

22 July 2019

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London

Dear Damian

Earlier this year, I wrote to you to express my concerns about state-funded and independent Steiner schools following a series of inspections with troubling outcomes. You requested that Ofsted report back on its analysis of any common themes that emerged after we had inspected the remaining independent Steiner schools. This note provides that report.

In the 2018/19 academic year, Ofsted conducted and reported on:

- 19 full inspections of independent Steiner schools
- two integrated inspections of independent Steiner schools and their boarding provision
- three section 5 inspections of Steiner academies (two converted from initial short inspections under section 8)
- one section 8 inspection of a Steiner academy
- two social care inspections of boarding facilities at independent Steiner schools
- one progress monitoring inspection of an independent Steiner school
- one monitoring visit under section 8 of a Steiner academy.

In the previous academic year, we conducted a short inspection of a Steiner academy and a full inspection of an independent Steiner school.

The results of all these inspections have now been published on the Ofsted website and are summarised in Annex A.

Summary

Of the 26 Steiner schools we have inspected, 13 were judged inadequate, seven were judged to require improvement and six were judged to be good, meaning 77% of Steiner schools have been judged to be less than good, compared with only 15%

of state-funded schools¹. In addition, 15 of the 22 independent Steiner schools inspected failed to meet the Independent School Standards.

These are very weak headline figures. The performance of Steiner schools overall remains poor, and there are areas of weakness that need to be addressed. Most worryingly, inspectors found that a significant minority of the schools had ineffective safeguarding practices, and I continue to be concerned about the provision for pupils with SEND, about quality of education more generally and about leadership.

We found some encouraging signs of good practice and change in some schools. We judged five of the independent Steiner schools to be good and despite some weaknesses we also found good elements in other independent schools. These schools have articulated a clear desire to improve and there is evidence that they are making real efforts.

Safeguarding

When I wrote to you earlier this year, I was deeply concerned about a number of common weaknesses in these schools, one of which was poor safeguarding practices. In our latest inspections we found that the majority of schools were judged to have effective safeguarding. However, over a third had ineffective safeguarding. This is a significant proportion of Steiner schools, and the issues we found are serious. Some schools had failed to check whether staff or host families for boarding pupils were safe to work with children. In the worst cases, schools failed to make appropriate and timely referrals to the local authority when pupils were clearly at risk of harm. Inspectors also witnessed staff using inappropriate physical interventions with children: in one instance children in a school's early years (kindergarten) were pulled up from the floor, carried across the room and forced to sit upright. These schools need to improve swiftly to ensure that the children attending them are safe.

Quality of Teaching

We also found shortcomings in the quality of teaching and outcomes for all pupils across the majority of the schools. Fewer than a third were judged to have good teaching, learning and assessment. We found that teachers had low expectations of what children could achieve, work was pitched at the wrong level and lessons lacked a clear purpose. For example, in one case pupils in older classes were completing work that was easier than in a younger class.

Provision for pupils with SEND

Provision for pupils with SEND was found to be weak in several schools. Some improving and good practice in this area was found too. However, in too many cases, children were not receiving the support that they needed. I am concerned that in some of the schools, children with SEND were found to be disproportionately excluded or absent.

¹ Figure from Ofsted's official statistics document "State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2019" <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-march-2019>

Leadership

Half of the schools were judged inadequate for leadership and it is clear that this is the reason for many of the weaknesses we identified. Common issues included a lack of clarity over accountability, with leaders and teachers not being held to account. The high level of complaints we receive about state-funded Steiner schools, mostly from parents, also reflects others' concerns about leadership.

We did, however, find that several schools had recognised their leadership issues and have begun to tackle their problems. We judged several schools to be good for leadership and management. Although these schools varied in their management structures, what they have in common is strong and ambitious leadership that is able to introduce and implement necessary changes whilst retaining the school's Steiner ethos.

When I last wrote to you, I was concerned that the serious issues we found across multiple Steiner schools in the state and independent sectors might derive in part from the underlying principles of Steiner education. In the state sector we have seen severe failings in three out of four schools. In the independent sector we have been able to judge only five of the 22 to be good schools. I am encouraged to see that a number of the independent schools judged less than good had already identified their issues before inspection and had begun work to improve. Part of this drive for improvement has come from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) who have been working effectively with schools directly on areas of weakness.

I am aware that there has been considerable change for the Steiner community over the last few months. Two of the independent schools have closed this academic year and three of the Steiner academies are in the process of rebrokering into a multi-academy trust, though that process currently appears too protracted. Your officials and mine have met with the SWSF and the independent schools in this time. We share a common purpose, which is ensuring that all the children in Steiner schools get a good education and are kept safe. We can see that some schools want to improve, which is welcome news. However, the desire for change has to be accompanied by the capacity and capability to do so.

I will be taking a keen interest in the results of the monitoring inspections of these schools over the coming months and hope that the schools can rise to the challenge ahead of them.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Spielman

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Annex A: Outcomes of Steiner School Inspections

School Name	URN	Inspection Date	Overall effectiveness judgement
Independent Steiner schools			
Alder Bridge	110175	26–28 February 2019	Inadequate
Beechtree Steiner Initiative	144620	12–14 June 2018 ²	Requires Improvement
The Brighton Waldorf School	144621	5–7 March 2019	Inadequate
Bristol Steiner School	109345	26-28 March 2019	Good
Calder Valley Steiner School³	137503	19–21 March 2019	Requires Improvement
Cambridge Steiner School	131937	21–23 May 2019	Requires Improvement
Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School	103876	11–13 June 2019	Good
Greenwich Steiner School	132066	27-29 November 2018	Requires Improvement
Iona School	122941	4-6 December 2018	Requires Improvement
Lancaster Steiner School	132095	n/a ⁴	n/a
London Steiner School	101073	27-29 November 2018	Inadequate
Michael Hall	114625	26-28 March 2019	Inadequate
Michael House School⁵	113014	4-6 December 2018	Inadequate
Moorland Waldorf	121573	4-6 December 2018	Requires Improvement
North London Steiner School	102169	7-9 May 2019	Inadequate
Norwich Steiner School	129511	14-16 May 2019	Good
Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley⁶	117631	2-9 November 2018	Inadequate

² Beechtree Steiner Initiative had a Progress Monitoring Inspection on 14 March 2019, it was identified that some of the Independent School Standards were not met

³ The school is due to close its upper school at the end of the 2018/19 academic year

⁴ The school was inspected by the Schools Inspection Service from 13-14 November 2018, they were judged inadequate in 4 out of 5 judgement areas

⁵ The school is due to close at the end of the 2018/19 academic year

⁶ This school has now closed

Ringwood Waldorf	113943	2-4 April 2019	Good
South Devon Steiner School	113603	2-4 April 2019	Inadequate
The St Michael Steiner School	138771	26-28 March 2019	Requires Improvement
St Paul's Steiner School	131362	26-28 March 2019	Good
Wynstones	115793	26-28 March 2019	Inadequate
York Steiner School	121759	30 April – 2 May 2019	Inadequate
Steiner Academies			
Steiner Academy Bristol	141108	26-27 November 2018	Inadequate*
Steiner Academy Exeter	139661	9-10 October 2018	Inadequate* ⁷
Steiner Academy Frome	138383	21-22 November 2018	Inadequate*
The Steiner Academy Hereford	135672	14 March 2018	Continues to be Good
		11-12 December 2018	n/a ⁸

*Following these inspection judgements, the schools have been placed in special measures. These schools are in the process of rebrokering into a multi-academy trust.

Inspections of boarding facilities in Steiner schools⁹

School Name	URN	Inspection Date	Overall effectiveness judgement
Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School	103876	11–13 June 2019	Good
Michael Hall	SC050351	11-13 February 2019	Good
South Devon Steiner School	113603	2-4 April 2019	Inadequate
Wynstones	SC034618	27-29 November 2018	Inadequate

⁷ Exeter Steiner Academy had a monitoring visit from 14-15 May 2019, the inspector was of the opinion that: Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures, the trust's statement of action is fit for purpose, the school's improvement plan is fit for purpose, but requires revision. They recommended that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

⁸ This was a s8 inspection was conducted of this school which examined safeguarding. Safeguarding was found to be effective.

⁹ These are both standalone social care inspections and integrated inspections