

The St Michael Steiner School

Curriculum for the older child in kindergarten (5-6 year olds)

At The St Michael Steiner School, children benefit from an extended childhood. They have the opportunity to embed basic skills (physical, emotional, social and cognitive), and develop lifelong learning habits that enable them to become enthusiastic, imaginative, resilient, creative and eager to learn students. Children join kindergarten from three years of age and stay until they are rising seven. We follow the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (with some exemptions granted by the DfE along with all Steiner Waldorf settings) for children up to the age of five.

How children learn in kindergarten

In the first seven years, the young child learns to be at home in the physical body, developing an orientation in space and acquiring the developmental capacities of uprightness, speech and thought. The content of the child's whole environment is the learning context; the child imitates the people and the agencies that are in his/her environment.

In the kindergarten, experiential learning, discovery through creative play and social interaction with peers and teachers constitute the main education themes. Awareness of the complexities of the mother tongue and number is acquired through play, daily activities and social interaction. In the seventh year, the child begins to develop the facility for independent, representational, pictorial thinking. The formal schooling process begins in Class 1 when reading and writing are introduced.

An experiential and active learning environment

All learning in a Steiner Waldorf kindergarten, including pre-literacy and numeracy, is experiential and connected to meaningful activities that are available every day. The mixed age group of three to six-year-olds provides a unique space where older children can 'step-up' in all areas of kindergarten life. They can use their initiative, extend and individualise activities, take responsibility, lead and develop independence.

Older children may be asked to prepare the table for snack, count the number of chairs, match bowls and cups, including adding or taking away numbers. Children measure and weigh ingredients for baking, develop and use mathematical language such as heavy and light, more or less. Children experience weight, height and gravity especially when engaging in large construction play, both indoors and outside. Older children are asked to help younger children get ready for the garden and serve food at snack-times. Conversation around the meal table often leads to 'how many boys and girls' there are present, the ages of those present, (and siblings), and ages of past/future times.

Children acquire a rich vocabulary through learning stories, songs and verses by heart. Older children may be asked to help the teacher with puppet shows and are given space and time to make up their own stories and puppet shows. Children learn their name and

those of others by observing name labels and often want to practice writing for birthday and other cards, menus for the annual pancake café and signs for games.

Children are supported to build up stamina: the ability to pay attention for longer periods of time, persistence, and the ability to complete a task they have begun.

All these are skills which facilitate a gentle transition to the formal learning stage which we believe takes place in the child's seventh year.

The big children's club

In the spring and summer terms, the older children come together each week for a whole morning. During this session, they are given opportunities for crafts, often making a hobby horse which requires the following skills: winding skeins of wool into balls, finger knitting, washing and carding sheep fleece, making felt, cutting, sewing, sanding, sawing, drilling, use of carders/ needles/ scissors/ sandpaper/ saws and hand drills. Children work at their own pace and often offer to help each other. The morning usually includes drawing in books, older-age ring games, a shared meal, free play and a longer walk. These activities are more formalized and intended to extend the learning in an effort to strengthen the will forces, widening and deepening children's experiences in a planned manner which is related both to the individual children's needs and interests, and the needs and interest of the whole group.

In the last term of the kindergarten yearly cycle the stories and puppet shows told to the whole group are ones that meet the inner mood and development of the older children. The last story and puppet show is part of the end-of-year family festival and is chosen specifically for the group leaving for class 1 or other school environments. The last day of the school year includes a short ceremony for these children, honoring their time in kindergarten, and their readiness to move on.

Assessment and transition to Class 1

During the spring/summer term the older children (along with children who have applied from outside our school) are assessed for their readiness for Class 1 in a group situation with our School Doctor (a non-testing situation). She may give indications that a child might benefit from another year in Kindergarten, that specific help can be given to a child to help her/ him overcome minor hindrances to enable them to take the step to wards Class one, or proclaim them truly ready for a new type of learning.

The decision for cusp children (those turning six in June, July and August) to remain in kindergarten or to move to Class 1 is made over the spring and summer term. Input is gathered from parents, along with class teacher, eurythmist and early years staff. In the past, decisions have been made for August birthday children to move up, and June children to remain in kindergarten, depending on a range of factors including their family constellation, health, the group of children they may join, as well as the broader view of how they have developed over the preceding years.

During the summer term, all rising Class 1 children are presented in Child Study to the whole school faculty in a series of meetings. When their class teacher has been appointed, he or she is able to meet with the kindergarten teachers to discuss each child more fully.

On the first day of the first term, the Class 1 Ceremony includes the children meeting their teacher, presenting her/him with a gift and being led by her/him to their first school assembly.