

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

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| Name of school: | The Iona School |
| DfE number: | 892/6010 |
| Inspection team: | Reporting Inspector: Ted Cohn Supporting Inspectors: Cecile Corfield Eileen McAndrew Lay Inspector: Deborah Leah |
| Dates of inspection: | 15-17 June 2010 |

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SCHOOL DETAILS

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| Name of the school: | The Iona School | |
| Address of the school: | 310 Sneinton Dale Nottingham NG3 7DN | |
| Telephone number: | 0115 9415295 | |
| Email address: | admin@theionaschool.org.uk | |
| Proprietor: | The Iona School Association | |
| Name of the Chair of the College of Teachers: | Richard Moore | |
| Name of the Chair of the Trustees: | Robert Parry | |
| Name of Administrators: | Nigel Revill and Ben Hicklin | |
| DfE number: | 8926010 | |
| Type of school: | Independent school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship | |
| Age range of pupils: | 3-11 | |
| Gender of pupils: | Male and female | |
| Total number on roll: (Full time) | Boys: 40 | Girls: 28 |
| (Part time) | Boys: 12 | Girls: 10 |
| Number of children under 5 | Boys: 18 | Girls: 10 |
| Number of post-16 students: | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 |
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 |
| Number of boarders: | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 |
| Annual fees: | £ 4,343 | |
| Type of inspection: | Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 | |
| Inspection Team: | Reporting Inspector: | Ted Cohn |
| | Supporting Inspectors: | Cecile Corfield Eileen McAndrew |
| | Lay Inspector: | Deborah Leah |
| Dates of inspection: | 15-17 June 2010 | |

PART 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 and reported on these to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship. Her 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:

The Iona School is a non-selective independent co-educational day school for pupils aged three to twelve years old, situated in central Nottingham. Currently it has three to eleven year old pupils on roll. The school was founded in 1985 in order to provide an education based on the educational philosophy of Rudolph Steiner, as expressed in the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. At the time of the inspection, the school had 68 full-time pupils and 22 part-time pupils on roll, with 29 pupils in the kindergarten. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs, but 10 have been identified by the school as having significant learning disabilities or difficulties, mainly related to literacy and numeracy. The school has a link nursery school for children aged six months to three years old, which is inspected separately. The school's aims are to develop in its pupils open and tolerant values, self-confidence and a love of learning, together with the ability to work with others, useful practical and social skills, and their intellectual potential.

The school generally 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:

| School class names | National Curriculum | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| Kindergarten | Nursery and Year R | |
| Class T | Year 1 | |
| Class 1 | Year 2 | |
| Class 2 | Year 3 | |
| Class 3 | Year 4 | |
| Class 4 | Year 5 | |
| Class 5 | Year 6 | |
| Class 6 | Year 7 | |

Summary of main findings:

The Iona School provides a good education and level of care, and is successful in meeting its aims. The teaching by experienced and committed teachers with a deep knowledge of their pupils is good and at times outstanding. Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent. Classes are managed skilfully, and teachers

create an ethos that is conducive to learning and fosters good behaviour. Pupils are attentive, enthusiastic and enjoy learning. Standards of achievement are good overall, with high standards achieved in speaking, listening and music, in particular. Pupils develop strong moral values, with a clear understanding of what is right and wrong and an appreciation and respect for each other. The school provides an environment where pupils feel safe, secure and well cared for.

Curricular and lesson planning, as well as assessment, do not always identify clearly the progress in knowledge, understanding and skills that particular pupils are expected to make in various subjects of the curriculum. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is of a high quality, and social and cultural development are generally good, but less attention is paid to informing pupils about public institutions and services in England or the diverse nature of British society.

What the school does well:

- it provides an environment where pupils feel safe, secure, well cared for and enjoy their learning;
- the quality of teaching is good and teachers manage their classes very skilfully;
- relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent;
- teachers are particularly good at encouraging pupils' confidence, sense of self-esteem and development of strong moral values; and
- achievement in speaking and listening and the performing arts is of a high quality, particularly in music.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- ensure that first aid certification of staff in the EYFS is up-to-date.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:

- the school meets the requirements of the DDA of 2002.

