

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

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

Name of school:	Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School
DfE number:	332/6000
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley Supporting Inspectors: Mr Brian Fitzgerald Mr Mike Thirkell Lay Inspector: Mr Ewout Van-Manen
Dates of inspection:	22 nd to 24 th November 2011

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School

Address of school: Love Lane,
Stourbridge,
West Midlands
DY8 2EA

Telephone number: 01384 394633

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Proprietor: Association of Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Ltd

Name of Chair of the College of Teachers: Mr Martin Dathan

Name of Chair of the Trustees: Mr Maarten Ekama

Name of Administrator: Ms Caroline Smith

DfE number: 332/6000

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3 to 17

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 99 Girls: 92
(Part time) Boys: 13 Girls: 9

Number of children under 5: Boys: 17 Girls: 14

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 6 Girls: 5

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: Boys: 2 Girls: 1

Annual fees: £3,610 to £6,870

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Brian Fitzgerald
Mr Mike Thirkell
Lay Inspector: Mr Ewout Van-Manen

Dates of inspection: 22nd to 24th November 2011

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Steiner Waldorf 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. 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:

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School opened in 1934 and moved to its present site in 1946. In addition to the original two houses, there are several buildings which have been purpose-built or converted to provide craft, laboratory, movement and other teaching rooms. It has 244 pupils, aged between three and seventeen, and at the time of the inspection four students from overseas temporarily attending the school, boarding with families associated with the school. The school aims to provide a Steiner Waldorf education, seeking to promote the fundamental principle of protecting the right to childhood and to create abilities for life. It follows the Steiner Waldorf curriculum based on rhythms and routines for the day, the week and the year, with learning related to the pupils' periods of development. The Early Years provision has gained exemptions from aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage relating to language and communication and knowledge and understanding of the world. In common with other Steiner schools, there is no head teacher; instead the Council of Management holds overall responsibility for the legal, administrative and financial aspects of the school. The College of Teachers has delegated functions for implementing Waldorf education at Elmfield. As part of the revisions to the management structure, a coordination group began work at the start of the present term and is responsible for policies, budgets, staffing and educational policies, fulfilling the functions of a school management team. These groups meet regularly.

Summary of main findings:

The quality of education at Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School is good overall, and this enables the pupils to make good progress as they move through the school from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and often outstanding; overall, they are good between pupils which supports the quality of learning, although at times low level disruption constrains pupils' opportunities for learning. The curriculum is good and provides a stimulating range of practical, creative and academic subjects. In the Upper School, recently introduced modules which extend the range of experiences are being enjoyed and appreciated by the pupils.

Teaching is good and a significant number of lessons observed were outstanding. Assessment is satisfactory, although it remains variable and since the last inspection progress in this area has been slow. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is outstanding; their cultural and social development is good. Safeguarding, welfare, health and safety are good and the premises provide good facilities. Relationships with the parents are good.

What the school does well:

- It encourages all pupils to respect one another and to promote a coherent school society, providing them with a particularly good basis for future life;
- It develops the pupils' oral communication skills particularly well; and
- It successfully reviews its approaches to the curriculum.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

What the school must do to comply with the Equality Act 2010:

The school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Next Steps

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

- improve opportunities for liaison between the special needs teachers and the class teachers to plan the ways in which support can be targeted more effectively;
- reorganise the facilities for art in the Upper School so that these more fully reflect the school's aim that aesthetic education be at the core of its work; and
- establish more consistent assessment procedures.

The school generally follows the Steiner Waldorf system for organising classes. The corresponding National Curriculum names for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection are:

Steiner class names	National Curriculum	
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1	
Class 1	Year 2	Lower school
Class 2	Year 3	Ditto
Class 3	Year 4	Ditto
Class 4	Year 5	Ditto
Class 5	Year 6	Ditto
Class 6	Year 7	Ditto
Class 7	Year 8	Ditto
Class 8	Year 9	Ditto
Class 9	Year 10	Upper School
Class 10	Year 11	Ditto
Class 11	Year 12	Ditto

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. It meets the needs of all pupils including those with special learning needs within the context of an age-related curriculum. The wide range of subjects, experiences and learning opportunities ensure that pupils in both the Lower and the Upper Schools have good opportunities to make progress academically and to develop intellectually as well as personally. All pupils have a good variety of learning opportunities in creative, aesthetic and academic subjects. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum provides a good preparation for pupils' future lives and for life as thoughtful and responsible adults.

