

STEINER WALDORF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE (EYFS)

Negotiations continue between the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) regarding the incompatibility of some of the learning and development (L&D) requirements with the Steiner approach. These requirements are part of the EYFS, which becomes law in September this year for ALL early childhood centres (Birth – 5 years).

As you may know, some parents of Wynstones Steiner School have taken the initiative to form a campaign around this issue and the school has set out a detailed case for granting exemptions from the L&D requirements for all Steiner settings in a letter to the DCSF which has helped to bring more focus to the issues. As a result of their initiative, many other schools have written to the Department and to the Minister, Beverley Hughes, and their local M.P's with their concerns.

In the meantime the Department continues to reassure us that the EYFS is flexible enough to accommodate a variety of educational

approaches including the Steiner approach. They are clear that delivery of the EYFS is mainly down to the teacher's professional judgment, including when to deliver some of the learning and development requirements such as reading and writing, which they acknowledge comes later in Steiner schools.

We await a response from the Minister.

The Wynstones Parents' campaign team website www.savesteinerschools.org will have updates, further information and clarification of their campaign.

The SWSF will continue to inform all parents through their children's schools and kindergartens. You can also contact us on info@swsf.org.uk or read the SWSF statement on www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk under 'news'.

JANNI NICOL - SWSF

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT TALKS

On a cold October evening, in the cathedral-like, vaulted space that is Committee Room 1 of the Scottish Parliament, Christopher Clouder gave a talk to MSPs and researchers from five Scottish political parties about the Scandinavian approach to education and how it might inform education in a modern Scotland. His talk gave a varied and interesting insight into issues such as school starting age, testing, status of teachers and parental choice of educational approach in each of the Scandinavian countries. One key theme was, of course, that each of these countries allows Steiner Waldorf Schools to flourish in the state system alongside other types of school.

His talk made a great contribution to the work that the Scottish Association for Steiner Waldorf Education is doing in Scotland and was particularly valuable since the change of Government in May's election. We capitalised on Christopher's visit by also taking him to visit the ruling LibDem/SNP coalition at Edinburgh City Council where he gave a lunchtime briefing to Councillors. Both talks were really well received and have stimulated an increased interest in Steiner Waldorf education in Scotland. Therefore we are moving forward with renewed optimism!

LIZ MURRAY - EDINBURGH STEINER SCHOOL

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Newsletter

SPRING 2008

THE GODERICH WALDORF SCHOOL, SIERRA LEONE

At the SWSF AGM last autumn, the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship was delighted to welcome the Goderich Waldorf School in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as our first international affiliate.

Since 2001, a close working relationship has developed between the Ringwood Waldorf School and this indomitable little School in Freetown, which now cares for over 200 war-affected and ex-combatant children who are among the poorest in the World. The relationship began in 2001 when I first met Mr Shannoh Kandoh (a social worker, lecturer at Freetown University and Director of the GWS) at the London Waldorf Teacher Training Seminar, on which I teach. He felt that Steiner Education was the best hope to 'heal hearts' in Sierra Leone. I was very impressed with the outstanding work that he and his colleagues were doing to help their community.

I arranged for Shannoh to visit the Ringwood Waldorf School and it was an instant success. RWS staff then arranged and funded a second social worker/teacher to visit for a year, and Alliance for Childhood sponsored him to attend the Kolisko Conference in S.Africa,

which focussed on teaching in post-conflict environments. There he was able to contribute his valuable experience. I visited the Goderich School in May '06, and the British Council Reciprocal Visit Scheme has funded two more, highly successful visits. My last visit was in November '07. I was dumbfounded at the scale of the task undertaken by the teachers of this brave little school.

Creating a proposal for the full British Council Global Partnership grant has allowed us to progress into a working relationship within curriculum subjects, developed out of a common understanding of the principles of Waldorf Education, the principles underpinning the British Council Global Schools Partnership, and the particular needs and aspirations of each school. From this starting point we identified areas of the curriculum that could include projects that are meaningful and useful to the children concerned, and could be sustained into future years as part of the 'tradition' of particular year groups within the schools.

