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 2,000 privately run, state-funded schools.

The intention is to include legislation to bring about these changes 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 be elected next May.

Queen’s speech should a Tory government bring about these reforms in the first market” in education, creating 220,000 places.

Since 1992, schools in Sweden have been able to operate outside the state system but receive state funding.

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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.

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 scholarship 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

IMHOFF WALDORF SCHOOL

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 glow, 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. Over the last fourteen years, the school has grown considerably in size 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
WEIGHING ANCHOR AMIDST THE APPLES – news from the Steiner Academy Hereford

A

lthough Herefordshire is a land-locked county that Ripple 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. 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 to 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 commented 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.

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 their work and commitment that has 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 while there was a national decline in all subjects, at 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, – Carolin 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 roles that sit beneath us. In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill warned that “State” education amounted to “a mere confraternity 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,1 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...

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

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, who include leading educationalists and politicians, are recommending a range of reforms including:

• formal education before the age of 6 is educationally counterproductive;
• greater use of teacher assessment rather than SATS;
• “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.

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