Work is planned carefully to suit pupils' ages and their stage of development. It is supported by a curriculum policy and a range of planning documents which provide guidance for all subjects in both the Lower and Upper schools. The details of the curriculum throughout the school are set out clearly and helpfully for parents in a handbook. Pupils of all ages say they enjoy the range of opportunities they have for learning.

The Main Lesson each day is central to the curriculum and to the pupils' learning experience. It is typified by a reverential start and by lighting a candle to encourage quiet reflection by the whole class. In the Lower School, each day begins with the Main Lesson for a period of two hours based on a topic which is usually taught for three or four weeks. Main Lessons, are planned to have a regular rhythm, including poetry, movement, recall, rhythmic work, written work, mathematics, music, singing, reading, writing, craft skills, movement and art, all developed and woven into a topic which is the focus for learning. Extra Main Lessons provide good opportunities to develop aspects of the work, frequently focusing on English and mathematics. Changes to the pattern of the day in the Upper School specifically relating to the Main Lesson reflect the school's aim of making the curriculum relevant to pupils' learning needs. Modules now taken in the Upper School during the first part of the morning each day provide students with an outstanding range of learning opportunities in creative and sporting activities and are much appreciated by the pupils.

The arts and the development of practical skills are an essential part of the educational process in all the classes. In the Lower School a range of craft and artistic skills is developed which relates closely to the Steiner goals for child development. Although art in the Upper School has a number of strengths the facilities are currently not well organised and do not support the Steiner approach to the subject. Music plays an important role throughout the school. All pupils in the Lower School learn to play a wooden pipe and learn to read music. Singing is a regular activity. From the age of eight upwards many pupils take up an orchestra instrument and play in groups. A high proportion of pupils of all ages study a musical instrument either in school or with a private teacher. In Class 11 pupils study the history of music in the Western world as a Main Lesson theme.

Eurythmy, an art of movement, is a central part of the curriculum and is taught by a trained eurythmist. A eurythmy therapist provides specialist support for pupils with particular learning difficulties.

The development of speaking and listening skills is an exceptionally strong feature of the school's provision. Pupils' progress in this respect is excellent and is supported by numerous opportunities, for example by speaking to groups of their peers about completed projects. Planning at all levels provides numerous opportunities for pupils to express their views. Literacy and numeracy are similarly firmly embedded throughout the curriculum at all levels, as well as through English and mathematics.

Support for pupils with special learning needs is good within the curriculum both in lessons and through periods when they may be withdrawn from classes for one to one tuition. Extra Main Lessons are used effectively to provide individual help for pupils experiencing difficulty with their work. Pupils who have a statement of special need receive good support which corresponds to their needs. The annual reviews of these statements are shared with the local authority. The number of pupils currently requiring support is placing strains on the school's specialist staffing resources, for example in providing opportunities for specialist staff to meet formally and regularly to co-ordinate support within classes. Pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented are provided with additional challenges within the curriculum, for example through further tasks in Main Lessons.

The curriculum in the Upper School is carefully planned to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to take a wide range of subjects at examination level. Pupils normally take external examinations in English language, mathematics, German and French in Class 10, and may choose from an extensive range of GCSE and IGCSE subjects which they take in Class 11. The school has recently introduced AS level examinations in mathematics and German to meet the needs of particular pupils. Similarly older pupils are able to study French literature as a non examination course. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and careers education are provided through distinct aspects of the curriculum, and are promoted very well throughout all pupils' experience of learning. Careers education is supported by the local Connexions service and by a two-week work experience for all pupils in Class 10. The curriculum is extended very effectively by a range of visits and trips which enrich pupils' learning experience.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teaching in several of the lessons seen was outstanding. This represents a continued improvement since the last inspection. There were outstanding lessons seen in all parts of the school, with a particularly high proportion of lessons in the Upper School being of very good quality, especially in the newly introduced modules. In all sections of the school the majority of lessons seen were good or outstanding. The pupils make good progress overall, but in some lessons throughout the school low-level disruption by a small minority of pupils constrains the learning of others. This was acknowledged by the staff and by the pupils.