The Goderich School now has close contacts in many Sierra Leonean government departments through

the integrity and effectiveness of its work. Shannoh has been asked as a consultant to draw up the national guidelines for child abuse (in association with the British Council). His close association with the head of the civil service is also opening many doors. He also has the means now to accredit a Waldorf training course for West Africa. Die Freunde and friends in Britain and America are funding a permanent site on which to house it, along with the new school and a small farm to help feed the children.

During my recent visit, the wife of the Deputy President of Liberia phoned to ask Shannoh's advice about setting up a Waldorf School in Liberia. She had already funded a state-of-the-art school for war-affected children, but it had failed. She is now looking towards Waldorf Education to heal hearts in a way that the grandest buildings cannot.

ELAINE HOLT - RINGWOOD WALDORF SCHOOL



Picture: Mohammed and some of the children

BOOK REVIEW: Creative Play for your Baby

This lovely book about toy making for babies of 3 months to 2 years is both child and adult friendly, full of simple and beautiful playthings, which any adult can happily make. What a gift for the child: something a loved one has formed and shaped by hand. These toys will delight and satisfy every little one; parents will experience their depth of concentration and contentedness. Pictures in colour of children and toys decorate every page, with practical, easy-to-follow instructions.

Descriptions of very young children's needs and development are written from the viewpoint of Steiner Waldorf education, but are instantly recognisable and comprehensible for anyone. The How, Why, When and What of early childhood are beautifully illuminated. The chapters: 'Introduction', 'Care', 'Awareness', 'Action' and 'Wonder' lead one through vital subjects such as imitation, sensory development, environment, family life, discovery and rhythmic play as the book moves from one plaything to another. Respect, caring and nurturing, the joys and worth of parenting and the importance of building relationships early in life are given worthy space. 'Caring, as an adult, is both a natural and moral inclination, and the sensitivity you show will

become the foundation for your child's eventual sensitivity to others.'

Janni Nicol and Christopher Clouder are well qualified to produce this book, for they have wide experience and practice across the ages of childhood in Steiner Waldorf education. 'Creative Play for your Baby' is endorsed by the Alliance for Childhood, a global organisation promoting and supporting all children's rights to a healthy childhood. They give helpful thoughts and advice throughout, such as 'Our years of education and experience can be a barrier that forecloses the simple joys of life that are able to rejuvenate and refresh us...'

The reader is led into the simple, unaffected small world of the little child where play is central. 'Play is a wholly absorbing activity from which logic, social skills, memory, fulfilment and values are derived. It is not a negligible aspect of human development, to be relegated to a leisurely pursuit, but in fact lies at the root of our nature.' Rattles, wind chimes, soft dolls and animals, boats, a train, push along toys, even a mini sandpit and dolls' hammock find their way into the pages. The authors describe the value of natural materials such as cloth, wool and wood, which have differentiated surfaces lovely to touch, explore and feel in the hand (and

mouth!). A wall hanging for keeping the toys, doubling as somewhere to put them in and take them out makes a vital component of the little one's activity. It can help lay the basis for happy tidying. Simplicity of colour and uncomplicated design stands out. There are notes throughout on how to help the baby stay safe without being dogmatic.

The authors explain the value of having few toys, all of natural materials, which appeal to the child's senses. They encourage parents to surround the baby with an environment free of clutter, and to leave the child to play alone as well as sometimes joining in. Several of these playthings are attractive for older children up to about 6, yet I look forward to another book with toys specifically for the child over two! This book is verily a basket of treasures in itself and to be highly recommended.

Available from SSF Publications on 01342 825005/info@steinerschoolbooks.com

Creative Play for your Toddler (2-4+years) will be published in 2008.

SALLY SCHWEIZER

PUBLISHED BY OCTOPUS PUBLISHING GROUP LTD. 125 PAGES. ISBN-13:978-1-85675-271-8

BY CHRISTOPHER CLOUDER AND JANNI NICOL

A NAVISH PROJECT...

