

Curriculum Policy

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Introduction

MWS works with a curriculum based on the pedagogical insights of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner and on the experience of teachers who have worked with those insights in Steiner Schools worldwide. There are approximately 1,000 Steiner schools globally and over 50 in the UK and Ireland. Steiner's original curriculum indications have been successfully implemented for over 70 years and adapted to local conditions. We are committed to offering an education designed at every level to meet the needs of the pupils at their various stages of emotional, intellectual and physical development, whilst still adhering to clear underlying fundamental principles. We are committed to working with Steiner's developmental insights, which are contained in a series of books and lectures and which form on-going study material for the teachers in our school.

These insights affirm that:

1. Each child is a unique individuality with his or her own path in life
2. The teachers' aim to remove the obstacles to this path and to support the emerging human beings in our care in developing inner freedom within a healthily functioning body endowed with a rich and coherent feeling life, so as to enable them to make their contribution to society while at the same time unfolding their own human potential
3. A threefold methodology, recognizing different approaches in Early Years, based on imitation, Lower School, based on imagination, and Upper School, based on ideals, needs to be recognized (even though, at present, we do not have Upper School facilities at Botton)
4. Artistic rendering by the teacher of lesson content enables all pupils to access the subject offered with enthusiasm and understanding, regardless of ability
5. Lesson content needs to mirror the pupil's developmental stage. This requires knowledge of what lives within the children and constant flexibility, more so in a combined class situation where the age range of the children may be two years. The teacher can set expectations which are appropriate for the pupil's ability and developmental stage
6. Lesson content needs to be related back to the human being in a moral and inspiring manner
7. The pupils' motivation needs to arise from enthusiasm rather than ambition or fear
8. Education needs to address the development of thinking, feeling and the will as equal and integrated partners
9. Measurement of the pupil's progress against external and objective targets must take second place to an assessment of progress that takes into account the child's qualitative experience of life, school and self.

See British Values Statement

Kindergarten (Age 3 to 6)

Eskdale Community Trust for Education

The aim of the Kindergarten is to build a bridge between home and school by creating a safe, warm, and loving environment. This is to protect wonder and delight up to the age of seven. Teaching works with the children's will, through activity and through imitation. The morning follows a regular rhythm of an activity such as food preparation, bread making, painting or modeling, followed by creative play; then ring time (songs, rhymes and counting games,) followed by morning snack, outdoor play and story time. There is a seasonal rhythm, and festivals are celebrated through the year.

Main School (Age 7 to 11)

On entering Class 1 the children meet their class teacher, who ideally will stay with them until Class 4. This continuity of teacher for the first part of each day fosters security and respect in the children and brings the teachers to a deeper understanding of the needs of the individual child.

At age seven, and indeed for the next seven years, the children live very strongly in their feeling life. Although they can learn readily what appeals to their artistic sense, they are not yet ready to comprehend purely abstract concepts. Memory is therefore developed, especially through the sense of rhythm, and a strong foundation is given through material being presented, not intellectually, but in a living and pictorial way.

The Main Lesson

Throughout the eight years the school day begins with a two hour long Main Lesson taught by the class teacher. The Main Lesson is central to Steiner Education and is seen as an artistic and integrated whole. It is organized into subject blocks lasting between 3 and 5 weeks each. Each block begins a new topic, but, within the block, subjects may be interwoven. Each Main Lesson has several components, including practical, musical and artistic activities, movement and oral and written work. These multiple approaches aim to appeal to different learning styles and fully engage the child's thinking, feeling and willing.

Subject Lessons

In addition to Main Lessons regular practice lessons are given in English, Maths, Form Drawing and two Modern Foreign Languages. Practical subjects such as farming, building, cookery and gardening are experienced, and there are lessons in woodwork, modeling, handwork, craft, painting, drawing, eurythmy, religion and games. Music and drama play an important part in school life and classes regularly perform plays. Although singing and recorder playing form an integral part of Main Lesson, the children also have music and singing lessons. The children all play the recorder, and opportunities are available for learning to play a second instrument. They progress from a class orchestra lesson in Class 3/4 to a full orchestra involving all the children in the top two classes. We provide a balance of subject lessons, which include academic, artistic, crafts and physical activities that correspond to the soul faculties in all children with regard to their need to engage in thinking, feeling and will activities. The curriculum provides many opportunities in interdisciplinary ways of cultivating social awareness in age appropriate ways.

