

The Iona School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	892/6010
Unique Reference Number	122941
Inspection number	301540
Inspection dates	9-10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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 Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Iona School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and twelve. It opened in Nottingham in 1985. The school has a separate nursery department for children aged from six months to three and a half years, which is registered with Children's Services Directorate and had its last inspection in 2005. There is one pupil for whom English is not their first language. In line with normal Steiner practice there is no headteacher, the College of Teachers is responsible for the educational provision. An Associative Leadership made up of teachers, parents and friends manages the school. The administrator is in charge of day-to-day running of the school.

The school's curriculum and teaching are inspired by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as expressed through the Steiner Waldorf curriculum:

The school believes 'that education should be a continuing process and our task is to stimulate and develop the faculties and skills, which enable our pupils to learn...for life...from life...throughout life.'

Evaluation of the school

The Iona School is successful in meeting its aims. It provides a good quality of education and care, where all pupils are valued as individuals. Through the effective use of the Steiner curriculum, taught well by experienced, knowledgeable and committed staff, pupils make good progress. Parents are very supportive of the school and its success with their children. One parent felt that '*children are allowed to be children*' and another noted '*I feel privileged my son attends...this is an absolutely incredible school*'. The school meets all but one of the requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The curriculum is of a good quality. In the kindergarten the curriculum for the younger children is planned around their developmental needs. The kindergarten provides a good quality, imaginative learning environment, which enables children to make good progress. The core of the curriculum for the three combined classes from Years 2 to 7 is termed the 'main' lesson, with the Steiner Waldorf themes

determining the focus. The main lesson lasts for one hour and forty minutes each morning and a given theme lasts for about three or four weeks. While focusing on one subject, the themes provide a centre around which learning in other subject areas is planned, helping pupils to establish links between them. Additional lessons in handwork, German, music, drama, mathematics, religious education, eurythmy (an art of movement), art, physical education and English make up the rest of the curriculum. Music is a very important part of the curriculum and the pupils' recorder playing and singing are of a very high standard. Music is promoted consistently from the early years through the learning of rhymes, verses and songs and contributes to pupils' good progress in the subject and to their learning in other areas. For example, Years 1 and 2 enthusiastically performed a short play with choral speaking of a high standard. The pupils speaking and listening skills are outstanding. Teachers allocate an appropriate amount of time to each subject so that pupils have sufficient breadth and balance in their learning. Throughout the school the strong philosophical emphasis on balancing academic learning and developing skills in the arts and practical activities is put into practice successfully. This is strength of the school.

The quality of teaching is consistently good with some outstanding features and enables pupils to make good progress. The work in the Kindergarten class provides a very good basis for pupils to settle into the school and develops their social and speaking skills effectively. Practical activities such as baking bread help both to provide a pattern for the week and develop pupils' awareness of seasons. Throughout the school lessons are well organised and proceed at an ordered pace with pupils having a clear understanding and expectation of what they will be doing during the day. This is one aspect that they like, with one pupil remarking '*I like the way that we start each day, I know what is going to happen.*' The integrated approach of the main lesson gives pupils the time to explore the wider implications of a theme, as well as helping them to make useful links between subjects. Teachers have a very clear understanding of the Steiner curriculum and the confidence to interpret it effectively. In lessons pupils are encouraged to apply what they know, and as a result, become more effective learners and enjoy their work. The older pupils are encouraged to think in depth, explore and discuss issues, such as law making during a main lesson on the Romans. As a result pupils make good progress during their time at the school. Resources are adequate but some, particularly the reading books, are in need of replacement.

The assessment of pupils' learning is good with continual checking of learning during lessons, regular testing of skills learnt in mathematics and English and annual testing of reading. Parents are given a very detailed breakdown of the content of the main lessons during the year, have regular meetings with staff both as a parent group and individually, and receive an informative report on their children's progress at the end of the academic year. Pupils who need additional help and for whom English is not their first language are supported well.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and it is at the heart of the school's purpose. There is a very strong emphasis on respect for each individual. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning; they learn tolerance and care and concern for others, which underpin everything that the school does. The emphasis on quiet reflection, tolerance of self and others, and creative development means that there is a great celebration of diversity and different ways of doing things. Social responsibility and moral development are encouraged very well indeed through the everyday happenings, stories and the history and geography themes. The school's strong emphasis on poetry and literature and the range of performance opportunities means that support for cultural development is strong and from time to time there are planned multi cultural experiences. Pupils' attendance and behaviour are good and they enjoy life at the school. They report that it is *'enjoyable'*. *'I really, really like this school'* and *'I love the gardening and planting seeds.'* This gives them a sense of security and well-being. They all play very well together and act as a small, well-ordered community. Healthy eating is encouraged and pupils sit and chat together and share the wholesome vegetarian lunch. Pupils take regular exercise, both in the playground and the extensive school grounds which they call 'The Land,' where they can garden, make dens, explore the living willow 'house' or listen to stories in the outdoor 'theatre'.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. It is a safe place in which to work and learn. Health and safety and behaviour policies are implemented effectively. The school is aware of the latest guidance for safeguarding children but not all staff have yet received up-to-date training in safeguarding matters. This is currently being remedied. The school is vigilant with regard to fire safety. All areas of the school have been risk assessed and detailed risk assessments are carried out before each visit outside school. Several staff are trained in first aid, well-stocked first aid boxes are located where needed, and accidents are recorded diligently. Pupils are very well supervised at all times. The school has a policy with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 but has yet to devise a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children meet all current requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The school is located in former secondary school premises, which provide spacious but rather disjointed accommodation. There are several specialist rooms including the large sports and drama hall, eurythmy and handwork rooms, which contribute strongly to pupils' learning. The buildings are in need of considerable refurbishment, although the school has tried hard to make the classrooms attractive and conducive to learning. A large outdoor area at the rear of the school is used for sports and play. The Iona School Association is aiming to redevelop the site in order to help finance a new school building, which is intended to be a clear expression of its ethos and aims.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school gives parents, carers and others a good range of information through the prospectus, the parents' information pack, regular newsletters and the web site. The majority of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. Parents are given a written report at the end of the summer term and have regular consultation evenings. The school makes parents very welcome; some of them are involved in the running of the school, and is happy to arrange a meeting at a convenient time. Some parents were concerned that the school does not take their children on sufficient trips outside school. The school makes a limited number of trips but takes an active role in local music and drama festivals, undertakes some local environmental trips and the older pupils are eagerly anticipating the three-day residential visit to Norfolk later in the term.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures which meets the regulations. As some parents were unaware of these, the school will now ensure that all parents receive a copy.

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 listed below.

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

- ensure that all staff receive safeguarding training in line with Department for Education and Skills guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (2007)* (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

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:

- implement the plans for redevelopment of the school
- improve and extend resources, especially for reading.

School details

Name of school	The Iona School		
DfES number	892/6010		
Unique reference number	122941		
Type of school	Steiner Waldorf		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1985		
Age range of pupils	3-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 34	Girls: 30	Total: 64
Annual fees	£3,816		
Address of school	310 Sneinton Dale		
	Nottingham		
	Nottinghamshire		
	NG3 7DN		
Telephone number	01159 415295		
Email address	iona.school@tiscali.co.uk		
Administrator	Mr Richard Hadfield		
Proprietor	The Iona School Association		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	9-10 May 2007		