



The St Michael Steiner School

NEWSLETTER



12th March 2010

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ARE OUR CHILDREN BEHIND?

Dates for Your Diary

MARCH

Sat 13th	Association AGM 10.30 - 12 noon
Tue 16th	Open day 3.30 - 5pm
Thur 25th	End of term festival
Fri 26th	Term ends 12.30pm

APRIL

Mon 19th	STAFF INSET 10-4pm No school
Tue 20th	School starts 8.30am
Mon 26th	Class 7&8 and Kindergartens' Parents' evenings 7 - 8.30pm

MAY

Mon 3rd	Bank Holiday No school
Mon 10th	Class 1&2 Parents' evening 7 - 8.30pm
Tue 11th	Open Day
Fri 28th	Staff INSET - no school
Mon 31st - Fri 4th	June Half Term

JUNE

Mon 7th	Back to school
Sat 12th	Open Day 10 - 12.30
Fri 25th	St John's festival

At Open days, and even in the school community, you may hear people ask, "How long does it take the children to catch up?" or "How far behind are the children?" Some state confidently, "Of course, we know the children are behind, but" It seems to be a common belief, but on what is it founded, against what is it being measured and is it true?

When our children's progress is compared to that of children in schools that follow the National Curriculum, we find that there are things - topics - that we have not 'covered'. Of course, there are many things our children have done that aren't part of the National Curriculum, but the assumption is made that they are behind because they haven't done everything that is. This belief is compounded by the fact that our children don't start formal learning until they are in their seventh year. It's a logical conclusion, but it only makes sense if you assume that everyone is on the same journey; that education is a linear progression, like a train on its track, one station inevitably following another until it reaches the terminus. We don't think of education like that; for us, it's more like a drop of water falling into a pool, the ripples expanding endlessly in all directions.

But if we want to draw a metaphor from public transport, perhaps we could say our education aims to provide the pupils with a ticket to a destination of their own choosing, while the National Curriculum puts them all on a package deal to Benidorm*. Having made the assumption that everyone is going to Benidorm, the Government looks at our children and sees them heading off across the Atlantic, to Scotland, to Africa or over the Russian Steppes and says, "Well, they're nowhere near where they need to be if they want to arrive in Benidorm at the same time as everyone else!" and the myth arises that they have been left behind, when really they have gone somewhere else instead.

But the expectation that every child will learn the same things at school is a very recent one. Until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, it was normal for children in different schools to learn different things. When I did some research to find out why the National Curriculum was introduced, I found this definition: "*The purpose of the National Curriculum was to standardise the content taught across schools in order to enable assessment, which in turn enabled the compilation of league tables detailing the assessment statistics for each school.*" I think it's interesting that it doesn't say it was for the benefit of children but to simplify the gathering of statistics.

The state says to us "If you don't take all of your kids to the same destination at the same time, how do you know they've arrived?" Our answer is, because we know our children, it's very clear when someone isn't with us, we wait for them to get ready, sometimes give them a bit of a push, a pull or a travelling companion and, most importantly, take an interest in each and every one's individual journey. Of course measuring their progress would be much easier if we sent them all to the same destination and just counted them off the plane, but why would teachers want to compromise the quality of the children's education just to make statisticians happy?

How did it happen that apparently sane, rational adults came to the conclusion that humanity would be better off if everyone knew the same random unconnected set of facts? Or to the conviction that it is undesirable for people to think and know a variety of different things? And why does no-one ask what on earth a 7 year old can possibly understand or appreciate about Impressionism or paleontology?

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Occasionally the cry goes up from one of our parents, "You didn't tell us they weren't going to Benidorm!" and it's true, it's easy to forget that some parents may not realise how different this education is from what is generally considered normal - which is why it felt necessary to write this article. And then another thought occurs: do some people think we are taking all the children to Benidorm but our flight is delayed and we're taking a longer, more picturesque route? "... but even so, we'll arrive on time, won't we?" "Oh no! my daughter is in Bangkok, her brother is in Australia and everyone else is in Benidorm! How will they ever find their way in the world?!" Very well, of course!

In universities all over Britain, teachers who had a more diverse and interesting, (pre-1988) education themselves despair as a new batch of students arrives from Benidorm unaware - unable to imagine - that anywhere else exists. The Steiner pupils arrive, ask questions and talk about the strange and fascinating travels they have already been on and the professors repeatedly say, "We'd like more of these students! They are interested in learning!" But the government says, "They haven't even been to Benidorm! What will they put on their UCAS forms?" And the university admin staff say "There's no place on the forms for these Steiner pupils. They'll have to go to Benidorm and get their passports stamped."

