

FREE SCHOOLS

In July, Michael Gove, the Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families announced that, if they win the General Election the Conservative intend to introduce a system inspired by the "Free schools" model pioneered in Sweden. Since 1992, schools in Sweden have been able to operate outside the state system but receive state funding.

Under the new scheme planning regulations would be relaxed. Companies, charities, private schools such as Steiner schools and parent groups could apply to run a school. Gove hopes this policy will stimulate a "free market" in education, creating 220,000 places in 3,000 privately run, state-funded schools.

The intention is to include legislation to bring about these reforms in the first Queen's speech should a Tory government be elected next May.

How would Steiner schools, including those schools that struggle to provide Steiner education in very inadequate premises, benefit from this new category of less regulated state funded schools? The precise details of the policy are not yet clear, but a potential provider would have to demonstrate that they have in place

- A sound business plan
- Parental demand for their education services
- Conformity to the Admissions law
- High standards of H&S and safeguarding
- A plan for 30 -40 % of the pupils to attain 5 A* to C GCSEs, (including English, maths and science).

Each pupil would attract a fixed annual amount of revenue funding and in addition an annual amount of capital funding which a school could borrow against in order to fund capital works. The provider would enter into a contractual agreement with the Government similar to the Funding Agreement for Academies.

Rachel Wolf of the think tank 'the New Schools Network' has been charged to work out the policy detail. She has agreed to present these ideas on November 17 at a SWSF Moving Forward Seminar at the Charity Centre, London. This will be an opportunity for representatives from our schools to find out more and for Rachel to hear our needs and concerns with regard to this route to state funding.

SYLVIE SKLAN AND EMMA CRAIGI - SWSF

IMHOFF WALDORF SCHOOL



Picture: Celebrations at Imhoff Waldorf School

Imhoff Waldorf School began in 1997 when a small, passionate group of parents seeking education with an environmental emphasis for their children encountered the principles of Waldorf education. Their collective inspiration produced a school with one classroom, a teacher, and twelve pupils. Fourteen years later, what was once a quiet wooded area on an old Cape farm (Imhoff Farm), now buzzes daily with the lively voices and activities of over 200 children from Playgroup to Class 7.

We are off grid and off road!

The vision of the school is to provide quality Waldorf education to children from all communities and to provide opportunities for children from diverse backgrounds to grow and develop together within a climate where Waldorf education is at its most transformative, least elitist, most accessible and most participatory.

- We commit to embracing and bridging the cultural, linguistic and financial diversity of the South African people.
- We foster a fertile ground for our strong community to express itself so it continues to flourish vibrantly.
- We make every opportunity to habituate reverence for our living planet and seize every moment to educate and practice sound, sustainable environmental principles.
- We invite imagination, inspiration and intuition to flow freely and abundantly.



Picture: Lessons at Imhoff Waldorf School

- We honour the unique life-journey of each child, removing obstacles so that they may reach the highest and fullest potential of their being.

As a committed community school we raise funds for our school and our sponsorship portfolio through fundraisers and sponsors that embrace our creative, social and environmental consciousness.

If you are keen to sponsor a child, donate money towards buying our own land and building an environmental school or to find out more please contact rebecca@imhoffwaldorf.org or see our website www.imhoffwaldorf.org

REBECCA
IMHOFF WALDORF SCHOOL

Newsletter

AUTUMN 2009



A NEW UPPER SCHOOL AT RINGWOOD

Ringwood Waldorf School is pleased to announce the opening of its Upper School.

This initiative begins with 27 students divided between Classes 9 and 10, a core staff of 5, and is operating on two sites: the main school campus, and our outreach site at Sturts Farm (a Camphill Community-based farm for adults with disabilities). In the long term, we are hoping to extend a workshop block on the school site into a purpose-built two-storey upper school block.

The wish to have an Upper School to provide the full Waldorf Curriculum to Class 12 has been living strongly in the school community since the fire of enthusiasm was first ignited at the whole-school Development Workshops in 2001. Since then it has been smouldering, crackling

"This is a big step for us and has involved a great deal of cautious planning"

and letting off a lot of sparks (!) in the School Development Plan until this historic moment. At last, as we turn 35, we are able to bring this next step in the life of the school to reality.

From our very earliest years we dreamt of becoming a school that offered to link the broad range of Upper School main lesson studies to practical work, and we believe as strongly as ever that practical skill and craft based learning are crucial to healthy adolescent development in our times when the senses and intellect are so over stimulated. With regard to qualifications, we are going a new road offering Open College Network (OCN) levels Two and Three in all the main subjects as well as in many of the traditional subject lessons and crafts.

