Steiner, Anthroposophy and some Background

Rudolf Steiner was born in what is now Croatia in 1861. He wrote and lectured on a wide range of contemporary issues including architecture, medicine, philosophy, science, economics and social reform as well as education. Steiner-Waldorf schools, biodynamic agriculture and a variety of therapeutic and curative initiatives are amongst the most well-known practical applications of his work.

Our approach to education is based on Steiner's educational insights, specifically those that relate to child development. These form one aspect of what Steiner called 'anthroposophy', literally, 'human wisdom' or 'knowledge of the human being. These ideas are contained in Steiner's approximately 4,000 lectures and some 50 written works. Many of these can be accessed on line at the Rudolf Steiner archive: www.rsarchive.org

Anthroposophy is a developing body of research and not a belief system, indeed Steiner was at pains to make sure that people scrutinised his ideas and put them to the test; he did not want them simply to be adopted or 'believed', but he did invite people to engage with them. In his lectures on education he gave many indications for suitable subject matter and approaches to teaching for different ages but always stressed that teachers must be free to interpret these indications in their own way.

Steiner schools do not teach anthroposophy, indeed some would argue that it cannot be taught in any conventional sense. Our schools endeavour to work 'out of anthroposophy'. The implications of this can best be understood by reading the Principles and Aspirations of the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, of which SWSF is a member: www.steinerwaldorfeurope.org

These principles are prefaced by the statement:

"Steiner Waldorf educators study and research aspects of anthroposophy in order to inform and develop their work within the schools and places of learning. The philosophical and methodological approaches that underlie anthroposophy are regarded as tools for personal and professional development; they are not taught within the school, either as a subject or a belief."

This guide to Steiner's work, produced to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his birth, provides a useful introduction to his life, times and activities: www.vernissage-online.eu/epaper/steiner_2011_E/index.html#/10