Lessons are generally well-planned, an improvement since the last inspection. The teachers have appropriate knowledge of the subject matter being taught and also have a good understanding of their pupils' abilities. Resources are generally used effectively. In the best lessons, work is clearly focused on the subject or theme, the pace of the work is good and the staff and pupils clearly enjoy teaching and learning as a shared task. A significant strength of a number of lessons is the way in which pupils share their thinking, as in the recently introduced Upper School modules,

including choreography, jewellery making, the art of quilting, making pickles and preserves in cookery, and t'ai chi. In a Lower School Main Lesson on Persian mythology, the excellent interaction between the teacher and the pupils enabled challenging questions to be posed in well-planned activities which encouraged the pupils to apply their previous knowledge and learning to new issues and use their speaking and listening skills effectively. In such lessons the pupils develop ways of critical thinking as well as learning for themselves. Very effective teaching was also seen in an older class in the Lower School when, as part of the beginning of the Main Lesson, the pupils showed outstanding pitch, tone and rhythm when singing *Gaudeamus Hodie* in three parts. The teacher's particularly good attention to vocabulary and her explanation of its Latin roots sustained the pupils' interest, enabling them to enjoy their work, engage fully with it and make particularly good progress. Less successful lessons were slower in their pace, through to teachers having to deal with individual problems, leaving other pupils who had completed their tasks and were waiting for new work.

Assessment, although satisfactory overall, remains variable both in quantity and form and insufficient progress has been made since the last inspection. The best assessments record pupils' progress in clear and often numerical forms, supported by occasional written comments in pupils' books. Elsewhere, in several subjects and in Main Lesson books, no clear assessments are made. The school is aware of the variation in assessment practices and has appointed an education coordinator in part to address this issue. In English and mathematics and often for Main Lessons, assessments are generally made at the end of a theme or piece of work. These assessments are not made in a common format, sometimes being general written records on the pupils' attitudes and development, sometimes being numerical records of marks awarded for exercises and other pieces of work, and sometimes using other means of recording the quality of the work. The most successful Main Lesson assessments give the pupils opportunities to comment on the quality of their work, space for the teacher's comments and also opportunities for parents to comment if they wish. Such a shared approach enables all concerned to express their views and become aware of progress and any issues.

The quality of marking remains uneven both across subjects and between classes. Teachers provide verbal feedback, but this tends to be congratulatory and brief rather than offering specific points for improvement. It does not provide pupils with a written record of what they need to do to improve their work and what future targets might be. The pupils' reports do not contain any targets for their future work. As noted in the previous inspection report, when the verbal support is linked to homework, pupils comment that they would like to have some further guidance as to how the homework will develop specific skills and knowledge from their work in class.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good overall and their spiritual and moral development is outstanding. The spiritual development of pupils pervades all aspects of school life; the quiet and reverent celebration of the morning verses is particularly a time of quiet reflection. The distinctive and well-established Steiner ethos creates and fosters a strong sense of community. The

curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to become aware of their own spirituality. Work in religious education in Class 7, in particular, fosters pupils' growing ability to pause and reflect, as was shown in excellent writing on 'My Earliest Memories.' Much of the creative work in literacy, English, art and music relates to the rhythms of the seasons and annual festivals, and this encourages reflection and growth in self-awareness. The teaching in the Main Lessons and modules in the Upper School, and in literacy, English and history also provide opportunities for personal insights. The celebration of end-of-term and seasonal festivals is not only important in the general life of the school but also in bringing school and parents together in celebration.

The moral development of pupils is also excellent. Pupils show politeness and consideration for others in class and around the school. Work in many subjects across all ages emphasises good moral attitudes. Work in many aspects of the Main Lesson and in the Upper School modules emphasises the consideration of moral attitudes, as was seen in a history lesson in Class 9 dealing with the rise of communism, fascism and capitalism in the early twentieth century. Pupils had the opportunity to discuss attitudes towards race, disability and social class, to which they responded very well. Teaching encourages generally good behaviour, respect for the school rules and a strong sense of right and wrong, supported by a comprehensive behaviour policy. Pupils did not feel that bullying was a significant issue. The school has an effective anti-bullying policy although anti-bullying posters are confined to just one area of the Upper School.