This is a big step for us and has involved a great deal of cautious planning. However, over the last fourteen years, the school has grown considerably in strength and numbers (present roll: 240). There will be a great deal of challenging work to do during the transition period between now and 2013 when we hope to have a full Upper School facility here, with Classes 9 to 12. We express our huge gratitude

to all those individuals, schools and colleges who/which have helped and inspired us along the way - which allows us now to say that what we are offering is dynamic and cutting-edge, and we hope will offer an inspiring Waldorf education to all who participate.

Anyone interested in admissions or staff vacancies should please contact Ringwood Waldorf School.

TONY ANDREWS AND CHRISTINE POLYBLANK FOR THE COLLEGE OF TEACHERS - RINGWOOD WALDORF SCHOOL



Picture: A Trigonometry main lesson leads Class 10 pupils into a surveying workshop

NEW HALL AT WYNSTONES



Picture: Inside of new hall at Wynstones

Wynstones School has completed phase II of its New Hall and children are now using the beautiful building. Sports, gymnastics, music, festivals and drama will fill the space. The use of wood inside and out gives the building a welcoming warmth very suitable for school children. The inside glows.

What has been most impressive right from the beginning is the community effort which has culminated in this fine building. From the summer camp, the borrowing community, the Paris bike rides, the attention to detail in all aspects of the project, the parent involvement all leaves me with a deep sense of gratitude. Here is a community creating a space for its children. A true gift freely given. And a real gift, one which encompassed the highs and lows, the disagreements and many challenges. A gift followed through and carried through. No government grant or state subsidy but a community deed which stands out as clearly amongst us as the building itself. Many years ago, perhaps the summer of 1989, an old man spoke to a school

assembly gathered for midsummer. He spoke with eloquence and passion of a New Hall for the school. He believed in this and told us we could build it if we had the will. His name was Benedict Wood one of the school's founders. He spoke of his vision, knowing he would never see its realisation. His vision arose out of his love for the school. Benedict was a craftsman and his eyes would be twinkling with delight to see our beautiful New Hall.

CLEA TOUT - WYNSTONES SCHOOL



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

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WEIGHING ANCHOR AMIDST THE APPLES – news from the Steiner Academy Hereford

Although Herefordshire is a land-locked county that ripples with farmland, there are plenty of sea-faring metaphors that spring to mind in relation to the Academy's voyage into uncharted waters.

The second year has begun with demolition in full swing and the shrinkage of the playground spaces to the size of a large postage stamp, as hoardings, fencing and portaloos move into position. Over the summer the remaining legal and financial threads were sewn into the fabric of the Capital Funding Agreement and this is now signed. Hot on the heels of what has been a rather choppy yet ponderous process, the main contractors have been appointed and move on site in October. Following a rigorous tending and selection process, Speller Metcalfe Malvern Ltd has been chosen to build and refurbish the Academy. Speller Metcalfe are a medium-sized, local company with a lot of experience working in 'live' school environments in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. They have a proven track record working in ways that are considerate of, and responsive to, human and natural environments.

“The Academy has made major gains in a number of key areas. These have been made by acknowledging the cultural differences between traditional education and Steiner education so that changes are made in a way which capitalizes on the best features of both to improve provision for the students and community served by the Academy.”

At the end of the first year, we had our third visit from our 'critical friend' – the School Improvement Partner, who reported that during the first year, "The Academy has made major gains in a number of key areas. These



Picture: Hereford's shrinking playground!

have been made by acknowledging the cultural differences between traditional education and Steiner education so that changes are made in a way which capitalizes on the best features of both to improve provision for the students and community served by the Academy." The report indicates that the course we have set ourselves is acknowledged and the advice is to proceed with lively speed.

This year we look forward to an initial 'monitoring' visit by OFSTED, which will give us an opportunity to articulate and explain how Steiner education is being practised in a publicly funded context.

The new term began with 315 pupils on roll, with waiting lists for all classes except at the top-end and a rising swell of admissions appeals. A fourth kindergarten group has begun and a parent-child initiative meets off-site, in a village hall. The Academy has appointed an independent appeals panel, which will begin hearing appeals early in the autumn. We have taken note of the number of

enquiries for places during the first year, which, on average, came in at 5 every day. This data seems to confirm that there is a clear parental demand for publicly funded Steiner education.

At the beginning of September, the Academy held a small tea party for invited County Councillors. Apart from the delicious cakes, the Councillors were treated to a talk about the educational principles and the Academy's ethos, as well as a tour of the site.

