ANITA MOORJANI on being authentic

Green activist

SATISH KUMAR celebrates 80 extraordinary years

GUARDIAN SPIRITS
Watching over our ancient sites

ANTHONY PEAKE
Opens the doors of perception

BY JUPITER
Your relationships are on the up

Mindful Learning
- A brighter future for our children through alternative and compassionate education

SHARING SPIRITUAL WISDOM FOR OVER 25 YEARS
COMPASSIONATE MINDFUL EDUCATION

Saffron de Menezes explores some alternatives to conventional schooling

For most of us our main goal as we raise our children is to ensure their happiness, allowing them to grow into confident, well-adjusted adults.

We want to provide them with a childhood in which their self-esteem and sense of value is given high priority, a childhood in which they can enjoy freedom and have the space to be children without having to worry about the pressures that adults are often subject to. Our children benefit hugely from having their individuality and unique talents respected and valued. It can be challenging to find this within a mainstream setting where targets, grades and budgets are increasingly taking priority.

Fortunately there are alternatives to conventional school. Democratic schools, Steiner education, and home education are all approaches that have been designed around children, honouring them as individuals, treating them with respect and giving their happiness a high priority.

STEINER SCHOOLS

Steiner education is based on the work conducted in the early 1900s by Rudolf Steiner. It is a more structured form of alternative provision with a strong underlying philosophy. There is a focus on nature, creativity, emotional, social and physical development. The emphasis throughout is on teaching the whole person rather than just focusing on the intellect.

Education is divided into three stages, Early Years for under sevens, Lower School for seven-14 year olds and Upper School for age 14 onwards, this relates to the seven year cycle in which our bodies renew themselves and the loss of baby teeth is seen as an important milestone in a child’s emotional development. During Early Years and Lower School children increase their school time gradually, building up to five mornings a week by age five then adding in afternoons to reach five full days by around age 11.

In each stage of a Steiner education the main focus is on developing a different aspect of self; in early years the focus is primarily on physical development, in lower school on emotional and spiritual, and in upper school on the mind, though all aspects are covered in an age appropriate way throughout. Each stage lays the foundation for the one that follows so that the child can develop naturally from a strong base.

Protecting childhood is highly prioritised and children are allowed to learn at their own pace. Reading often becomes fluent around ages seven or eight, though it can take longer. Topics are revisited many times as children gain different layers of knowledge at different ages, just as we might gain a different perspective when rereading a book we read as a child.

Consistency is considered vital for younger pupils, with children keeping the same class teacher throughout lower school, supported by some specialist subject teachers, maintaining the same rhythm from week to week. Awareness of the seasons is another big part of the Steiner philosophy with the year marked by numerous festivals and celebrations. In the West these are symbolised by Christian saints.

Similar to democratic schools, there is a community feel within Steiner education; there is no head teacher, all staff are valued equally and children and adults alike are on a first name basis. There is a high level of parental involvement as well as involvement in the wider community. Botton Village School, for example, sits within a Camphill community of adults with learning difficulties and provides a valuable social hub within that setting.

- **ADVANTAGES:** Nurturing environment, protecting childhood, rounded education. More UK sites than democratic schools.
- **DISADVANTAGES:** Very few upper schools (14+) in UK, smaller schools mean personal issues need greater understanding, high parental involvement