The social development of pupils is good. They cooperate well both in and out of lessons. There is an expectation of service to others. The feeling of trust that exists between pupils and the class teacher in the Lower School, and class guardians in the Upper School, has strong effects on pupils' attitudes and social development. The Upper School has a recently constituted school council with two representatives from each class. This is able to discuss issues such as the provision of classroom newspapers and the possible introduction of an Amnesty group. However, there is no similar council for younger pupils. Other opportunities for experiences of a democratic nature, which also assist in the understanding of public services and institutions, have been provided by the Dudley Youth Parliament, and the school has had prospective parliamentarians to hustings during the 2010 general election. Pupils also have opportunities for action in the local community and have given carol concerts at a local home for the elderly. They have opportunities to raise money for the Waldorf One World charity in the Michaelmas and Harvest Festival held at the school. They support Steiner work in Zambia and elsewhere in the developing world. Opportunities for growth in economic awareness is provided in many areas of the curriculum, especially in the Upper School; of particular interest is the development of the 'In Tandem' business for cycle servicing by Upper School pupils.

Pupils' cultural development is also a strong feature. This is particularly so in the teaching of historical aspects of culture from Roman times to the twentieth century and in the study of Norse and Irish myths and legends in the Main Lesson, in modules and in subjects such as history. The treatment of all pupils reflects the intentions of the school's equality policy. Good opportunities are provided in the curriculum to study and become increasingly aware of peoples of other cultures, ethnic groups, religions and countries. Visits have been made to a local synagogue, the Black Country Museum and the local Glass Museum. Visitors, including a choir from Bulgaria, have widened pupils' experiences, and the school has made good use of parents and others of different faiths and cultures to talk with pupils about their countries of origin.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3. The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. It has a range of policies and practices that ensure good behaviour, that pupils are well safeguarded, cared for, and feel safe and secure.

The policies to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare are clear, comprehensive and reviewed regularly. Staff have regular training in safeguarding procedures and careful risk assessment procedures are carried out to identify and rate potential hazards for all relevant school activities, including school visits.

The school has developed a range of policies and practices that ensure and promote good behaviour and deal with bullying. A number of parents expressed concerns regarding bullying, but this was not confirmed in discussion with pupils and the pupils said that staff deal with any bullying swiftly and effectively. The school has suitable provision for recording sanctions where pupils have committed serious offences. The record shows very few entries, and none of a serious nature.

Encouragement of a healthy lifestyle is good: this is a priority for the school. The school provides healthy snacks and advice for parents on providing healthy food in the *Handbook for Parents*. Lunch boxes are monitored by the staff. Physical exercise is encouraged and the school provides good arrangements for healthy exercise and lunch-time and after-school sports, and swimming lessons. Attention is given in appropriate lessons to sustainable farming and energy supply, together with lessons about horticulture, health and hygiene in Main Lessons, modules and science.

The school has an appropriate written first aid policy and sufficient staff have been trained in first aid to support its implementation. Regular fire drills take place and are correctly recorded and monitored for efficiency. Fire risk assessments have been updated and fire alarm tests carried out regularly.

Admission and attendance registers are kept in good order. Attendance is good. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for making all the required checks on staff and other adults are thorough in all respects. The school has clear administrative strategies for conducting such checks. School documents reflect thorough procedures that support the development of an appropriately detailed and correctly completed staff register of appointments.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school premises are good and provide appropriate facilities for effective learning by all the age groups attending. There is a wide range of general and specialist teaching rooms which support the broad curriculum. The outdoor provision is extensive and well organised into a variety of hard- and grass-surfaced areas as well as woodland, games courts, horticultural and wild life areas. This is generally well-maintained. The school has an on-going programme of maintenance for accommodation. The age of some buildings makes this a continuous task, but windows are being gradually replaced, along with parts of the heating system and updating classroom furniture. The school is aware of other potential hazards, including ensuring that all upper floor windows have protective bars to prevent accidents, maintaining the flooring and reviewing the provision for cookery. The two ponds are not securely fenced or covered to prevent possible accidents and their use is currently suspended pending appropriate action, including staff training.

There are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, and careful consideration has been given to enabling pupils with special needs to access the accommodation.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The information available for current and enquiring parents is broad and informative. There is a helpful prospectus which is also available through the website. The school is actively improving and updating the website and the parents' handbook in order to keep abreast of current organisational and educational developments. Both give a detailed picture of the curriculum and ethos of the school and also include school policies such as admissions, discipline, and exclusion. There are notice boards outside the buildings providing information of events of interest to parents.