Next Steps:

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

- ensure that progression in knowledge, skills and understanding is identified clearly in curricular planning and is used more systematically in assessment;
- pay more attention to developing pupils' understanding of British society in the early twenty first century and of England's public institutions and services.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, with some good and significant features. It is influenced and shaped by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and makes effective use of the published Steiner Waldorf curriculum. It includes all the required areas of learning and religious education (RE), eurythmy, German and gardening, whilst ensuring that pupils of all abilities experience a balance of academic, creative and practical ways of learning.

The curriculum is conscientiously planned, with the core provision formed by the Steiner Waldorf themes, known as main lesson blocks, which are allocated about one and half hours daily over a three to four week period. All teachers prepare an annual plan, which is an overview of the themes that will be covered across the year. The main lesson blocks constitute the medium-term planning. This sets out broad aims and objectives in accordance with the Steiner philosophy and clarifies in some detail the range of areas pupils will study within the main lesson theme. Some planning also specifies the activities pupils will undertake. However, it rarely identifies precisely what pupils of different ages and abilities will learn in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills in each of the areas studied, which makes it difficult to ensure appropriate progress in each area of learning for all pupils. This is particularly important because each class has pupils of different ages, as well as abilities. Notwithstanding this weakness, class teachers are skilled in their knowledge of the Steiner Waldorf themes and adept at finding imaginative ways to interpret them, so as to catch and develop pupils' interest and engagement. Work in Class 2/3 on farming and gardening has taken pupils to a variety of different locations to study aspects of their topic at first hand, and their writing reveals an involvement and enjoyment which contributes strongly to their learning. In addition, teachers reflect daily, in some depth, on the lessons in the main block, considering how effective they have been and noting issues for further attention.

Aspects of personal and social education are central to the Steiner Waldorf philosophy. They are thoroughly integrated into the daily rhythms of the lessons and are explored in circle time. Where aspects of health education arise in class, these are discussed, but there is no formal planning to include these aspects in all pupils' routine learning experience. Subject teaching in German, eurythmy, handwork, gardening and RE adds a significant and vibrant dimension to curricular provision. Literacy and numeracy form a part of main lesson provision, as well as being developed in additional lessons. The strong emphasis on oral work from the early years contributes significantly to the pupils' good progress in these areas.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The number of such pupils in each class is small; teachers know pupils' capabilities well and are able to give generally appropriate support to those pupils who may have difficulty with some aspect of learning. A small number of pupils receive individual support. The school has recently created the post of special educational needs coordinator, but this role is undeveloped as yet.

A high value is given to the creative and expressive arts that form an integral part of the curriculum for all pupils. As a result, pupils respond with an enthusiasm, effort and motivation, which is widening their experience and developing their ability to

learn in different ways. Pupils' learning and skills in singing, recitation, drama and handwork are of a very high quality. Opportunities for additional enrichment and achievement are created through performances which put these excellent skills into practice, such as when the parents of pupils in Class T/1 were invited to watch '*The Water of Life*'.

Visits to museums and sites of historical and geographical interest provide a valuable resource, making learning more immediate and meaningful to pupils. This resource is not yet fully exploited to develop pupils' understanding and skills in the humanities because they are not integral to a planned programme of learning. Nevertheless, these visits, and the residential visit, add substantially to the quality of pupils' learning through direct experience of the world around them.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good, with some outstanding features. Teachers have a thorough understanding of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and enthusiasm for it. In a significant minority of lessons, teaching is outstanding; these lessons are mainly in the aesthetic and performing arts areas, in particular, reflecting the high quality of music, which was a feature of the last inspection. In these excellent lessons, teaching is most interesting and maintains the pupils' high level of interest and motivation.

