

Statement of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) in response to the Curriculum Review for the former Steiner Academies now called Avanti Hall, Avanti Gardens and Avanti Park, published 4 May 2020.

SWSF welcomes the conclusion of the curriculum review for the three academies. We note that the Avanti Schools Trust (AST), as the new operator of the three academies was not required to undertake this process and we are appreciative of the effort made to seek out the views of parents in the three schools.

We note also that the aim was not to assess the Steiner Waldorf curriculum but to identify the areas of Waldorf education that were in synergy with The Avanti Way already established in AST's other schools.

We acknowledge that there are values which are shared between our two approaches to education, in particular a recognition of the spiritual essence in each child and the aim to develop well rounded adults. However, through the curriculum review it has become clear there are also significant differences of approach.

Whilst we welcome the review's recommendation that some Steiner elements such as in-depth learning, storytelling and craft be included to a limited extent in the new curriculum parents are deeply disappointed at the decision not to maintain exemptions to the EYFS and KS1 to enable children to continue to start formal learning at age six rather than age four. Later formal learning was central to the education offer to the families when they came to the schools. The kindergarten years where young children learn through imitation and play and develop social, emotional and physical capacities before starting formal learning at age six, is a corner stone of Steiner Waldorf education.

We acknowledge that when the schools were transferred to AST on 1 November 2019 they became Avanti schools however the upcoming curriculum review and meetings held during that process gave parents and teachers hope that this fundamental principle might be maintained in the schools. In consultations held by the review team in each school, parents consistently highlighted a later start to formal learning as a foundation to what they wanted to remain in the schools' education delivery.

At the start of discussions around the possibility of AST taking over the schools before the summer 2019, parents were told that the schools may retain the tag line 'Steiner Inspired' and in doing so parents and teachers were given the expectation that more elements of the Steiner curriculum would be kept in the schools. Although statements on the AST websites for the schools in September 2019 said that exemptions to the EYFS and KS1 testing would not be sought, parents and teachers took comfort from the fact the curriculum review was taking place and felt they had received assurances in face to face meetings that it was still possible. Whilst this may have been a misunderstanding on the part of the parents, the outcome announced this week is a significant blow.

The decision to introduce formal learning from age four in all three schools and KS1 testing at age seven will mean the dismantling of the kindergartens and a wholesale move to introduce the national curriculum in its entirety. As such, a foundation stone of the original establishment of these schools is being removed and the curriculum will bear little relation

to Steiner Waldorf education. This is not something SWSF can support and as a result we have withdrawn from our role on the Interim Hub Education Board overseeing the governance of the three schools.

It has become clear that the option for AST to apply for exemptions to the Early Years Foundation Stage and KS1 testing was never available because requirements within the funding agreement prevented it. And we are told the Department for Education had indicated it would not support such exemptions. The possibility of a later start to formal learning at age six was therefore never available as a matter of policy. I have consequently written to the Secretary of State about that decision and its impact on the children and parents.

Fran Russell
Executive Director.
7 May 2020.