that trustees meticulously follow established procedures when they take on tasks from staff;
- ensure that the actions identified in the school improvement plan are implemented in a timely manner;

- increase expertise in Steiner Waldorf pedagogy in the trustee body;
- decide on the title of the governing body and adjust all paperwork accordingly;
- develop effective consultation and decision making in all decision making groups; and
- appoint a SWSF representative in order to liaise and be actively involved with the SWSF.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall quality and standards of the early years' provision

The overall quality and standards of the early years' provision are good with some very strong features. The kindergarten staff have a clear vision for the early years' and as reflective practitioners, have carefully identified what is needed to aid further improvement. Their deep understanding of the Steiner approach is reflected in their self-evaluation and is evident in practice. Supporting this practice is the rhythm of play both indoors and outdoors, craft activities, songs and stories. The staff's high quality role-modelling enables children to imitate and develop their own skills, for example in paintings, where colours are blended to beautiful effect. Children are encouraged to help set out and clear away materials as well as to use them with care. In this way, the children's individual development and learning is supported very well and they make good progress or better from their different starting points.

How well the early years' provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend.

The two kindergarten classes follow the Steiner curriculum. Exemption from the literacy area of learning and assessment arrangements has been granted by the DfE, together with modifications for all the other areas of learning with the exception of children's personal, social and emotional development. Central to the early years' provision is the uniqueness of each child and ensuring that the children's individual needs are met effectively. A strong emphasis is placed on children learning through play and by accessing real-life activities, such as baking bread and making soup. As a result of the children's engagement in practical activities, they develop good concentration skills which prove invaluable as they move into their next class. Other strengths in the children's development are their very good speaking and listening skills. This was observed during snack time when children listened intently to the conversations others and were themselves articulate and confident speakers. Similarly at the end of the morning, children were captivated by the story told by their teacher and listened intently to it.

The children develop very good social skills and mutual respect through a well-planned daily routine where activities are repeated weekly so that a real depth of learning is promoted. This routine reflects the Steiner approach of following the rhythms of the day, week and year. In both kindergarten classrooms there is a good balance of adult- and child-led activities and the children have daily experiences both indoors and outdoors when physical skills and control are developed effectively. Children have many opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and they make clear choices about what they would like to do. They are quietly encouraged to solve their own problems, as observed when some children worked out how to make bank notes (needed for their role play) by folding and cutting paper. At all times, the conversations between adults and children help each child to think carefully about their play, exploration and learning.

The contribution of the early years' provision to children's well-being

A strength of the Steiner approach in the kindergarten classes is the calm environment created. This is a quality promoted by all staff and is evident in the very good relationships forged with the children. Strong relationships are also formed

between the children. This was evident when an older child invited a younger one to join in with her role play and when expectations of the younger child's good behaviour were made clear. This demonstrated the children's imitation of the kindergarten practitioners' very good role modelling. Notably, the younger child responded positively, and quickly engaged in the new activity.

The children are happy in kindergarten and very much enjoy the activities both indoors and out. Cooperative and imaginative play is promoted effectively and children work together very well, for example, in tidying up, sweeping up leaves outside and drawing directions in chalk on the path towards the entrance to kindergarten. The children are supported well to manage their own hygiene and personal needs and are helped to understand the importance of physical exercise and healthy eating. Children have the opportunity to help, for example, by peeling and coring apples for a crumble or to prepare healthy snacks of rice cakes and oat cakes. Parents are given guidelines for the contents of their child's packed lunches and are asked to support the kindergarten's commitment to healthy eating.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years' provision

The leadership and management of the early years' provision are good and founded on effective team work, appraisal and training. The children's learning and development are carefully monitored and detailed records are maintained of the children's progress. The children's learning journey records are particularly detailed and provide helpful photographic evidence of what they have achieved. However, the assessment entries are not regularly dated and this is something the early years' coordinator has recognised would improve parents' understanding of their children's development over time. Consideration is also being given to ways in which parents' involvement in the assessment process could be enhanced. Meanwhile, very positive relationships have been established with parents and with external agencies. The local authority provides particularly good support for children with special educational needs and this support is highly valued by the school.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

Yes

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