In the great majority of lessons, where the teaching is at least good, planned work is well-matched to the full range of the content of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. Teachers provide clear well focused explanations and often use questioning well to test and consolidate understanding. These enable pupils to make good progress.

Pupils listen, work together co-operatively and persist with their tasks. Challenging questioning enables pupils to make at least good progress. Pupils are given sufficient time to answer questions at length and explain their reasoning. There are many opportunities provided for pupils to develop good speaking and listening skills. This motivates them and maintains their enthusiasm for their tasks. An appropriate pace is maintained and teachers give effective support to individuals. Good use is made of the available resources.

Daily lesson planning is satisfactory overall, but also has some good features. Most lesson plans describe content to be covered, but not what the pupils are expected to learn. Some good examples of main lesson evaluations inform future planning, but this is not a common feature. Pertinent notes on individual pupils are recorded on planning sheets, but lesson planning does not detail how the needs of pupils in different age groups will be met.

Teachers encourage pupils to listen to, and respect, the views of others. Excellent relationships with pupils are fostered throughout the school. Teachers have high expectations of both behaviour and achievement and pupils respond well. Behaviour throughout the school is good. Teachers have a deep knowledge of pupils personally, and this is used skilfully to manage lessons, so that pupils are given much personal attention and remain well-focused on learning. Individual attention for pupils who have been identified as needing extra learning support is satisfactory and is mostly provided by support from class teachers in lessons.

Assessment procedures are satisfactory. Pupils' work is routinely scrutinised in class and often marked with the pupils. In conversation with inspectors, pupils said

teachers gave them feedback on their work which helped them to see how they were making progress or what they needed to do to improve. Written work is regularly marked and often includes encouraging comments, but rarely makes clear to pupils why their work is good or gives them guidance about how to improve it. Class teachers conscientiously assess the responses of individual pupils to main lesson work. This usefully includes comments on pupils' attitude and motivation and on aspects of academic work. However, the latter comments are couched in general terms rather than identifying the pupil's specific progress in particular areas of learning. This makes it more difficult to plan the next level of work accurately and effectively.

A recent initiative has involved the diagnostic screening of all pupils from Class 2 upwards to identify areas of individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. This data has provided a valuable range of evidence for teachers. Some of the data has already been used by teachers to target support more effectively for individual pupils. The longer term uses of this data are under active consideration by the College of Teachers.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, with strengths in spiritual and moral development. The school is particularly successful in enabling pupils' spiritual development, so that they develop from an early age a strong sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. As they move through the school, they also become increasingly self-critical, reflecting a growing understanding of themselves. Pupils' spiritual development is also greatly enhanced by the music that they make, choral speaking and some of the art and handwork.

Pupils develop strong moral values that help them to distinguish clearly between right and wrong and develop respect for the mores and laws of English society. This development is supported by the expectations of teachers and the good exemplars that they provide. In addition, teaching in religion is focused around addressing moral dilemmas and reaching morally justified decisions. As a part of their development, pupils increasingly accept responsibility for their own behaviour and are willing to take the initiative in making suggestions and participating actively in school community projects, such as the 'Land' improvement project.

The ethos and curriculum at the school encourages appreciation of and respect for different cultural traditions, together with a spirit of tolerance and harmony in classrooms. Insufficient attention is paid, however, to understanding the diverse range of cultural and religious traditions that contribute to the life and changing nature of British society. Similarly, pupils are not well informed about the public institutions and services of England.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision that the school makes for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is good. The school has developed an ethos and a range of policies and practices that

ensure that pupils are well cared for, feel safe and secure and promote good behaviour.

Policies to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare are clear and comprehensive. Staff have had regular training in safeguarding, including inter-agency training. Risk assessments have been carried out for all the relevant school activities, and full and careful risk assessments are also carried out to identify and rate potential hazards, as part of preparation for school trips.