Last year St Paul's Steiner School in Islington, London put on a very successful series of family friendly chamber music concerts on Sunday mornings in the school to raise funds for the school and to attract families from in and around London wanting to introduce their children to live chamber music played to a high standard who might be intimidated by more formal venues such as the Wigmore Hall.

Under the banner of 'the Nave', the Allegri String Quartet played the inaugural concert on Sunday 29 April. Since then a wide range of acclaimed artists have taken part in the series including the Endellion Quartet, the Beznosiuk Ensemble, pianist Frank Wibaut and Monica Huggett's Sonnerie ensemble together with up

and coming groups such as the Badke and Benaim Quartets (fresh from winning the Melbourne and Bordeaux chamber music competitions).

It helped that the Nave has a superb acoustic and a great location in Islington (corner of Balls Pond and Essex Roads), with excellent public transport links. It also helped that the school's resources could be deployed to provide crèche facilities for children who got restless listening to the music.

One of the most heartwarming aspects of the series has been the pleasure these professional musicians have taken in performing for a younger audience who took such delight in their playing. They all said how much they would like to return for more concerts in future.

A further series is planned for this year, starting Sunday 15 March with the German baroque consort Pantagruel at 3pm (the Nave's first afternoon concert). The Sunday morning concerts resume on 20 April with the Sarabande Consort.

For more information, see www.thenave.org or contact: TOM HOPE tom.hope@thenave.org



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

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SWSF Easter Conference

As you will be aware from the Autumn newsletter the Ringwood Waldorf School has been very busy preparing for the SWSF Easter Conference, which will take place from 4th – 8th April 2008. The subject will be 'The Twelve Senses and the Modern Child'. This promises to be a very special event. We hope to see as many of you there as possible. Programmes available from the SWSF office (info@swsf.org.uk)

ELAINE HOLT -
RINGWOOD WALDORF SCHOOL

SWSF Job Vacancy

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship is looking for someone with vision, enthusiasm and initiative to join us in supporting the development of Steiner Waldorf education in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

The successful candidate will have a good understanding of Steiner Waldorf education and PR experience. She/he will have a firm grasp of contemporary educational issues and a track record that demonstrates an ability to work with the underlying ethos and principles of Waldorf education. He/she will be self motivated and able to work within an existing team. Good networking, and oral/written communication skills will be essential and the post assumes a competent level of computer literacy and administrative efficiency. The job is initially part-time and the salary will be based on pro rata of the basic SWSF salary.

If you would like to discuss this opportunity further, please email cclouder@dsl.pipex.com
For an application pack email j.avison@yescomputers.co.uk

STEPPING OUT – November Conference in Switzerland

Last November around 100 educators from Europe and further afield gathered in Dornach to work on three important topical themes. Firstly, as the education continues to grow around the world, the task of trying to define the essence of a Steiner school in terms that are enduring and universal, becomes a pressing, if vexed, question. With 1000 schools now open, national ministries, public agencies and, sometimes, commercial interests look for a defining statement of principles as to what constitutes a Steiner school. It goes without saying that conditions vary from country to country. However, it is easier to picture that opening a school in Amman or Shanghai is wholly different to opening a school in Braemar or Swansea.

Secondly, consideration was given of the destinations and life choices of former pupils and 'Waldorf graduates'. Research papers were presented from Germany, Switzerland and the USA*. The results provide a stimulating, positive and critical foundation from which to carry out further work, feeding the findings into the education at its roots. Dr. Dirk Randoll from Alanus Hochschule gave a stimulating contribution on the challenges of, and need for, research into Waldorf education. There are currently half a dozen German universities carrying out such research. Randoll identified five key points: the education will benefit from an examination of the supporting assumptions and the claims made for it; existing prejudices and critiques of the education need addressing; the educational principles deserve to be studied and understood; examples of good practice could be shared with others

and documented, and, finally, where ministers and officials call for evidence of the effectiveness of the approach, this needs too be made available in an open and positive manner.