Class outings take place in connection with the main lesson subjects being taught, for example during farming, local geography, botany, geology, chemistry and astronomy main lessons. From Class 3/4 onwards, there is a main annual trip, which takes into consideration the development and age of the children.

Varying Needs

Our main aim is that all children who come to this school will be able to participate fully at the appropriate stage in the curriculum for their age and therefore for their development. The curriculum in itself is adaptable and fluid, and one of the advantages of continuity of class teacher is that children are able to work in such a way that particular needs can often be addressed by the class and subject teachers.

Differentiation is implemented by various methods in lessons in all subjects:

- Making use of the Steiner three fold strategies of imitation, storytelling (picturing) and thinking
- Each lesson having a multi-sensory approach; with visual, aural and kinaesthetic components
- Keeping a rhythmic and balanced lesson
- Ensuring a variety of activities – from listening to doing
- Ensuring a child-centred approach ie. responding to each child as an individual
- Allowing freedom of response to a lesson so that pupils can produce very different work to reflect what they have learned
- Ensuring there are tasks ranging from simple to complex, to allow for different abilities
- Using open-ended questions, so there is no wrong answer
- Sometimes explaining first and demonstrating afterwards, or demonstrating first and explaining afterwards – allows for different learning preferences
- Structuring work so that some pupils can be set lower or higher targets and then helped later on if necessary
- Grouping text on the blackboard in different colours for different groups of pupils to undertake appropriate tasks
- Encouraging the more able to help their peers
- Using recall, both at the end of the lesson and at the beginning of the next, to anchor information
- Each lesson containing different tasks; for example writing, listening, speaking, drawing, observation, dictation, reading, questioning. The content is differentially approachable.
- Encouraging discussion, exchange of news and reworking with others.

Each differentiation method is systematic, simple, inclusive and inductive. Each child is helped to contribute in his or her own way to the creation of the whole picture. However, we all recognise that many children in the context of their normal lessons will need an individual approach in particular areas of work and that at times an assistant will be needed in the classroom. We always try to have assistance for the Kindergarten teacher. We also try to keep up-to-date with relevant courses and publications.

Teachers and the SENCO are careful to monitor the children's progress and growth in self-confidence and there are times when a child will need a timetable to be adapted to allow for extra work, or for a different approach to work. This may be for a short or a long period of time. Help is usually given in a small group or on a one-to-one basis and takes place regularly. At times such help is offered within the context of a lesson but often the child or children will be withdrawn. When many needs are brought to our attention, we may have to prioritise.

In some cases children need support beyond that which we can offer. We are grateful to receive help from anthroposophical doctors, local doctors, educational psychologists, therapists and other professionals when appropriate. We are particularly aware of the need for children to make transitions to and from our school with ease. However, we are not always able to tackle all the needs that are brought to our attention. Sometimes we have to suggest that help is sought elsewhere.

Reference

At MWS we specifically base our curriculum planning on that laid out by Martyn Rawson and Tobias Richter in ‘The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum’ (SWSF Publications, 2000, ISBN 1 900169 07 X). MWS’ principal modifications are set out below. We are very conscious that within the Steiner Curriculum there is a great emphasis upon the autonomy of the class teacher to produce a curriculum informed by the setting, locality and particular pupils within their class. Therefore, how a topic is presented to one particular class by one particular teacher may be quite individual.

In a small Steiner School such as MWS it is common to have combined classes (ie double year groups, to create the best situation pedagogically, socially and economically) thus making it necessary to adapt the curriculum. Often in combined classes the subjects of the lower year group are taught in the Autumn term and the class moves gradually into the next year’s curriculum by the end of the academic year. It is important for the teacher to decide which main lesson topics are for the Autumn term and which are for the Spring and Summer terms. Discussions and planning takes place and is carried out 2 years in advance to aid organic development.

The curriculum laid out is primarily content, rather than skills, based. An outline of skills development can be found in Chapter 8 and further details and modifications can be found in individual teachers’ planning documentation.

Modifications to the curriculum as stated in ‘The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum’, which are specific to MWI. These are presented primarily as variations to the vertical curriculum, but they also impact on the horizontal curriculum as presented in the book.