To try and cope with the traffic and parking constraints, exacerbated by the building project, the Academy now runs 5 mini-buses to and from different localities around the school. Taking other services into account, each day 130 pupils travel back and forth to school on buses. In the summer the Local Authority commended the Academy's Travel Plan, which focuses on lift-share, mini-buses, public transport, walking and cycling, and a grant of £6500 was awarded to the school to be spent on measures to enhance sustainable means of transport.



Picture: A caption here

We have had a letter from the Principal of the 6th form College, informing us of the marked success of former pupils of Hereford Waldorf School at A-Level and thanking the teachers for the work and commitment that they have contributed to the students' education in days not long gone by. In terms of the summers' GCSE and OCN results, it is worth pointing out that amidst the squalls and of the Academy's opening year, the students did extremely well in this aspect of their learning.

On the teaching front, there was a significant development last year regarding the potential dialogue between state training and Steiner Waldorf practice. In partnership with the Local Authority, a new colleague – Carolyn Hall – succeeded in completing her NQT (newly-qualified teacher) induction year solely within the Steiner Academy, with the guidance and support of colleagues at the school. The confirmation of 'qualified teacher status' in a Steiner school offering a distinctive pedagogy and a different curriculum is fresh and innovative, allowing us to harbour the hope that this could be the beginning of a new chapter in teacher education for Steiner teachers in England.

Finally, over the last 12 months the Academy has been in partnership with the national Steiner Schools movement – SWSF – and the University of Plymouth to research how teachers in Steiner kindergartens approach their work with the children. The research report is due to be published this autumn and will be launched at the Institute of Education in London on 23rd November. The report is co-authored by Mary-Jane Drummond and Sally Jenkinson and details of how to obtain a copy will be available from the SWSF website in the coming weeks.

As the dialogue between Steiner education and the public authorities continues, there is a daily mindfulness concerning the complex and unusual nature of the currents that swirl beneath us. In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill warned that 'State' education amounted to "a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like on another", whereas Robert Owen described the advent of public education as "the most powerful instrument of good that has yet been placed in the hands of man." This duality is not an easy one to bridge and it almost goes without saying that both can be true, depending on the context. That education is a social-cultural activity that can prompt and inspire individuals, nourish societies at all levels, while fostering human peace and understanding across the divides is an aspiration and an ideal that this school, along with many others, tries to bring to earth, every day.

TREVOR MEPHAM –
STEINER ACADEMY
HEREFORD



CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW

The Cambridge Primary Review's report on education for children under 11 in the UK was published on 16th October. This made front page national news and the report's authors confirm:

- formal education before the age of 6 is educationally counterproductive;
- greater use of teacher assessment rather than SAT's;
- "joined up" relationships with parents and carers helping to create schools as communities are vital.

Please find below a press release on behalf of the SWSF.

PRESS RELEASE – on Behalf of the Steiner Waldorf Schools' Fellowship

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, the association for Steiner education in the UK and Ireland, welcomes the findings of Robin Alexander's Cambridge Primary Review.

In our view, Professor Alexander has examined the evidence rigorously and his conclusions will not be a surprise to educators in most of continental Europe, nor will it be for many unheard voices here. While the starting age for formal learning has been progressively reduced in practice, and the government's Early Years' Foundation Stage effectively imposes literacy and numeracy targets on children from three onwards, there is ample evidence that these policies are counter-productive: it is a case of the cure undermining the long-term health of the patient.

Children's innate curiosity and ability to learn can be strengthened by providing a range of experiences: linguistic, mathematical, practical, social, spatial and physical...

High quality early years' education lays the foundations for good social and academic skills and for life-long learning. Children's

innate curiosity and ability to learn can be strengthened by providing a range of experiences: linguistic, mathematical, practical, social, spatial and physical... However, the more teachers are forced to become dictators of "outcomes" at this young age, the thinner the real education becomes: play is the means by which young children most readily learn. Steiner Waldorf schools and early childhood settings endeavour to provide an educational environment in keeping with the needs of children, rather than the anxieties of adult politicians. A later start to formal learning in this sense allows children to experience the joy of learning without unhealthy stress or the risk of early burn-out.

Professor Alexander has reached his conclusions out of a deep concern for the well-being of all children and after lengthy consultation and detailed analysis. His approach contrasts with the sort of review commissioned by government departments; his deserves the title "independent" and is a true example of what that over-used phrase, "evidence-based" claims but rarely delivers. Whether our politicians – who are themselves the consequence of what drives our current educational obsessions and delusions – are prepared to listen remains to be seen. For the sake of our future, we can only hope so.

SWSF

For further information on the Primary Review please go to www.primaryreview.org.uk