

Clive House
70 Petty France
Westminster
London SW1H 9EX

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted

Direct T 0300 013 0067
hmci@ofsted.gov.uk



31 January 2019

The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Damian

Advice letter in respect of the commission to inspect Steiner schools over safeguarding concerns

Following concerns I raised over safeguarding in Steiner schools, you wrote to me on 15 November 2018 to confirm that you agreed with my advice that there should be additional scrutiny of these schools. In addition to our routine inspection of Steiner academies, you commissioned Ofsted to inspect a selection of independent Steiner schools, usually inspected by the School Inspection Service (SIS), and to increase our monitoring of SIS inspections.

My inspectors have since conducted:

- six full inspections of independent Steiner schools
- three full inspections of Steiner academies (two converted from initial short inspections)
- one section 8 inspection of a Steiner academy
- one social care inspection of boarding facilities at an independent Steiner school
- monitoring of two SIS inspections of Steiner schools.

All the inspection reports have now been published on Ofsted's website. Six of the nine 'overall effectiveness' judgements from full inspections were inadequate and three were requires improvement.

None of the schools was judged good or outstanding for overall effectiveness. A significant number were inadequate in all areas, and a number of the independent schools inspected failed to meet the department's independent school standards. In only one school that we inspected, Steiner Academy Hereford, did inspectors not have concerns about whether the school continues to be good. The outcomes by school are set out in Annex A.

Overall, the findings are deeply concerning. They demonstrate that there are a number of areas of common weakness in these schools, which mean that in many cases, the children attending them are inadequately safeguarded and are receiving a poor quality of education.

At the root of many of the weaknesses are poor leadership, management and governance. Many of the schools inspected lack clear lines of responsibility and, too often, senior leaders do not hold staff to account, while governors fail to fulfil their role in holding school leaders to account. In the worst cases, senior leaders and governors have created a culture in which it is difficult for parents to raise their concerns, and some parents who have made complaints to Ofsted or to the school have felt ostracised and intimidated by school leaders.

The consequences of these failings for pupils are serious. Inspection identified that many of the schools do not identify and address safeguarding risks effectively. Some do not have in place even the basic systems needed to safeguard children. For example, some of the schools did not have an adequate system for maintaining an accurate admissions register, while others had not made sure that staff are suitable and safe to work with children. In the worst cases, inspectors witnessed inappropriate physical handling of children and a failure to make appropriate referrals to the local authority when pupils were clearly at risk of harm. My inspectors also found instances where the approach to safeguarding protected staff rather than children, because senior leaders and governors failed to address serious complaints from parents about a member of staff.

Inspectors too often noted a poor approach to the provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), a lack of understanding of their needs and inadequate support provided. In some of the schools we inspected, children with SEND were found to be disproportionately excluded or absent. At one of the schools found to be inadequate in all areas, inspectors reported that some staff and senior leaders blamed pupils with SEND for all the problems in the school.

With the exception of the Steiner Academy Hereford, there were shortcomings in the quality of teaching and outcomes for all pupils across all the education inspections. Expectations are often not high enough and the curriculum is lacking in the ambition needed to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

Given the prevalence and seriousness of these issues across both state-funded and independent Steiner schools, they raise questions about whether these common failures are a result of the underlying principles of Steiner education. Across the state and independent sectors, there is a wide variety of educational philosophies, and successful schools can be run in a variety of ways. Ofsted does not have a

preferred model. However, there are fundamentals that need to be in place: good governance, clear lines of responsibility and effective safeguarding procedures. While we did find some examples of this during these inspections, they were very much in the minority. I therefore urge you to consider and further investigate why so many of the Steiner schools inspected are neither protecting children adequately nor giving them a good standard of education.

The results of our monitoring work of SIS also gave me cause for concern: the inspections we monitored lacked rigour, particularly in relation to safeguarding. However, I am aware that SIS has taken the decision to cease operating. I know our officials are already working together, along with the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), to ensure that all schools previously under the SIS umbrella are inspected by an alternative inspectorate.

Recommendations

As the regulator, the Department for Education should:

- carry out a thorough examination of the underlying principles of Steiner education and consider the extent to which they may have contributed to the common failures we found in our inspections, and take action as appropriate
- take enforcement action to close down all inadequate Steiner schools that fail to improve rapidly
- commission Ofsted to be the inspectorate for the independent Steiner schools formerly inspected by SIS.

We welcome the news that the Department has prioritised action to re-broker the three Steiner academies placed in special measures to strong multi-academy trusts.

We will of course continue to offer our help and support in making sure that children attending Steiner schools are safe and receiving a good education.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Spielman". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of each word being significantly larger and more prominent.

Amanda Spielman
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Annex A: the schools inspected and their outcomes

School name	URN	Inspection dates	Overall effectiveness judgement
Greenwich Steiner School	132066	27–29 November 2018	Requires improvement
Iona School	122941	4–6 December 2018	Requires improvement
London Steiner School	101073	27–29 November 2018	Inadequate
Michael House School	113014	4–6 December 2018	Inadequate
Moorland Waldorf School	121753	4–6 December 2018	Requires improvement
Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley	117631	6–9 November 2018	Inadequate
Steiner Academy Bristol	141108	26–27 November 2018	Inadequate*
Steiner Academy Exeter	139661	9–10 October 2018	Inadequate*
Steiner Academy Frome	138383	21–22 November 2018	Inadequate*
The Steiner Academy Hereford	135672	11–12 December 2018	n/a ¹

*Following these inspection judgements these schools have been placed in special measures

Social care inspection of boarding facilities at an independent Steiner school

School name	URN	Inspection dates	Overall judgement
Wynstones	132066	27–29 November 2018	Inadequate

¹ A section 8 inspection was conducted of this school, which examined safeguarding. Safeguarding was found to be effective. Prior to the section 8 inspection, Steiner Academy Hereford had a short inspection in March 2018 where the inspector judged that the school continues to be good.