

# Alder Bridge School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	869/6013
Unique Reference Number	110175
Inspection number	322073
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, in order 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

Alder Bridge School is situated in Padworth, near Reading, in Berkshire. It was opened in 1987 by a group of parents who wanted their children to have an education based on Steiner Waldorf principles. The school caters for pupils from the age of three to 11. The kindergarten has 13 children on roll of statutory school age and there are 36 pupils aged between seven and 11 in the main school. 'Parent and child' groups meet at the school for several sessions each week. The school is staffed by 10 teachers many working in a part-time capacity to provide specialist subject teaching. There are eight part-time assistants.

The school is recognised by the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship as a Steiner school with sponsored school status. It follows a curriculum based on the educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and its governance is guided by Steiner principles. The school is a registered charity with a board of four trustees, and is a limited company. The Interim Management Group, with five members drawn from teachers, office staff and a trustee, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. The school was last inspected in December 2005.

*It aims 'to educate the child in an holistic manner ...to nurture and develop head, heart and hands, ...to encourage independent thought, self confidence and skills for future life...'*

## Evaluation of the school

Alder Bridge School provides a good quality of education. The commitment of staff to the school's philosophy underpins the good quality of care which, together with the good curriculum, ensures children and pupils make good progress. Its provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. Teaching is good and assessment is rigorous. Assessment information is not always used well enough to plan additional challenges for more able pupils. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. However, the school lacks a clear development plan to guide future development and help it keep track of how well it is doing. The school meets all the educational and all but one of the organisational regulations.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and supports successfully the school's central aims. It provides a broad range of experiences with a strong emphasis on developing pupils' sensory awareness and social skills. A daily '*main lesson*' is provided which includes a focus on particular topics which are taught in rotation. Topics promote pupils' awareness of the natural world and the changing seasons. These topics take close account of the National Curriculum with the exception of the provision of information and communication technology. All pupils learn French and 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 add to other experiences that develop in pupils an impressive awareness of their physical and spiritual nature. 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. For example, helping prepare bread and cakes for break time and planting the garden. These children's linguistic skills develop well through joining in during story telling times, '*ring time*' (movement linked to story telling) and when playing together. The curriculum for these young children is well resourced with natural materials.

Pupils make good progress in all aspects of the Steiner curriculum. In relation to national age related expectations pupils' attainments in English and mathematics are broadly average by the time they leave the school. The linked project work gives pupils practical experiences in applying their mathematics skills and enables them to make good progress in observation and investigative skills. There is good, additional provision for those with learning difficulties or disabilities, and support teaching is effective in helping pupils reach their goals. The individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities set clear and achievable targets that are regularly discussed with teachers. However, the plans do not state the timescales within which the effectiveness of the additional intervention strategies will be evaluated.

The quality of teaching and learning and assessment is good enabling all pupils to make good progress. Teachers are skilful at combining expert instruction with pupils' natural enthusiasm for learning and exploring ideas. This was most evident in handcraft, music and '*Eurythmy*' lessons. The excellent relationships pupils have with their teachers encourages them to develop independence in their thinking and creativity. Teachers take time to explain clearly and they question and probe to ensure that pupils fully understand what they are doing. Teachers know their pupils very well, often having taught them for two or three years, and adapt their teaching to meet their needs. The teachers are diligent in assessing learning against the Steiner framework of curriculum objectives and this ensures they have good knowledge of what pupils have learnt. Whilst lesson planning identifies how the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities are to be met they do not explicitly identify how the more able are to be challenged to develop their skills further.

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

Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and their spiritual development is outstanding. There are many valuable opportunities throughout the day when pupils learn to reflect and experience spiritual awareness. For example, during *'Eurythmy'* sessions, orchestra, morning greeting and at the end of lessons. What is particularly impressive is the ease with which pupils, as a class or as a school, come together to join in quiet reflection. The consistent and clear structure of these activities helps to promote the pupils' self-worth, respect and awareness of others. Staff provide very good role models. As one parent commented, 'they show excellent examples of human goodness'. This promotes pupils' 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 on projects or when out on the many visits. As a result they have positive attitudes towards school. Older pupils frequently check and advise each other on how they can improve their work. These arrangements have a significant impact on pupils' personal development. Attendance is satisfactory. The school has taken a tough stance in reducing the number of days lost to holidays in term time. The impact of this in higher attendance rates is anticipated but not yet demonstrated.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Sometimes a few are overly boisterous in lessons and do not recognise when they are stopping others from learning. Challenging behaviour is managed in a sensitive and non confrontational manner which ensures adults are trusted by pupils. Pupils acquire a strong sense of community through participating in celebrations and festivals. They have some informal opportunities to express how they can improve their school but no formal participation by older pupils in this aspect of their personal development. Cultural awareness is promoted through the Steiner curriculum which provides them with a good understanding of both their own and other cultures. Pupils have a broad knowledge of public services and institutions. They develop as self assured and confident individuals, well prepared for the next phase in their education.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school provides a good level of welfare, health and safety for its pupils. All guidance is provided within the context of the school's philosophy which places the child at the heart of all the school does. Pupils are taught to keep safe and healthy through the curriculum for personal, social and health education. They are encouraged to bring healthy food such as fruit to school for snacks at their break times and are keen to do so. They enjoy healthy food, as well as active play. There is always plenty to occupy them and keep them active at playtimes. There is no bullying, and no cause for the school to invoke sanctions for serious breaches of discipline. Pupils say they feel safe in school and the excellent relationships they have built up with their teachers means they always have someone to confide in if required.

The most recent report of the fire safety inspecting officer in January 2007 raised serious concerns about the quality of fire safety precautions at the school. Risk assessments are routinely carried out for fire safety and staff and pupils are clear about procedures for evacuation. The critical fire safety systems are now in place, and suitable interim controls have been implemented. The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is satisfied with the progress made against the school's action plan but has not yet issued a final report of satisfaction. The staff have received training for first aid and any accidents are recorded appropriately. Monitoring of risk is thorough and underpins the success of the many off-site visits. The named person for child protection has ensured staff have had recent training. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure they are suitable to work with children and this information is held as one single central record. References and confirmation of employment history are sought for all new appointments.

### School's premises and accommodation

The classrooms in the main school are bright and comfortably accommodate the small numbers in each class. This enables teachers to move around and support individual learners, quickly and calmly. The kindergarten, situated in Bridge House, is rather run down on the outside but staff have worked hard to make its rooms inviting. They are clean, tidy and well organised to provide for young children's needs. The trustees have responded quickly to issues raised at the last inspection to secure the safety and well being of the children and pupils. Play areas are well resourced and secure. The dual purpose use of a staff room as a first aid post is adequate. Some pathways, linking the main school with the Kindergarten, are in a poor state of repair, and some internal wooden paling fences are weak in places. The school has identified the potential risks but have no planned dates for when repairs will be completed.

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

The majority of parents are very positive about the work of the school and consider they are fully involved in helping the school with their children's learning. There is a comprehensive collection of policies and procedures available to parents on request. These are written in a user friendly manner. Pupils' reports to parents are personal and contain the appropriate information. They record the journey their child has made over the year and contain clear evaluation of the child's strengths. Less consistently reported are the challenges that face the child and guidance on how they can meet these.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The policy is well written and procedures are in place for handling any complaints. There is good contact with the school and parents are able to call in and talk with teachers or administrators about any concerns. There are a number of parents who help in the school regularly and the parents are well represented in the trustees and personnel groups.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those one listed below.

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

- complete such work as is specified by the Fire Authority Enforcement notice 32067 to the satisfaction of the Fire authority by the agreed date (paragraph 3(5)).

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- identify in lesson planning the expectations of more able pupils
- improve the management of the school by producing a strategic development plan that identifies the priorities of the school and the necessary actions to be achieved and by when.



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## School details

Name of school	Alder Bridge School		
DCSF number	869/6013		
Unique reference number	110175		
Type of school	Steiner Waldorf School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1987		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 25	Girls: 11	Total: 36
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 7	Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1800-£5235		
Address of school	Bridge House Mill Lane Padworth Reading Berkshire RG7 4JU		
Telephone number	01189714471		
Fax number	01189714471		
Email address	info@alderbridge.w-berks.sch.uk		
Proprietor	Alder Bridge Association		
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	13–14 May 2008		