The final theme touched on an issue that has resonance across Europe: the accreditation and recognition of the programmes of learning that are based on the Waldorf curriculum framework. In the UK, until recently, the assessment juggernaut has provided a restrictive monoculture for pupils, parents and teachers in Steiner schools. There are some signs of change; last September saw the piloting of Diplomas in England, which focus on work-experience and individualised projects, as well as specialist and functional learning. Alongside this development, organisations such as the Open College Network, seek to provide accredited learning beyond the constraints of National Curriculum programmes of study. SWSF is in discussion with such agencies to explore opportunities for collaboration. In Europe, there is also work being done by representatives of the European Council (ECSWE) with officials from the European Commission and also, in relation to European funding for projects to look at the educational effectiveness of 'leaving portfolios' and the outcomes of non-standard learning and achievement.

*NB Research papers on Waldorf outcomes can be found at www.ecswe.org, take the WREN (Ed) link.

TREVOR MEPHAM - SWSF

CAMBRIDGE STEINER SCHOOL – FINALLY THERE!

The first day of the New Year was particularly joyful at the Cambridge Steiner School as we were finally able to open the doors to our first permanent site. Children, parents and teachers came together in a simple ceremony in the hall, to mark this poignant moment in our history. As I looked around at the faces in the room, it was hard not to feel a great swelling of emotion as I thought about how all of these people, and a great many more besides had come together to bring about this very moment.

Ute Towriss, the new class one teacher, who has been involved with the project since its inception, likened our journey to this site to that of the three kings following a star. Anyone who has been involved in the early stages of setting up a Steiner School will know what a hard journey this can be. It brings together an eccentric diversity of visionaries and pragmatists, optimists and critics, stalwart supporters and spontaneous benefactors, all united by the single desire to bring a Steiner School into their community. In a world where we often feel overwhelmed and dis-empowered in our lives by huge global forces, how extraordinary it is to be part of a project where you can see the dreams and generosity and impact of individuals.

After years spent in nomadic situations in church halls, corners of schools and a disused nursery it is with joy and gratitude in our hearts that we watch our children climbing and running in a large enclosed garden and then settling down to their schoolwork in the warmth and comfort of a spacious classroom.

For those of you who are currently engaged in looking for a school site, it might be encouraging for you to hear how quickly our situation changed from crisis to hope. This time last year, things felt particularly bleak. We had just been outbid on the site that we now inhabit, there was a great feeling of despondency and exhaustion. After ten years in a cramped, cold, damp and dreary church hall, faith in the project was ebbing. Perhaps it was all too much! However, the children were still coming, still eager to learn, still enjoying school (even if the adult community was rather less keen), so school life

continued. Finally there was a rumour that the other bid had fallen through, and the Windmill school was back on the market. The energy to put together a second bid was hard to find, but there were new parents with new skills who offered support to the exhausted property group. Gradually, wheels started turning, we teamed up with Mencap who wanted to buy the on-site hydrotherapy pool, and to the surprise of everyone (especially those most involved) the joint bid was accepted.

The Windmill School is an old special needs school in a small village just outside Cambridge. It is a light, contemporary building with enough room for the school to grow up to class 8 and beyond. There is a hall, kitchens and a large courtyard garden in the centre of the school which class three are busily converting into a kitchen garden. The on-site hydrotherapy pool will be run by Mencap and we are currently negotiating a convenient time for the children to swim. Each classroom is generous in size and each has access to a small piece of private outside space. The Kindergartens and classes 1 and 2 overlook the beautiful garden, which, in turn, overlooks fields. We have been particularly fortunate to inherit a wooden crocodile which was donated to the school by fundraising efforts in the local community. It is an enormous wooden structure, comprising runways, slides, tunnels, hidey holes a roundabout and sandpit. This brings about the unexpected bonus of giving all the children an incentive to arrive early at school (spaces are limited on the roundabout!).

