



The St Michael Steiner School

13th May 2019

Dear Parents,

The final report of our Ofsted inspection is now available at ...

As you know, the most recent inspections of St Michael's were carried out by the Schools Inspection Service (SIS) on behalf of the Department of Education (DfE). Their inspection teams included an advisor with extensive experience of Steiner Education; this is not the case with Ofsted Inspections.

In December 2018 the DfE decided not to renew the contract of the SIS to inspect Steiner Schools and instructed Ofsted to bring forward any pending inspections of our schools. This was in response to concerns held within Ofsted about failures, particularly in Safeguarding, in a number of Steiner Schools.

The primary aim of an Ofsted inspection of an Independent School such as ours is to give reassurance to parents and pupils that a school meets the regulations set out by the DfE for Independent Schools – the Independent Schools Standards (ISS). We are very pleased to say that we have fully met the ISS. To quote the report:

Leaders and governors have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

Given the recent findings by Ofsted in a number of inspections of Steiner Schools of failures of 'safeguarding' we are pleased with their finding that:

A strong culture of safeguarding pervades all aspects of school life and ensures that pupils are kept safe.

In addition to ensuring that these regulations are met, Ofsted inspects the quality of the education against its own DfE-approved criteria, which are based on the National Curriculum. In meetings with the lead inspector it was clear that they are expected to make comparisons between the academic achievements of children in our school, at each age, with those at a similar age who are following the National Curriculum.

At the end of the second day of the Inspection the two Inspectors gave us some verbal feedback. Based on this we then gave them a detailed rationale of our Steiner Curriculum. This is an extract:

We have experienced that many of the comments made by inspectors about the teaching and learning in our schools show a lack of understanding, so we wanted to make these observations clear, in the hope that they will give you a deeper, more positive picture of the principles of Waldorf Education.

You have said that the rationale for our curriculum is clear and strong. The basis of this rationale is a particular understanding of child development, which means that what we do with and expect of the children is age-appropriate at every stage. Our curriculum and its implementation are designed to meet the children and young people in a way that is appropriate for their age and stage of development. The result of this is that they like coming to school, enjoy learning and are engaged, enthusiastic and interested, as they have told you themselves.

You have also said that our children are happy, confident and articulate; you have seen that there is minimal bullying in our school; that the children are sociable, courteous, well behaved and engaged in their lessons; that they are respectful and have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers.

You have seen that the High School students - 50% of who have been in the school since Kindergarten, so have been educated entirely according to the principles and practices you have observed in the school - are intelligent, capable, focused, interested, responsible and are having discussions, making observations, drawing their own conclusions and asking questions at a high level. They also achieve very highly in formal assessments and are offered places at good universities to study serious academic subjects.

We want to suggest that these outcomes and the way we have designed and implement our curriculum are not unconnected.

The inspectors were quite open in their meetings with the Chair of Trustees and others that they could not change the criteria for their judgements; these are the criteria set by Ofsted and applied to all of the schools they inspect. They do not vary according to a school's particular curriculum and ethos and have to be applied even when they run counter to the approach taken in Steiner schools. Therefore, in the final report you will see that they used the judgement 'Requires Improvement' as their overall judgement on the Inspection.

A finding of 'requires improvement' is not a finding of 'inadequate'. A 'requires improvement' finding can only be made if the School has fully passed, as we have done, the Government standards for Independent Schools.

Since the school started in 2001 we have worked with a process of continual review and renewal. We are pleased that the inspectors have acknowledged this:

From the actions already taken, leaders and governors have shown that the school has good capacity to improve

We are very grateful for the support you always give us, something that the inspectors also noted in their report.

Parents, staff and pupils are highly supportive of the school, and value the provision.

We realise that many of you may have a number of questions and queries following on from the Ofsted Inspection report; how the school is going to respond, our membership of the Independent Schools Association (ISA) and the potential for the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) to inspect our school in the future. We therefore wish to arrange an open meeting at School to discuss these issues. We will be sending details of this shortly.

Kind Regards

Brian Hipkin
Chair of Trustees

Peter Brewin
Chair of College