Steiner Waldorf schools form the largest group of independent, non-denominational private schools in the world. They thrive on every continent, in every culture and within a wide range of ethnic contexts, including Israel, Egypt, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Taiwan, Japan, Brazil and China. There are currently over 1,000 Steiner schools worldwide and 35 in the UK. There are over 2,000 Early Years settings in a total of 64 different countries. The first school was opened in Germany in 1919, the first in the UK in 1925.

The Steiner Academy in Hereford was the first state-funded Steiner school in the UK. It opened in 2008. The Frome Steiner Academy will be the second. Globally many Steiner schools are state-funded.

Steiner schools offer a broad and balanced curriculum that is artistically structured to respond to the developmental needs of the children. There is a strong emphasis on creativity. In addition a high value is placed on play in the early years, imagination in the middle school and creative thinking at secondary level.

Steiner teachers aim to develop the `head, heart and hand` in a balanced way: the cognitive, the social-emotional and the practical. Every pupil is expected to give of their best across all disciplines, thus avoiding one-sidedness and early specialisation.

In most cases the children are with the same class teacher from age 6 to 14, supported by a range of subject teachers. Key subjects are taught in `Main lessons`: blocks of up to four weeks of the same topic for two hours every morning, allowing for in-depth study and enthusiastic immersion.

The rhythms of the day, week, month and year give a structure and context highlighted by seasonal celebrations which reflect the local culture. There is a strong emphasis on structured activity, movement, a lively use of the out-door environment and learning through doing.

Many are all-through schools, catering for children from age 3 to 18. Whole class teaching is combined with individualised and differentiated learning. Most schools employ SEN specialists to support the class and subject teachers.

The social and emotional development of the child is supported by the strong family-like environment of the extended early years, the rich social and imaginative learning of the middle school and exploration of the global and social as well as individual perspectives at secondary level.

There is a strong oral and narrative tradition expressed though recitation, drama and an extensive use of poetry, stories, myths and legends from all cultures, often told rather than read. Modern languages are taught, ideally two, from age six.

Formal learning, i.e. writing, reading and numeracy begins in class one at the age of six, the norm in many European countries and an approach supported by a significant body of research.
A number of UK Steiner schools offer a limited range of GCSE’s and A levels or recognised equivalents. Results are well above the national average and pupils are able to advance to higher education and a huge variety of career paths.

All science subjects begin with the close observation and direct experience of physical phenomena, rather than with a description of prevailing theories and models. An open mind as to causes and first principles is encouraged.

Festivals, both seasonal and those adapted from the culture that is local to the school, play an important part in the life of the child.

In addition to all conventional subjects, Eurythmy is also taught. It is a form of movement that attempts to make visible the tone and feeling of music and speech. It helps to develop concentration, self-discipline, spatial and aesthetic awareness and a sensitivity to others.

Games and sports are an integral part of social and cultural life in Steiner schools. Competition has its place as the children get older, and many schools may prepare and enter teams in a range of sports competitions, including basketball, hockey, tennis and cricket.

Steiner schools do not shy away from engaging in critical debate about the appropriate use of computers, TV and DVD. Computers are generally used by students at secondary age and not earlier. They very quickly master the necessary ICT skills and many go on to successful careers in the computer, film and TV industries.

All Steiner schools have Behaviour Management Policies which state clearly their approach to discipline which is neither rigid in the traditional sense nor free in the progressive sense. Each school day is clearly structured. There are clear expectations and clear boundaries.

Steiner schools are non-sectarian, non-denominational and are not part of any church. They educate all children, regardless of their cultural or religious backgrounds. Parents from a broad spectrum of religious, spiritual and philosophical backgrounds send their children to Steiner schools.

In most schools there is a regular religious education lesson in which the aim is to cultivate a moral mood towards the world and our fellow human beings.

Different Steiner schools structure their management and governance in different ways, but curriculum development and methodology are determined by the teachers. Steiner schools are not required to teach the National Curriculum.

Dr. 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.

Steiner’s body of thought is known as Anthroposophy, literally, ‘human wisdom’, or ‘knowledge of the human being.’ Steiner maintained that the spiritual world could, by means of conscientious inner development, be investigated empirically in the same way that natural science can investigate the physical world and so contribute to the understanding of child development.

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) is the membership organisation for all the Steiner schools and independent Steiner Early Years settings in the UK and Ireland. Its aims are to: to safeguard the ethos and identity of Steiner Waldorf education; to support its member schools in their efforts to provide a high quality and distinctive education; to represent the interests of Steiner education in the wider educational, academic, social and political context.