

QUALITY QUESTIONS

The Waldorf curriculum was founded on a deep appreciation for, and understanding of, quality: gesture, tone and rhythm, line and colour, the dynamics of life, these are essences of the arts and of a truly human and humane education. When Steiner education is most successful the arts become practical. One danger of impractical aesthetics is that of replication. Replication is art without creativity, like the work of a photocopier: you can increase the size up to a point, but the image on the copy will always be what was fed into the machine, plus mechanical distortion, which, if the same image is copied repeatedly, eventually increases to a point where it begins to decay. Qualitative education demands continuous change and recreation. Accordingly, Rudolf Steiner gave indications, not prescriptions, so that the Waldorf curriculum would be endlessly recreated, but not replicated.

An art of education, the art of a school, is not only what goes on in the conduct of lessons, but every aspect of the way the organisation operates. So, education is an art, more than another, which relies upon a science of application and an appropriate moral technology. Care for the essential qualities of a school, in order to develop and improve the learning environment, is one quality that sustains all the others and it is clear that this caring role is what Rudolf Steiner saw as the primary task of the teachers' meeting, or collegiate. In caring, application and moral responsibility are paramount. "Quality

management", "quality improvement" are other words for "care" and "development", even if they sound more sharp-edged than is comfortable.

Steiner Waldorf schools and early childhood settings exist in a world of regulation, regulations that are inspected by Ofsted (in England), or maintained by a battalion of agencies (Charity Commission, Companies House, the Health and Safety Executive...). Regulations are to do with standards that secure the bottom line, the legal rights of citizens (including small ones!). Standards of this sort are sometimes disguised as "qualities" but cannot in fact produce or even encourage quality. On the other hand, when organisations are judged to be falling short of the qualities their ethos implies, law soon rushes in pulling the organisation down and raising its own level, like water filling a leaky hulk. In other words, organisations that are not working to raise standards and are not seen to be doing so, are likely to find that legal regulation becomes more exacting, usually in ways that make life much more difficult, potentially at the expense of quality improvement. Higher qualities are undermined when survival is threatened. That is also why every organisation needs to have cross-checks and accountability firmly in place, such things are social co-responsibilities, not items for individual whim.

The SWSF sustains regular contact and dialogue with regulators and inspectorates so

far as that is possible. On the other hand, it also offers help, for example through the advisory service, for quality care and development in member organisations. Both are essential: the outer representation and the inner endeavour. We know only too well that without that balance the world soon begins to crash around our ears. In order for each organisation to maintain the individual balance that gives stability and strength to the whole, those responsible, staff, Trustees, members of the community, need to be engaged at their appropriate level of responsibility for meeting regulations and improving quality, cross-checking one another. The only proper measure of a school is the experience of young people and their learning, part of which belongs more in the future than the present. The complications of this task tend to encourage swarms of consultants often with obscurantist schemes selling their services on the appearance of assurance this gives to the process. However because quality improvement demands creative risk, the appearance is usually false. Only when those who carry responsibility do so responsibly, keeping their core task and intentions in view along with the means by which they will evaluate the results, can the quality improvement risk be managed so that mistakes become opportunities for learning and progress. That is one quality no form of education should ever be without.

KEVIN AVISON –
STEINER WALDORF ADVISORY SERVICE

A NEW HOME FOR GREENWICH STEINER SCHOOL

On September 11th 2008 Greenwich Steiner School opened the doors of its beautiful new home: WOODLANDS. Following years of hope, disappointment, hard work and prayer, we finally achieved our dream: a home to call our own!

The school had been founded in 1999 with one Kindergarten Group situated in the basement of a local Anglican Church, and grew gradually into two, then three kindergarten groups. Then came the first Class 1, housed in the aisles of the same church. When class 3 arrived, there was no room but the church's transept, which meant that the classroom needed to be 'created' every Monday morning and 'disappear' for the Sunday Service. We clearly started to outgrow this church and needed to move on. With lack of suitable buildings in London (Primary schools being sold off for private development) our search became increasingly desperate. We were saved by the Ministry of Defence (of all!), who let out several rooms to us in their Cadet Training Centre. There we spent two interesting years, where our strength of faith, and our flexibility were thoroughly tested. After those two years we knew we would be on the road, as our contract was not extendible.

