

Frequently Asked Questions

When do pupils begin formal learning?

Pupils start formal learning, i.e. writing, reading and numeracy in class one at the age of six, the norm in many European countries and an approach supported by a significant body of research. Cognitive skills can be introduced with relative ease if children have first had the opportunity to develop speech, co-ordination and their relationship to themselves, others and the world around them during the pre-school years and in Kindergarten.

How do we know that pupils are making progress?

The teacher stays with one group of pupils for up to eight years in the lower school and his or her knowledge of the child is therefore very extensive. An emphasis on formative and on-going assessment reduces the dependence on, and the anxiety related to, testing. Teachers and parents work closely together in order to build a picture of the child that helps everyone to understand and support that child's development. Parents receive a detailed written report at the end of each school year.

How do pupils succeed academically?

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. Their strong independent learning skills, motivation and enthusiasm for learning stand them in good stead for later life.

What is a Main Lesson?

Each day opens with a Main Lesson which lasts approximately 2 hours and will focus for up to four weeks on *one* core subject drawn from the broad curriculum. The Class Teacher (or specialist teacher in the Upper School) endeavours to integrate a range of artistic activities, techniques, delivery methods, learning styles and resources to encourage the child's enthusiastic immersion in the subject.

What part do festivals play?

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. These festivals serve to awaken the child's natural reverence, recognition of the mood that is appropriate for such occasions and a respect for the spiritual essence that exists in us all. Festivals also provide an opportunity for participation and celebration by the whole school community.

What is eurythmy?

Eurythmy 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. Eurythmy lessons follow the themes of the curriculum, exploring rhyme, meter, story, and geometric forms.

What place does sport have in the curriculum?

Games and sports are an integral part of social and cultural life in our schools. They promote physical agility, grace, social awareness, self-esteem and cooperation. 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.

What do our schools recommend about television viewing and IT?

A familiarity with all the technologies that surround us and influence our lives is an essential part of a complete education. There is growing evidence, however, that too much 'screen time' is detrimental to children and 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.

Who was Steiner and what is anthroposophy?

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.

What provision is made for pupils with different learning needs?

A child's weaknesses in one area - whether cognitive, emotional or physical - is viewed as usually balanced by strengths in another area. It is the teacher's job to try to bring the child's whole being into balance and to offer a differentiated approach in the classroom in order to meet a wide range of abilities. Most schools employ SEN specialists to support the class and subject teachers.

How do children adjust when they transfer to one of our schools?

The standards in Steiner schools are high and the breadth of subjects covered by the Steiner curriculum is extensive and it can take time to adjust to this, although most settle very quickly. It is not uncommon to observe new children waking up to the possibility of actually enjoying school and learning for the very first time.

How is the children's behaviour managed?

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.

Children learn best when they feel secure and when they know what to expect. A warm, well structured environment gives them essential support in finding out about the world and themselves in an age appropriate fashion.

Do Steiner schools teach religion?

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. In the younger classes a sense of wonder, respect and reverence is central. In the older classes the focus is on the phenomena of idealism, striving and the over-coming of adversity. Story material from all sources, including a broad range of folk and religious traditions, together with the biographies of inspiring individuals is used.

What if a child does not get on with their class teacher? (given that the teacher may be with the child for a number of years.)

The teacher's professional responsibility is heightened when children are in their charge for a number of years. Problems cannot be 'passed down the line' but have to be addressed. The teacher and children come to know and understand each other in a deep way, respecting both strengths and weaknesses. The children feel themselves to be known, the teacher feels more accountable and the working together between teacher and parents becomes more meaningful.

How are the schools run?

Different Steiner schools structure their management and governance in different ways, but all have one thing in common: curriculum development and methodology are determined by the teachers. Their collaboration, on-going study of child development and immediate experience of the children ensure both the distinctive ethos and the contemporary relevance of the school.

Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship

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