The school has appropriate policies to promote good behaviour and deal with bullying, and this is supported by the skilful manner in which staff encourage good behaviour. Pupils report that bullying is infrequent and, when it takes place, it is dealt with effectively, with pupils involved on occasion as part of their perceived role as responsible members of the school community.

The school meets all the relevant health and safety requirements. It has a satisfactory level of fire safety. Full assessments had been carried out recently by an appropriately qualified organisation and the minor issues identified have been addressed. Regular fire drills are carried out and monitored for efficiency. Pupils are well supervised in school and the playground. The school has a satisfactory First Aid policy, which is implemented efficiently, with the support of several staff with the appropriate first-aid qualifications. There is suitable provision for the recording of sanctions for pupils who commit serious disciplinary offences, but these sanctions have not been needed in recent times.

Admission and attendance registers are kept in good order. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Care, Discrimination and Disability Act of 2002.

The school promotes healthy eating effectively in a variety of ways. The food provided for pupils at lunch-time is nutritious and palatable. Parents of those pupils bringing packed lunches are strongly advised not to provide unhealthy food or drink. Water is always available for pupils throughout the school day. The school shop sells only healthy food lines. Pupils learn about sustainable methods of farming, partly through farm visits and follow-up work, and are themselves involved in growing vegetables and fruit and the harvesting of these.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All the necessary checks have been carried out on staff, volunteers and trustees to ensure that they are suitable to work with children and be involved in the work of the school. The single central register meets all the requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in a large building with extensive grounds. Spacious classrooms are carpeted and provide a good learning environment, which is enhanced by its good quality display.

The grounds, particularly the large area of meadow and woodland area known as the 'Land', provide a valuable learning resource that is used well by the school for various subjects and activities, such as botany, growing fruit and vegetables, performances in a little open air theatre that has been created, work in art and handwork, and experiencing the joy of the uncultivated English country-side.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The provision of information to parents, carers, and others meets the requirements of the regulations. An attractive prospectus summarises the aims and ethos of Steiner Waldorf education, alongside evocative photographs of Iona pupils in a variety of situations and lessons. These illustrate the breadth of the school's curriculum.

Key policies, including those concerning admissions, curriculum, discipline, exclusions and anti-bullying, are on the school's website. Hard copies are available at Reception, together with others relating to welfare, health and safety, and the school's complaints procedure.

New parents receive an excellent Parents' Handbook, which details extensively many aspects of the school, including its ethos, background, clothing and food codes, school hours, and attendance protocol.

Newsletters are currently sent out twice a term. Open days, talks, parents' evenings and individual consultations with teachers are held regularly, and parents are invited to take part in community festivals and work days, where informal communication thrives.

Parents receive annual reports of the work covered by their children throughout the year. These include perceptive insights into individual character and social and emotional development. Some cite achievements in literacy and numeracy. The reports do not include reference to the oral evaluations which take place in class, nor do they provide enough information about achievement across the curriculum, or suggest one or two individual learning aims for the year ahead. They are, however, encouraging in tone and supportive.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The complaints policy and procedure meet the statutory requirements. No formal complaints have been made for several years, which reflects the overwhelmingly positive tone of the parental questionnaires.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

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

The Board of Trustees is intentionally small, with three members who are elected at the Annual General Meeting of The Iona School Association. Its role is to maintain a strategic overview of the school, carrying legal responsibilities of governance.

The College of Teachers takes the lead in maintaining the ethos and integrity of the Iona School as a Steiner Waldorf school. Day-to-day management tasks have been delegated by the collegiate to the School Management Team (SMT), which comprises administrators, parents and a teacher who is a conduit of information between the College of Teachers and those involved in managing Iona School.

Following work on Associative Leadership (described in the Parents' Handbook), the trustees have been reviewing their activities, and consciously distinguish between their oversight of the school and the business dealt with by the SMT, which currently meets fortnightly. Minutes are kept and names attached to action points. How these are followed up and reported is rarely recorded.