All the while we had set our hopes on a beautiful Georgian Grade 2* listed mansion, called Woodlands, which is situated just round the corner from the kindergartens and is surrounded by ancient woodlands. With much personal effort and dedication by a very small parent group, battling against local and political opposition, we finally succeeded and purchased Woodlands from the council in December 2007. Nine intense months followed, during which the building was completely and professionally refurbished under the keen eyes of English Heritage. Miraculously Woodlands was 'delivered' on time for the start of our new term in September 2008!

Woodlands has a rich history and was initially built by Julius Angerstein, a respected and popular city philanthropist who also loved and patronized the arts. In the following, it was the family home of Sir Yarrow, a shipbuilder, a hostel for Belgian refugees during the 1st World War, home to nuns "The Little Sisters of the Assumption" before the Borough of Greenwich bought it, refurbished and turned into a Local History Library and an Art Gallery. This is where our story begins ...

On that wonderful first day in September, we opened the doors of our new home by lighting a candle with the following words:

"We light this candle to represent the spirit of all the children who have attended Greenwich Steiner School in the past ten years, those who are here today and for the generations of children to come through these doors. May their light shine brightly!"

This was followed by the address Rudolph Steiner gave at the laying of the foundation stone of the very first Steiner School in Germany in 1921. Then all the children walked into their new school, class by class, each laying their pebble or stone on the nature table, accompanied by beautiful viola playing. This formed the beginning of their first assembly in Woodlands.

The stones and pebbles will be laid into a path in the near future to remind the children and us of this very special day in the life of our school. May we all hold this moment dear and may our school grow in the spirit of these words.

JOHANNA BENSELER –
GREENWICH STEINER SCHOOL

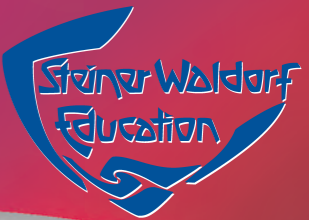
STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP (The Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland)

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Newsletter

AUTUMN 2008



New home for Norwich Steiner School

The Norwich Steiner School, with its two kindergartens and parent and child group are now housed in a wonderful old and historic building in Norwich. All groups had beautifully painted rooms ready for the start of term, in spite of the fact that we had the final confirmation that we could take on the premises only on 11th August.

The kindergarten was originally housed in a church hall and had to be dismantled at the end of each session. In 2004 it moved to our temporary premises in another church hall where it could remain assembled as a kindergarten for most of the week. There was also room for two classrooms, and Class 1 started with three pupils in 2005.

In spite of lack of space, few toilets, the school office being behind partitions in a corner of the kindergarten kitchen and the tiny well-used garden being full of mud in the middle of winter, I think most people will have memories of a nevertheless beautiful environment for our children. Festivals were at times crowded but allowed us also to enjoy how much can be made of a small space. The kindergarten and school both thrived and grew in numbers. We were very aware, however, that unless new premises were found, opening of a much-needed second

kindergarten and housing the new Class 1 would be almost impossible.

Finding our new premises at Lakenham has been a long, uncertain process. Talks began with the council three years ago and a lot of work has been put in to looking at all possibilities for expansion. We hoped to be able to keep the school within the city but there were few realistic options.

When we started work on the Lakenham building the contract was still not secure and we had to hope that everything would work out. There was some opposition from the local primary school. The building has been an orphanage and hospital, and most recently a first school. It looked very shabby inside and we had to struggle with plaster falling off the walls leaving huge holes in the downstairs rooms and corridors, and with staples everywhere, sometimes in the most unexpected places. Glue had to be scraped from radiators and doorframes. I particularly noticed the changes in colours. An upstairs classroom was transformed when its bright blue radiators and black skirting boards became white, and the walls a lovely pink and peach.

The building has room for years of expansion, as well as large grounds and many trees. It feels particularly good for the Steiner school

community in Norwich that all groups can now take place under one roof, especially when the Parent and Child group had been in a different part of the city for so long. It is also a relief after having to contemplate separating all the groups as one option when searching for premises.

On the first day of term, after a summer when some parents were working almost constantly to make everything ready, a group of us waited outside the gates with our children for the Class 1 welcoming ceremony. As we waited, a passerby spoke to us. 'Some of us are very pleased that you are here!' After some local opposition it was moving to get such a welcome. Now, in the fourth week of term, we are already feeling very much at home.

ELIZABETH COOKER, PARENT –
NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL



Picture: New term at Norwich Steiner School

The Steiner Academy Hereford is here!