So in the end, that's what most of them have to do; they take GCSE's and A-Levels, not because the education in our schools isn't good enough, but because it's so rich and diverse and inventive that it doesn't fit neatly into the government's boxes. Unfortunately, if our pupils want to go to university, they have to play the government's game. It's not difficult for them to do that for a few years, except that perhaps there are more worthwhile ways to spend that time. So if you worry about whether your children will get good grades at GCSE - which, by the way, they will - take a moment to think beyond the next five or ten years and ask yourself what kind of education is really more likely to prepare them for the decades beyond that - for the rest of their lives: one that ensures they know what everyone else knows, or one that gives them what they need now and inspires them to live and continue learning way past childhood, adolescence and into old age?

Amanda Bell

**I have nothing against Benidorm, I'm just using it as an example of a package holiday destination - I'm sure it's very nice!*

[See the attached ECSWE newsletter for information about the international portfolios project to accredit the Steiner Waldorf curriculum]

NEWS

EYFS-exempt Steiner school wins 'outstanding' rating

Catherine Gaunt, Nursery World, 20 January 2010, 00:00am

One of the first Steiner Waldorf schools in the country to be granted exemptions from some of the EYFS learning and development goals has been graded Outstanding in its inspection.

The school was inspected by the School Inspection Service, which inspects all independent schools, including those with kindergartens and nurseries, affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship. The inspection, just published, took place at Wynstones School in Gloucester in November. The school had been granted exemptions from the communication, language and literacy and ICT early learning goals (News, 2 September 2009).

Teacher Ken Power said, 'We're relieved, happy and delighted about the report.' He said the school had been very open with the inspectors that the teaching in the kindergarten had not changed in any way to fit in with the EYFS. For example, the school does not teach numeracy and is not assessing children against the EYFS profile.

Mr Power confirmed that Wynstones is planning on re-applying for exemptions to all the other learning and development requirements in the EYFS and has the full backing of parents at the school.

He added, 'As long as we continually apply, we are de facto exempt from the EYFS in the way we are inspected.'

The report said, 'The kindergarten has received exemption from some programmes within the EYFS and modifications to others. As it is in the process of re-applying for other exemptions and modifications, it is planning for and gathering information on the children's learning according to the Steiner Waldorf curriculum pending the outcome of that re-application. The assessments made by staff are useful and provide a good basis for commenting on the children's progress during and when they leave the kindergarten.'

Janni Nichol, early childhood representative for the SWSF, told Nursery World that a number of other Steiner nurseries and kindergartens at Steiner schools, inspected by the SIS, have also received good reports. They include York Steiner School, York, and St Paul's Steiner School, London, which were both rated 'good with outstanding features' for their overall effectiveness of EYFS provision. York School received the grade despite the report saying the school was still waiting to hear if it would be granted some EYFS exemptions and inspectors said it did not meet the regulations.

Ms Nichol said the process was taking more than a year in some cases. She said, 'Schools have been told that if they don't get exemptions they could fail.' She is due to meet with the QCDA shortly to discuss these issues, including the requirement for Steiner settings to comply with the EYFS profile.

She said, 'I'm looking forward to further discussions with QCDA and politicians from all parties about how the EYFS will apply for Steiner schools in the future, as the exemption process is far too bureaucratic and cannot continue.'

We expect to hear from the QCDA about our own exemptions application by the end of May.

From The Early Years

We have had a lovely time celebrating the Chinese New Year, setting up Pancake Cafes and watching 'The Runaway Pancake' and 'Sweet Porridge' puppet shows. This week we have been busy sewing and making fabric collages, preparing gifts and cards of gratitude for our mothers on Mothering Sunday (sshhh they are a surprise!)

Our kindergarten groups were depleted after half term as many of our children have been away unwell with various symptoms during this, the 'coldest winter for 30 years'. Our children are gradually returning, some still a little tired and lacklustre. We take account of their well being, adjusting the pace of our daily rhythm accordingly.

We have found the following two articles by Susan R Johnson, M.D. from "You're Not The Boss of Me!" very helpful and hope you find them interesting and useful.

The Importance of Warmth (*slightly abridged*)

Warmth is probably one of the greatest gifts we can give our children, not only the warmth of love, but also the physical warmth of their bodies. Children are developing their bodies, especially during the first seven years of their lives. An infant or young child will always feel warm unless they are on the verge of hypothermia because they have an accelerated metabolic rate. If we don't provide them with the layers of cotton and wool to insulate their bodies, then they must use some of their potential "growth" energy to heat their bodies. This same energy would be better utilized in further developing their brain, heart, liver, lungs, and other organs. In addition, being cold decreases our immunity. We are all more susceptible to the germs and viruses that are always around us when we are wet and cold. When our body has to expend extra energy to keep warm, then less energy is available to "fight" off infections.

So why do children rarely complain that they are cold? Children are not connected with their bodies enough before the age of seven to even acknowledge or communicate that they are cold. They live in the moment and are so excited and stimulated by all that they see that they don't have the capacity to sense the coldness of their bodies. This is why children often will play in a swimming pool or ocean until they are literally "blue", denying that they are cold or that they need to come out of the water. So as parents, we have to help our children develop their sense of warmth. By helping a child develop this sense of warmth, we are actually strengthening his immunity and laying the foundations for a healthy body and healthy organs in his adult life.

The meaning of Illness

Imagine health as a beautiful sunny day with a brilliant blue sky and no clouds in sight. The earth is covered by a layer of green fields, plants, and trees springing up from a firm ground composed of minerals. The sun is our spirit, the sky is our soul, the green living layer is our vitality (etheric body), and the mineralised earth is our physical body. We come to this earth with the purpose of purifying our soul. There are always clouds that form in our soul: those issues in life (our needs, wants, and desires) that we are trying to work through and transform. At any given time, if our spirit is strong enough, then like the sun we can often dissolve the clouds that come our way. Sometimes too many clouds form at the same time or a cloud grows too quickly and becomes too large, obscuring the sun's light. If we don't pay attention to the messages from our soul, the clouds can grow and merge into a huge thunderstorm and eventually pour down to earth as rain. After the rain, the sky will become clear again, but all the rain may have flooded the earth. If our etheric body is not strong enough to withstand the rainstorm, then our physical body can become ill. Hereditary factors, destiny and karma can all affect the physical body

The etheric body is formed during the first seven years of our life. Routines and daily rhythms (especially around mealtimes, bedtimes, morning times, and holiday celebrations) all strengthen the etheric. Adequate sleep (usually around eleven hours for young children and teenagers), adequate clothing (so hands and feet stay warm), and proper nutrition (that follows the cycle of our liver, consuming fats and proteins before 3p.m., eating a hearty breakfast and hearty lunch with nutritious snacks, and followed by a light dinner) all help our organs grow in a healthy way and strengthen our immune system. Minimizing the stressors in our culture (television, videos, computers, caffeine, sleep deprivation, prolonged car rides, and always hurrying from one place to another) can strengthen our etheric body. These stressors over-stimulate our nervous systems and cause us all to release stress hormones that weaken our immune system and our vitality.

Nature is one of the greatest healers. Taking a long walk through a park lined with trees, in a quiet forest, or by water nourishes us. When my spirit and vitality needs strengthening, I hike in the mountains and sit under a redwood tree by a small flowing stream. When my soul feels in torment and too many thoughts and worries are flooding my consciousness, then I sit by a rushing waterfall or walk along the ocean and listen to the crashing waves. Finally, one of the greatest gifts we can give to ourselves and our children is to slow down and remember that "less is often the best."

Our school doctor, Dr Jenny Josephson, has written a number of articles which we can make available upon request.

Sincerely,

Leigha Hipkin and Katie Sharrock

What's Happening in the Classrooms?

Class 5&6 are in the midst of a new main lesson subject: physics. We began acoustics, the study of sound, by being quiet and listening. This then developed into exploring where sounds come from, how they are produced (What do we hear when we hear a sound?), how sound travels through different materials, and something of the formative quality of sound, how speech is formed by the relationship of the larynx to the teeth, tongue, and lips. . Then we went on to study light by sitting in a darkened room. A number of experiments were conducted to enable the class to have an experience of where light comes from, what happens if we darken light, and how light can brighten darkness. Can we see light? What does it look like? It was also interesting to note how light always creates a shadow. This led on to studying colour, more from a Goethean perspective than a Newtonian, working with prisms and after-images. Now, we have begun examining the phenomena of heat. Where does heat come from? What is the quality of heat? What is it like to be cold? The children's own feelings are part of their experience but when they can also have the opportunity to understand that their (subjective) experience of the quality of heat and cold can also be recognised in other objects, it can lead to a more objective view of their own experience. In other words, they may discover it's not always about themselves: a good experience to have at this age. The class are finding it immensely fascinating but also hard work as the 'answers' are not always obvious and much thinking work needs to be done. Before the end of the term, we will also study electricity and magnetism.

The class has also begun a fundraising effort to raise money for two reasons. One is our continued support of the development of a small village in Lesotho, and the other is to put some money towards our class trip at the end of June which will bring together some of the main threads of this year's lessons. Thank you for helping us with this. We hope you have enjoyed the flapjacks, shortbread, and jacket potatoes.

Brian Jacques

Class 3&4 have been in the world between icy darkness and fiery heat - the world of the ancient Norsemen. The great gods, Odin and Thor, the Frost Giants and the dark elves, Midgard, home of Men and Asgard, home of gods, the three Norns, Urd, Verdandi and Skuld who see the past, present and future, Black Surt who waits in scorching Muspell for the end of the world, the Midgard serpent who circles the world, forever biting his own tail, Fenrir the terrible wolf who is chained by the magic ribbon, Gleipnir - finer than silk but stronger than iron - and, of course, Loki, charming and funny, heartless and cruel. Their stories have taken us into another world and have also provided inspiring material for writing descriptive texts and poems and exploring past, present and future tenses of verbs.

Amanda Bell

In class 7&8 we have been exploring biography as history in the light of revolutions, from the Reformation to the Russian Revolution. We are investigating time from 1600's-1900's. We have looked at individuals such as Napoleon, Lord Nelson, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Garibaldi, Lenin, Robespierre and Marat. From the story of individuals, where the personal mingles with the political, we have begun to tease out the threads of patterns in the story of humanity. We have begun an investigative tasks which can last lifetimes!

Juanna Ladaga

I am in the process of getting my minibus driving license to enable me to drive a minibus on class outings. The original cost estimate was around £500.00 (which the school has paid) but the actual cost has risen to £400.00 more than that! Would anyone (or several) in the school community wish to sponsor me for the remaining amount or part of it? It would be greatly appreciated.

Brian Jacques

Would you like to see this newsletter in colour and detail?

This Newsletter - as well as back issues and all future issues - is available in full colour on our website at

www.stmichaelsteiner.wandsworth.sch.uk

Newsletter Contributions

The next newsletter will be distributed on Friday 14th May.

We are always keen to publish contributions from parents in the newsletter. If you have something interesting/funny/controversial/moving/profound to share, however small, please send it to me.

Deadline for contributions is 6pm Wednesday 12th May.

Email them please, to: amandabell@mac.com

Community Pages

Please note that the school does not endorse or recommend, either in general or in particular, anything offered in the Community Pages and parents are advised to check the qualifications of practitioners or people offering services here.

Forest Row House Swap

Forest Row family wishes to swap four bedroom home within walking distance of Michael Hall School for house or flat in Wandsworth area beginning July/August 2010 for one year. Prefer to be within easy distance to train station. Contact Jacqui at 01342 825 020 or jacquiji@btinternet.com

UNIQUE CHAKRAS / AURA SESSIONS

Treat yourself and fundraise for the school!

I propose -during March and May - discounted sessions for school parents and staff (but tell your friends and family too). I will give back 10% to the school.

I WANT TO PUT SOME APPLES ON THE FUNDRAISING TREE! So visit me...

I give you:

- * Detailed description and drawings of the energy flow of your chakras and aura
- * Explained life patterns and their link with your chakras patterns
- * Messages from your chakras on how you can move forwards...

You will leave with session recording on a CD, drawings, a big smile on your soul, feeling sacred and blessed away by your own potential...

Suzanne: 07805 740 002

The Art of Mentoring

Jon Young, a pioneer in cultural mentoring and inspirational leader in connecting children and adults to nature, is coming to England for the first time to run a course in July 2010.

The course is designed for parents and teachers and is based on a combination of approaches from modern holistic education and indigenous wisdom. The system has many parallels with the Waldorf-Steiner education and numerous teachers and parents have previously attended this course in USA and Europe.

Participants learn a system of connecting others more fully to themselves, their society and the environment; to help find their individual strengths, sense of belonging and love of the world.

For more details, see www.artofmentoring.co.uk