A key task of the College of Teachers is developing and improving the quality of provision for pupils. Regular mentoring and teacher appraisal helps to ensure consistency across classes. All class teachers are visited in their main lessons by an experienced colleague and given verbal and written feedback on their teaching. This has been followed up with help on planning.

Behaviour is successfully managed in classes and at break times. Written policies help to achieve consistency. Parents' appreciation and pupils' good conduct are evidence of this.

The enthusiastic support of the parents reinforces the holistic nature of Steiner Waldorf education in the Iona School and builds trust within the school community.

Pupil numbers have increased significantly over recent years. Teachers give public talks at school and elsewhere in Nottingham. They monitor and give training in the on-site nursery, from which some children go into the kindergarten. This facility is an aspect of local outreach, as is the Parent and Toddler Group which is open to all families on a drop-in basis.

Although the extensive premises are too big for the school's current needs, they are used constructively. Gardening sessions and festivals use the cultivable land, which produces food for the school.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The trustees and College might consider the following recommendations:

- improve the management of the school by following up agreed action at meetings with brief confirmation of successful completion or the need to carry them forward; and
- by visiting other Steiner Waldorf schools in order to learn about good practice in planning and assessment.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

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

The quality of the provision in the Kindergarten is good, with some outstanding features. Planning is conscientious and follows the guidelines of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum closely. The staff have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum for this age group and ensure that the needs of each individual child are met. Staff know the children very well and they work effectively as a team. The atmosphere promoted by staff in the Kindergarten is warm, welcoming and calm. Teaching is good, with some outstanding features. Story-time is particularly effective for both the younger and the older children. Stories are told so expressively that the children sit spellbound for considerable lengths of time for this age group. The lit candle and flowers on the small central table make this time special. All activities are well-planned and follow the rhythm of the day, the week and the season. Festivals are celebrated assiduously and provide the children with a clear indication of the passage of time and of the importance of celebration. Weekly meetings are held to discuss planning and to evaluate what has already been covered. This is good practice, but could be improved by brief notes being kept of what has been discussed in these meetings and notes being kept also of meetings with parents. The setting has applied for, and been granted, modifications to two of the Early Learning Goals to fit the curriculum more closely to Steiner Waldorf principles of developing initiative and curiosity. The personal knowledge of each child that staff have provides useful information on their day-to-day progress, but there is insufficient recording of this information. At present, the assessment procedures are underdeveloped. This is an area for immediate development.

The children make at least good progress during their time in Kindergarten. They develop in self-confidence and independence in a secure and warm ethos. They play freely indoors and outdoors and develop co-operative and collaborative skills by working and sharing resources together. The mixed-age groups enable the children to learn from each other, and older children are helpful to the younger ones. By having free choice of activities for parts of the day, the children learn to be selective and how to make appropriate choices. When asked to tidy up, they readily join in and take pride in caring for their environment. They gather quickly for ring-time and story-time and readily understand that they then work as a group and do not intrude on others.

The setting is led and managed well. All of the legal requirements regarding data, staff checks, and procedures for safeguarding and promoting children's welfare are met. However, the first-aid certification of qualified staff expired this term; training has been booked to remedy this shortcoming. Staff attend appropriate training for their professional development during the year. The lead teacher is due to attend a singing course shortly. He is also part of the management of the school and is therefore able to keep staff and trustees up-to-date with issues concerning the Kindergarten. The welfare of the children is paramount and full attention is given to health and safety matters, including child protection. All food and drink is nutritious and wholesome. The children are encouraged to wash their hands when appropriate.

The overall effectiveness of the kindergarten is good, with some outstanding features. This is achieved through the high quality teaching and enthusiasm of the staff, who do their very best for the children. As a result, the outcomes for the

children are at least good. The capacity for sustained improvement is good as a consequence of the commitment of all involved. The involvement of parents and the wider community is good and welcomed.

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

The school meets all the requirements except one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools' Standards regulations 2003, the school should:

- ensure that the school has sufficient staff with currently valid first-aid certification (Paragraph 3(6)).

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Steiner Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk.