

Alder Bridge School

Bridge House, Mill Lane, Padworth, Reading, Berkshire RG7 4JU

Inspection dates

26 November 2019

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii), 3, 3(c) and 3(d)

- At the last standard inspection, the curriculum did not take into account pupils' previous attainment, knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, they were making poor progress, especially in English and mathematics. This was particularly the case for the oldest children in kindergarten. Furthermore, older pupils in lower school were not receiving the careers advice they should be provided with.
- Much work has been started to address the weaknesses identified in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. However, leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done before the quality of education provided to pupils is consistently strong throughout the school.
- Leaders have reviewed the school's timetable. Additional lessons have been introduced, which teachers use to teach mathematics and different aspects of English, including phonics.
- Staff have received training in how to deliver phonics. This was provided by the local authority and introduced a phonics scheme that staff in lower school are delivering. However, older children in the kindergarten are still not accessing phonics, nor are their reading and writing skills being developed so that they are achieving as well as they could.
- A new curriculum scheme, developed by the Steiner fellowship, has been introduced to the school. This covers expectations from different kindergarten years through to class 8. Teachers who talked to the inspector were very positive about the benefits this brings, although expressed well-founded views about how certain aspects needed to be 'tweaked' to reflect the unique context of the school.
- The new curriculum scheme (the purple folder), provides teachers with a structure to ensure that pupils build knowledge over time. It also gives teachers a clear idea of age-appropriate expectations as pupils move through the school.
- Discussions with leaders and staff highlighted the positive start teachers have made with the new curriculum scheme. It is clear that most staff are embracing it. One teacher

described its introduction as positive but acknowledged that staff needed to go 'step-by-step' to ensure full confidence in this new way of working.

- Leaders have started the process of introducing careers guidance into the curriculum for older pupils. However, at the time of this inspection, leaders were still waiting for funding to be approved for this to begin.
- Because leaders have not yet addressed all of the shortcomings found in these paragraphs, this standard remains unmet.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1) and 23(1)(c)

- At the last standard inspection, the school did not have shower facilities for pupils aged 11 years or over.
- Leaders have installed two new showers, one each for boys and girls.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcoming found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(c), 7, 7(a) and 7(b)

- At the start of the last standard inspection, it was found that the safeguarding policy published on the school's website did not reflect the latest statutory guidance that staff were following at that time. However, safeguarding was found to be effective during the inspection.
- The school's current safeguarding policy, which is published on the school's website, is compliant with the latest guidelines issued by the Secretary of State. Staff are aware of the policy and other statutory guidance.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in these linked paragraphs, this standard is now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a) and 34(1)(b)

- At the last standard inspection, it was found that not all of the independent school standards were met. Outcomes for pupils and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were judged to be inadequate. Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged to require improvement because pupils were not being taught how to stay safe on the internet, for instance, and their attendance was not as good as it might be.
- Leaders have started to address these issues. However, much of their work is at an early stage and the impact of their actions is not as clear as they would have hoped for. Trustees acknowledge that progress has been slower than they would have wished. It is clear that the current absence of the education manager has not helped.
- Leaders have been successful at improving attendance. The attendance policy has been reviewed. Leaders are more proactive at working with parents to address poor attendance. As a result, rates of absence have reduced significantly since the last inspection.

- Leaders have begun to monitor the quality of education provided by the school in a more systematic way. They have a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in classrooms. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who currently works on a part-time basis, will be employed full time from January 2020, thus creating capacity for leaders to support and challenge staff to improve practice.
- A new curriculum scheme has been introduced. Most staff have embraced this. However, the new scheme is not fully reflected in the curriculum policy or in additional curriculum information, such as the school's stated approach to language and literacy in kindergarten, for instance.
- Pupils are beginning to receive better information about keeping themselves safe both in and out of school. Age-appropriate lessons on internet safety have started, for instance. The personal, social and health education curriculum is currently being reviewed. However, leaders were not able to provide strong evidence about the consistent implementation of this aspect of the curriculum during this monitoring inspection.
- Leaders have begun to manage the performance of staff. A schedule is in place. Staff who talked to the inspector value this, although not all staff have started this process yet.
- Trustees feel that they have a better understanding of the quality of education provided by the school. However, there still remains some disconnect between what trustees think is happening, and the reality.
- Safeguarding was judged to be effective at the last inspection. This remains the case.
- Because leaders and the trustees have not fully addressed all of the shortcomings found in this paragraph, and other independent school standards continue to be unmet, this standard continues to be unmet.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 23(1)(c) suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.

School details

Unique reference number	110175
DfE registration number	869/6013
Inspection number	10125001

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	20
Proprietor	Alder Bridge Association for Steiner Waldorf Education
Chair	Dorit Ferreira
Headteacher	Rachel McCrory (Education Manager) Joanna Box (Operations Manager)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£981–£9,150
Telephone number	0118 9714 471
Website	www.alderbridge.org.uk
Email address	info@alderbridge.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	26–28 February 2019

Information about this school

- Alder Bridge School provides Steiner-based education for pupils aged three to 14. The school is located in Padworth, near Reading in Berkshire.
- The school aims to provide an education that accords with the principles of Rudolf Steiner. This is based on staff, pupils and parents working closely together in establishing a learning community in which pupils' learning and achievement are developed in tandem with their self-esteem and self-confidence through a strong emphasis on experiential learning.
- The kindergarten provides early years education for children in Nursery and Reception.

The school has an exemption from the literacy, mathematics and assessment aspects of the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.

- Year 1 pupils are also taught in kindergarten. In the lower school, there are four classes that combine classes 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and 7 and 8.
- The school is led jointly by an education manager and an operations manager. They act as the day-to-day leaders of the school and provide a link between the trustees and the college of teachers.
- At the time of this monitoring inspection, the education manager was absent and not expected to return to the school until January 2020. In her absence, the SENCo and operations manager were working together to cover the education manager's duties.
- The proprietor is the Alder Bridge Association for Steiner Waldorf Education, which is led by a board of elected trustees. Some trustees have had long associations with the school, and most trustees are current or past parents.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2019, when the overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate and not all of the independent school standards were found to be met.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the first progress monitoring inspection since the previous standard inspection in February 2019. As a monitoring inspection, this inspection was carried out without notice.
- The school's action plan to address the unmet independent school standards identified at the last standard inspection was rejected by the Department for Education in September 2019.
- During this inspection, I carried out a range of activities within the school. These included brief classroom visits to assess the quality of pupils' work and to talk to pupils about their learning. I also viewed different parts of the school's premises, including the grounds, communal areas, stairways and passageways.
- Meetings were held with staff, including the operations manager, the SENCo, three class teachers, the chair of the college of teachers, and the designated safeguarding lead. I also met with a representative group of pupils.
- I held two separate meetings with the chair of trustees and the trustee with an overview of safeguarding in the school.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's safeguarding and other associated policies. Other documents relating to leaders' work to address the unmet independent school standards and qualitative weaknesses identified at the last inspection were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following requirements of the independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work–
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan; and
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that–
 - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school

standards

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

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