It's been a long time in the making, but finally we are there. The first Steiner school in this country to be funded from the public purse has actually been established, despite all the setbacks. On 1st September the 25 year old Hereford Waldorf School became the Steiner Academy, Hereford. This big step change has been accompanied by a sense of excitement – and apprehension, as expressed by a parent of a class 7 pupil: "I was a bit fearful of what the Academy might mean in terms of outside interference and have been relieved to see that classes seem to be carrying on as usual." This parent reflects the general sense that, so far at least, it is 'business as usual' – even the sign for the school remained unchanged for the first few weeks of term. Behind the scenes though it has been a frenzy of activity in various offices as all the new systems get fired up. For some local parents this has been the first time they could consider sending their children

to a Steiner school. Kerry and David Berkeley, for example, had planned to take their twelve year old son out of state secondary school because he had found the transition from primary school difficult and wasn't happy. Kerry intended to teach him at home until she heard that the Hereford Waldorf School was becoming an academy. Now both he and his younger sister have joined the academy. "I feel so lucky and happy to get what I originally wanted for them. We considered Steiner before they ever started school, but we couldn't have afforded it," said Kerry. "We chose a good primary school and hoped the state system would be ok, but it didn't bring out the best in our son." Both their children have settled in well and are happy and the parents love the sense of strong community. Another new parent said: "I have been very impressed with the Steiner Academy. The communication with parents is the best we have

ever experienced with schools and the whole ethos leaves most state schools standing."

The school is bursting at the seams and demand for places at the Steiner Academy has far exceeded the number of places available. The problem of overcrowded classrooms will be alleviated to some extent when 8 new temporary classrooms arrive on site for the beginning of next term. The classrooms have planning permission whilst the new extension is being built and the old school facilities are refurbished. It's going to take some time now to consolidate things and to meld the old with the new and to show that the intention behind public funding for Steiner schools is not to constrain this education, but rather to enable it to flourish and to be available to more children.

SYLVE SKLAN – SWSF

The St Paul's Steiner School in Islington is blazing an ever wider trail in developing its Grade 2* listed church building for community use. Over the weekend of 17/18 October, it hosted the hard-hitting Glasgow knife culture drama FLEETO, the London culmination of this play's 10 week tour round Scottish venues. The performances in the Nave were enhanced by support from the Forgiveness Project, providing its 'F Word' exhibition for no fee which audience members could view before and after each performance.

Thanks to funding from the Southern Housing Group, who look after half the flats on the nearby Marquess Estate, the Project was able to install lighting bars, making the Nave better equipped to host similarly high quality professional drama productions, which also generate funds for St Paul's Steiner school.

The school's Trustees have now approved further development of the Nave space for this kind of dual use. Projects in the pipeline – to sit alongside the continuing family friendly chamber music series each Sunday morning of term time – include a festival of evening piano music recitals this November, forum theatre projects for the coming spring and a story telling festival next summer.

If you want to know more, look at the Nave's website www.thenave.org or contact Tom Hope tom.hope@thenave.org mobile 07770984612

**TOM HOPE, PARENT –
ST PAULS STEINER SCHOOL**

Book Reviews

The Crazy Makers by Carol Simontacchi
Deep Books Ltd (ISBN 9781585426263)

Carol Simontacchi is a clinical nutritionist and her book explores the way the food industry influences the collective diet. It sets out the stages by which commercial interests pander to humanity's tendency to prefer sweet and high fat foods. She makes the case, based on a particular interpretation of evolutionary theory, that we have evolved in conditions where food supply was scarce to an affluent modernity where ancient appetites and tastes lead to excessive consumption and epidemic obesity. The author's key concern is the effect poor nutrition can have upon mental health.

Letting the Outside In by Rebecca Austin
Trentham Books (ISBN 9781858563916)

In this book Rebecca Austin sets out her belief that while children's lives are increasingly lived in enclosed environments, children learn better when they have "real stuff" work with. Many colleagues and parents of children in Steiner schools will readily acknowledge the force of Rebecca Austin's conviction. The book provides case studies and research evidence to support the value of the classroom outdoors and she also gives practical applications and examples for her ideas.

**KEVIN AVISON –
STEINER WALDORF ADVISORY SERVICE**

UK Parent Network

We experienced a wonderful moment of awakening earlier this year when we played host to the International Steiner Waldorf Parents Network – a group of representatives from (currently) 9 countries across Europe, who wanted to share experiences and information about their school lives. Only then did it occur to us that a similar network for UK based Steiner Waldorf parents would be a great asset for parents and schools alike; a platform for sharing tips, experiences, problems and solutions that affect us all.

To that end we wrote to all the UK Steiner Waldorf schools to see if such a group would be of interest to their parents. The first hurdle, of course, is to locate the right person within the school to deal with the query! Not all schools have a PTA or equivalent, or indeed a designated administrator to direct our message onwards. We need to follow up and see how we can forge a sustainable link with parents in the schools without overburdening their administration.

International Steiner Waldorf Parents Network

The annual meeting of this group took place over the weekend of 7/8 June at Michael Hall School in Forest Row. Whilst it was the 3rd meeting for the group, it was the first at which an English school had been represented!

It was quite an eye-opening experience to realise how much communication happened within other European countries, and one which has inspired us to try and achieve something similar within the UK Steiner schools. As a parent of only 6 years (a newcomer in the eyes of many!), I am sure similar initiatives have been undertaken before, and their results now part of Steiner folklore, but one must never give up!!

Representatives from 9 countries – Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Sweden, Slovenia, Norway, France, Finland, UK and the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education – spent the weekend exploring the similarities and differences in our experiences of state and Steiner education; who received state funding? How was the education perceived by the wider community? What particular struggles did they face? And what stories of success would they like to share?

The participants were all parents (or former parents), but many had additional roles which they played within, or linked to, Steiner education. It was a wide ranging and stimulating gathering, with such a wealth of information to be shared. We have clearly just scratched the surface!

Personal highlights include an understanding that educating our children is a community effort, which we must all own. All adults who have contact with children are educators in the truest sense. Also whilst we in the UK were among the minority who did not receive state funding, those that did still had their own financial struggles. It was interesting to

We have had positive feedback from a dozen or so schools who are keen to come together and see how we can support each other. Fired with enthusiasm, we have set a date for such a gathering – Saturday 14th March 2009, at our school here in Forest Row. We would love to hear from any of you who can help us forge these links – perhaps you were involved in a previous attempt to set up a similar group? If so, we would really appreciate feedback on your experiences. Are you a parent in a school without a formal parent representative body, but interested in being involved in such a group? Whatever your background, we welcome your input, questions and tips.

Please contact either Christian or Denise with your interest:

*Christian.lewin@michaelhall.co.uk /
denise.weavers@michaelhall.co.uk or call
01342 822275.*

We look forward to hearing from you!

**CHRISTIAN LEWIN/DENISE WEAVERS
COMMUNICATIONS CO-ORDINATORS –
MICHAEL HALL SCHOOL**

note that state funding did not mean that the education was supported by the public generally – many had suffered a lot of bad press in the recent past. In the UK, whilst we do not have funding we are broadly regarded by the educational establishment and indeed the media as having interesting ideas, bordering on being actually quite good at what we do!

There was a strong determination to minimize jargon in our communications thereby making the education more accessible to "closet" anthroposophists – an anthroposophist in all but name! We also wanted to expand membership to include as many countries as possible from all across the world. We were only too aware that we represented countries from a limited cultural and ethnic diversity.

We also learned what a wealth of written material there is "out there" which supports much of the work we do in our schools, and which would greatly help with our efforts to communicate more effectively what we offer.

As parents there was one overwhelming point on which we all agreed – good communication is the key to everything. As one speaker said "If there is something that you do that you are unable to communicate effectively, then don't do it." Quite a sobering moment for us all.

We finished the weekend resolved to support parents in whatever way we could – through writing, lectures, forums and other moments where our experiences can be shared. A well-supported parent is an invaluable source of support for teachers, too.

The next meeting of the ISWPN is scheduled for July 2009, venue to be confirmed.

**DENISE WEAVERS –
MICHAEL HALL PTF**

BRISTOL STEINER SCHOOL OPENS ITS NEW UPPER SCHOOL AND CELEBRATES 35 YEARS

On Saturday 27th September Bristol's refreshingly unstuffy Lord and Lady Mayoress arrived to officially open our new upper school, touching speeches were made by his Lordship and Christopher Clouder, the ribbon cut (to the accompaniment of our senior choir), the school toured appreciatively, parent-made tea and cakes consumed and the mayoral 'bling' patiently displayed and explained to a group of wide-eyed class four and fivers who were eager to paw it. By now the parents and teachers closely involved in setting up the upper school were blinking in disbelief as they slipped across the invisible line from last minute preparations, anxieties about shelves and hooks still to put up, the craft space to build, and fundraising, to end result; there had been no



Picture: Bristol's Lord Mayor with Bristol Steiner School pupils

time to step back and take stock. But here, after three years, was our stunning new classroom, designed by one parent, built with assistance from others and a number of the school's wonderful children, the fruit of no generous state-aided budget, nurtured by adversity but not disaster, and finished on time.

The parent-led upper school (PLUS) project started in response to the clear demand for an upper school expressed in the school community during consultations in 2003/4. It progressed from a notion of 3-5 pupils around someone's kitchen table, through an inspirational visit to the generously encouraging Aquila Project near Ringwood, to something more substantial but without a location; and then support came from the Bristol Steiner School in the form of a yet undefined shed somewhere in its grounds.

Even better was to come when, in April of this year, following the appointment of a new Education Coordinator, the school formally adopted the project. Reality dawned: suddenly 13 out of the 17 class 8 pupils were signed up for class 9, five months to go, no classroom, no curriculum, virtually no teachers. However, we were prepared! In a controlled surge of activity plans

STEINER EARLY CHILDHOOD – Movement and New Regulation

The Early Years Foundation Stage came into force in September 08. It introduces a legal duty on all providers to comply with certain learning and development, welfare requirements and assessment regulations.

We have been successful in getting an exemption process introduced, through which we are able to apply for exemptions from elements of the EYFS Learning and development section and assessment regulations which conflict with our established principles for the education and care of young children. The exemptions process is complex, however, and therefore it is important that we trial it now – in both a NG funded and a non-funded EY setting (kindergarten). There will, of course, always be the freedom for each setting to make their own decision as to whether to apply for exemptions or not, and we will be offering further advice on this later. At present our settings are being consulted on various aspects of the EYFS and the exemptions criteria.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) are funding a read-over document written by the SWSF, which explains how the practice in Steiner early childhood settings can be interpreted by inspectors and early years advisors against the EYFS.

This will become available in printed form, and on all government websites.

International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE)

The October meeting took place in Copenhagen and was hosted by the Danish Early Childhood Association. There are now 34 representatives of over 50 countries (some share a representative) attending. Two new countries who joined this October were Hungary and Brazil. (Israel attended prior to joining).

In each meeting the council members discuss trends, questions and burning issues facing children and families today throughout the world, and try to see how these can be addressed, in an active way, by the participants who then take these questions back to their own country associations.

IASWECE also provide support to new projects and initiatives, and this is done through fundraising throughout the member organisations. The UK early childhood centres are asked to fundraise for this work, and can direct the proceeds via the International Organisation to specific countries, kindergartens or initiatives, or into the general fund in order to sponsor teachers to attend conferences.

The UK will be hosting the meeting at the Ringwood Waldorf School in October 2009, and our kindergartens will be actively fundraising for this event.



Picture: Enjoying the magic at Bristol's celebrations

for the new classroom were finalised, teachers with strong potential began to appear, the site for the new classroom – a yard at the front of the building, sparse of light and little more used than as a picking up point for younger children – was cleared and, before the end of the summer term, a round concrete slab was laid. For many there was no summer holiday. The circular classroom quickly took shape above the slab outside while, from the cellar upwards, alterations were made inside the main school building. The day before term started a brief dedication ceremony was held in the new building; it was finished the night before. Our upper school, Bristol Steiner School PLUS, is up and running...

If you would like to make a donation to the upper school, please visit the school's website at www.bristolsteinerschool.org or contact the school directly.

**RICHARD WORSNOP –
BRISTOL STEINER SCHOOL**

World Conference for Waldorf Early Childhood Educators

The IASWECE world conference took place in New Hampshire, USA in August 2008. This conference called MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD TODAY was attended by over 300 participants from all over the world, and addresses the development of the child from pre-birth to age 7, and the development of the adult caring for and educating the child.

For further information on IASWECE or on where to send donations, please contact: Janni Nicol, UK Representative to IASWECE. Email: JanniSteinerEY@aol.com JANNI NICOL – EARLY CHILDHOOD REPRESENTATIVE FOR SWSF

CONFERENCES

Movement, Play & Emotional Relationships as a Foundation for Learning

A conference for teachers, parents and all who are interested in Early Childhood Education. Tuesday 18th November 10.00am – 3.30pm University of East London Docklands Campus For further info and application form contact: info@allianceforchildhood.org.uk telephone: 01342 827702

National Early Childhood Conference – The Teacher as a play facilitator with Joan Almon (USA)

In this conference we will explore the power of play, how to strengthen it in the home, Waldorf setting and in the wider world. Saturday 22nd November 9.30am – 4.00pm. University of East London Docklands Campus For further info and application form contact: Jane Avison admin@steinerwaldorf.org tel: 01384 374116