There is, of course, much work still to be done on the building. November, December and the Christmas holidays brought us all together to sand, clean and paint the new classrooms and do the many tasks required to make the building habitable. There are still a mountain of tasks that need to be undertaken but we feel confident that the next few years will see the school swell in numbers and the buildings and gardens grow in beauty! At this time of great fortune for us, our hearts and thoughts go out to everyone who has helped us to achieve this situation for our children.

To find out more about our school, make a donation or offer help, please contact us on info@cambridge-steiner-school.co.uk or visit the website: www.cambridge-steiner-school.co.uk

SONIA TRICKEY -
PARENT, CAMBRIDGE
STEINER SCHOOL

Inadequate premises prevent St Paul's becoming state funded...

In a very recent letter from the Minister, he says: 'My officials have for some time been in discussion with you and your colleagues, and the Islington local authority, about the proposal that St Paul's Steiner School might be brought into the maintained sector. I am now writing to let you know the decision we have taken on this matter in the light of the position reached in those discussions.

The Government believes it is right in principle to consider proposals for independent schools to join the maintained sector; this has the potential to increase the diversity of that sector and to enhance the choice available to parents. However, in the case of St Paul's I understand that a number of serious issues have emerged which throw into question the viability of the proposal. These include the premises of the existing school, which would need substantial improvement. The indications are that this would need to be funded from the public purse. Even if public funding on the scale required could be made available we are not persuaded that this would provide good value for the investment, given the limitations of the buildings and the relatively small number of pupils which they can accommodate. Such pupil numbers would clearly generate limited revenue funding, raising further issues about the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the provision. In all the circumstances, we have decided not to proceed with the proposal.

I know you will find this disappointing and should make it clear that our decision reflects the particular circumstances of this case and should not be regarded as relevant to any future proposal the Fellowship might make for a Steiner school to join the maintained sector. I can confirm that any such proposal would be considered on its merits.'

We had been led to believe that the premises issues could be resolved AFTER the school had become a member of the local community of LA schools. But now it would appear that state funding remains conditional upon a school having suitable premises. On the face of it at least, it would seem that all the reforms and the Education and Inspection Act 2006 have not overcome this barrier after all – not good news for our city Steiner schools.

And now for the good news: it is anticipated that the contract for the first state funded Steiner school in rural Herefordshire will be signed before the end of the month, despite the planning difficulties. If the outcome of the planning inquiry is not good, then the Academy will go ahead in more modest buildings that already have planning permission.

SYLVIE SKLAN - SWSF

THE WYNSTONES HALL RISES

Armed with hammers and saws, a host of volunteers from the school community and Europe converged on Wynstones during last summer. For three weeks these parents, teachers, pupils and friends, laboured through blazing sunshine and some torrential downpours, to construct the wooden structure of the new hall. For the first week the entire upper school were on site hammering and sawing away. Children from 9 years upwards, helped to cut out the timber supports and nail together the vast Belfast trusses. There were pupil representatives from Waldorf schools across Europe and the language differences did not seem to hinder a spirit of teamwork and smooth co-operation. The structure was then erected using heavy equipment, to complete the first phase of what must be one of the biggest self build projects ever attempted by a Steiner school in the UK.

This unique event was the culmination of a five year period of fundraising, involving almost everyone connected to the school. To date £327,000 has been raised directly via the school community through donations, a borrowing community and a variety of fundraising events, including two sponsored bike rides to Paris and a musical extravaganza in which all Beethoven's symphonies were played one after another by a professional orchestra.

Wynstones is well known, as are many Steiner Schools, for high standards achieved in the performing arts. This new hall is needed urgently to provide a place where the entire school can meet, where indoor sports can be played and music, Eurythmy and plays can be performed.

The structure of the hall is complete, the roof is on and the building is secured against the weather, but much still remains to be done. To

complete the building we need to raise another £318,000, so after a short period of celebration no one at Wynstones will be resting on their laurels.

GUY PINNINGTON - NEW HALL MANDATE,
WYNSTONES SCHOOL