There is a weekly newsletter, 'Loose Ends', which provides parents with up-to-date information, and also an annual 'Forge Magazine'. Termly parents' evenings provide specific information on child development, the curriculum for that year and the class as a whole. The pupils' individual educational progress is detailed in annual school reports. Seventy-five parent questionnaires were returned. Their responses reflected the parents' overall support for the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The concerns and complaints policy and procedures are comprehensive and clear and comply with all the regulations. There were two complaints in the last year which followed the correct procedure and were properly recorded. The school took the complaints very seriously and immediately acted on the issues.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT (ETHOS AND MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES)

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School is a registered charity which was founded in 1934. Overall responsibility is held by the Council of Management. As is the case in most Steiner Waldorf schools, day-to-day management is delegated to the College of Teachers.

Over the last year or so, the school has been reviewing ways of improving its organisational processes. This has resulted in the employment of an education coordinator and, more recently, the establishment of the Coordination Group which fulfils the functions of a School Management Team.

The education coordinator has a key position in facilitating the day-to-day work of the school's educational provision. She also ensures that the school ethos is supported. The coordination group is accountable to the College of Teachers and oversees or actions key management areas such as staffing, timetabling, grievance, professional development, educational policies, staff communication and school development. This revised system allows for greater accountability and effectiveness. The College meetings are now able to work on curriculum development and other purely pedagogical matters in line with Steiner Waldorf principles. The new management structure is already bringing about changes that are in the best interest of the students and in accordance with both the Steiner ethos and current education legislation.

The school has a strong Steiner Waldorf ethos and one that also appears to be open to some educational innovation within the context of Steiner's view of child development. An example of this is the Upper School module system which enables the students to develop personal interests and skills in physical activities as well as mix with other students across the Upper School age range.

Elmfield Steiner School has a few foreign students who board with school families and take part in normal school life with some additional specialist English tuition. These students speak highly of the care and learning experience at Elmfield. They usually stay for about one term.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The Council of Management might like to take into consideration the following suggestions as to where specific improvements could be made:

- to develop further the re-structuring which is in progress;
- review policies and procedures to improve consistency and support the teachers in their work; and
- prioritise work on the educational development plan so that there is a clear document that can be owned by the school association and all staff and pupils.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall effectiveness of the provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is good. This is an improvement since the last inspection. This is largely due to the capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement through evaluating its work. There are two Kindergarten classes for four- to six-year olds held in the mornings, and the older children go to the Transition class on three afternoons a week. There is a Nursery for three- to four-year olds, a parent and toddler group, afternoon care and after-school care. This provision has been developed partly as a result of parental demand and partly through the staff's perceptions of the needs of the children and their families. The largely informal, but continuous, self-review remains a significant feature of the overall provision.

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

Leadership and management of the EYFS reflect the school's overall collegiate approach. A Kindergarten teacher chairs the staff meetings. The Early Years Department has weekly formal meetings with a written agenda. This approach has supported ambitious developments such as the Forest School work which is approaching fruition. It also ensures that resources are well deployed and that equality and diversity are promoted effectively. Safeguarding is good: a former Kindergarten teacher, who now works with the Lower and Upper schools, remains the designated person, and this is appropriate. Key staff support specific groups of children. The recorded self-evaluation is satisfactory, but under developed, with a heavy reliance on shared knowledge rather than written records. This makes it more difficult to identify trends over time and to balance competing demands on time and resources.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision is good. Staff know and care for the children. They supervise the children very effectively both indoors and out. Exemptions have been obtained from parts of the EYFS concerning communication, language and literacy, and knowledge and understanding of the world. The school has applied for continued exemptions. The children demonstrate emerging knowledge of related skills such as drawing a hopscotch grid or thinking how many times they have filled a wheelbarrow with leaves. They set the table for snack time, matching the places to the number of bowls and drinking cups. The setting is developing Forest School work to enable more skills to be acquired and to provide clear purposes for outdoor activities.

The outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes are good as children achieve well and greatly enjoy their learning as well as meeting the goals of the EYFS. They are happy to come to school and feel safe. Parents provide healthy packed lunches and the school's morning snack which also promotes healthy eating is an excellent social occasion. Such activities provide the foundation for much of the later good social and moral development in the older

classes as well as enabling the children to develop skills which will serve them well in the future.

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 Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk