

A note to the inspectors re teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils  
28th March 2019

*I realise that you have to make your judgments based on certain criteria from Ofsted and that what I have written here may not have any impact of those judgments. However, we have experienced that many of the comments made by inspectors about the teaching and learning in our schools show a lack of understanding, so I wanted to make these observations clear, in the hope that they will give you a deeper, more positive picture of the principles of Waldorf Education.*

In surveys undertaken by all major organisations that work with children with mental health issues, children and young people report that school - pressure to achieve, homework load, exams, bullying and social problems - is the main cause of childhood anxiety, depression and mental illness.

You have said that the rationale for our curriculum is clear and strong. The basis of this rationale is a particular understanding of child development, which means that what we do with and expect of the children is age-appropriate at every stage. Our curriculum and its implementation are designed to meet the children and young people in a way that is appropriate for their age and stage of development. The result of this is that they like coming to school, enjoy learning and are engaged, enthusiastic and interested, as they have told you themselves.

You have also said that our children are happy, confident and articulate; you have seen that there is minimal bullying in our school; that the children are sociable, courteous, well behaved and engaged in their lessons; that they are respectful and have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers.

You have seen that the High School students - 50% of who have been in the school since Kindergarten, so have been educated entirely according to the principles and practices you have observed in the school - are intelligent, capable, focused, interested, responsible and are having discussions, making observations, drawing their own conclusions and asking questions at a high level. They also achieve very highly in formal assessments and are offered places at good universities to study serious academic subjects.

I want to suggest that these outcomes and the way we have designed and implement our curriculum are not unconnected.

Our curriculum and its implementation are designed to meet the children and young people in a way that is related to their age and stage of development. The result of this is that they like coming to school, enjoy learning and are engaged, enthusiastic and interested.

You commented that the children in Class 1 were making good progress in literacy 'in spite of the EYFS exemptions'. We would argue that they are receptive and eager to learn to write and read at 7 *because* they have not been intellectually challenged earlier.

The exemptions we have from certain parts of the EYFS were won because we were able to convince the DfE that it is part of the special character of Waldorf Education that we delay formal learning with good reason. Our children stay in Kindergarten until they are in their 7th year because we believe that they need those 7 years to develop strong healthy bodies and social relationships through physical play and meaningful, practical work together.

This being the case, you should not expect, as you have said you do, to find the older children in the Kindergarten being given more 'advanced' (intellectual) work than the younger ones. If we were to do this, it would defeat the purpose of keeping them in the Kindergarten for that longer period, and parents send their children to us because this is what they want for them.

Further up the school, age-appropriate education includes helping the children to develop good, clear observation skills before we ask them to be critical of what they are studying. If children are

asked to analyse and evaluate, as you have said they should, at a stage of development when they are, anyway, critical and judgmental - i.e. between 9 and 12 - being asked to look at what they are learning with a critical eye exacerbates those feelings and attitudes. Instead, developing the ability to withhold their own feelings and opinions, to observe or listen and report on things clearly, accurately and dispassionately, provides a balance that keeps them from slipping into the negativity that is so prevalent in our society. This is why you will mostly find description and explanation in the children's work in the Middle School, rather than analysis and evaluation. We would argue that their critical faculties are stronger later because they have learned to approach the world with interest before they are asked to question it.

Most importantly from your point of view, none of this undermines the students' intellectual development in the longer term. Quite the reverse, as you have seen for yourselves in our High School classes.

We hold a weekly parent study group where we look at child development, the curriculum and our teaching methods in detail. About 22 people regularly attend at present, which is about 20% of the parent body. These parents understand what I have said here, and this is why they have sent their children to our school. We also publish our curriculum books which contain a great deal of information about why we do what we do. Our parents know and support the way we work with their children.

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