Early Years curriculum modifications

1. The older children in Kindergarten are encouraged and expected to help with tasks, whereas the younger children are welcomed to help but not required.
2. It is expected that most 6 year olds are able to write their name in preparation for Class 1.
3. Songs, rhymes and little stories are told in foreign languages in Kindergarten. The language depends on the teacher. At the moment the children hear Swedish and occasionally French.
4. The Kindergarten teacher arrives before the children each morning to ensure materials are prepared but also that the right mood is created. An assistant meets the children in the centre of the village and walks with the children to Kindergarten to ensure they arrive in a suitable mood.
5. Following the morning snack, the children’s free play time takes place outside in the Kindergarten garden.

English curriculum modifications

Speaking and listening

1. The recitation of poems alternates with short musical exercises (singing or playing pentatonic flute [Class 1/2] moving onto recorder in Class 2/3)
2. All children should be able to participate in retelling a part of the story from the previous day. It would not necessarily be the case that the children would stand up in front of the class to do so.
3. A play is performed each year from Class 1/2, moving from choral speaking to children taking individual parts.
4. Project work is introduced in Class 3/4. The guidelines insist on dialogue taking place for research purposes. The children give brief oral presentations to the class, initially using notes, and this builds up to substantial oral presentations, with notes used only as prompts, for parents, teachers and other members of the school community.

Writing

1. The teachers at MWS feel that it is important to teach each individual letter of the alphabet with a story and a picture and will designate the time to do this thoroughly.
2. Lower case letters are not introduced in Class 1. If the teacher decides to introduce lower case printed letters this would be in Class 1/2. Most teachers, however, decide to teach cursive handwriting to Class 2 children and not to teach how to write printed lower case letters. The children write with fat, coloured Lyra pencils. Fountain pens are introduced to all children in Class 3/4.
3. Dictations on a known subject may begin in Class 1/2 and develop throughout the classes.

Grammar

1. Punctuation would be introduced to the children in Class 1/2 beginning with full stops and capital letters. The children in Class 2/3 would have an awareness of speech marks, commas, questions marks and exclamation marks and would begin to use them in their own compositions. Paragraphs would be introduced in Class 3/4. The children would understand and apply this knowledge by Class 5.

Reading

1. The reading scheme which is used is Oxford Reading Tree. However, there are numerous graded books available for children to choose, as well as good quality picture books, high quality literature and factual books on a bookcase in the classroom. Often Class 2 children and above are encouraged to take books home and read to their parents or guardians, and notes about progress are written in a home/school book. The class teacher, and often parents, listens to Class 2 and Class 3 children reading on a weekly basis. In a combined Class 1/2, some Class 1 children may decide to read from the reading scheme.
2. Project work encourages children to read broadly, fiction and nonfiction, and to carry out research work. This begins in Class 3/4. The teacher advises on suitable sources such as text books, articles and internet use.

The check lists for literacy skills given for Classes 1-4 are applicable, taking into account the above variations and modifications.

Movement curriculum modifications:

All classes have separate timetabled movement lessons. Class 1 and 1/2 has one lesson per week. From Class 2/3 this increases to two lessons per week. In preparation for the Olympics in Class 4 more time may be given to running.

Swimming lessons usually take place in Class 3.

Due to the size and location of the school opportunities rarely arrive to take part in tournaments.

Gardening curriculum modifications:

Age appropriate gardening begins in Kindergarten. They have their own small garden plot which they care for, planting and harvesting. The school has raised beds, fruit trees and a compost area cared for mainly by classes 1-4. The classroom window sills are often used as a greenhouse for sowing and seedlings. Class 3 is particularly active. All children help to harvest vegetables in the autumn for Esk Valley Camphill Community. We agree and adhere to the points of view and general themes as stated in Rawson and Richter.

Handwork and Craft curriculum modifications:

The teachers choose a selection of projects each year from the content suggestion list adhering to the points of view and general themes.

Clay modelling takes place in craft lessons in Class 4. Projects include animals evolving from a sphere or egg, thumb and coil pots. The curriculum is then followed up often in connection with certain main lesson themes such as Anatomy.

Cooking and Baking modifications:

This takes place from Kindergarten onwards. Some classes have specific timetabled lessons. Cooking often features in Maths, Foreign languages, History or Geography lessons or in project work. All classes are involved in preparing a Harvest Meal each year.

Geography curriculum modifications

The introduction to astronomy is carried out usually, in a conscious way, during an over night class trip in Class 4.

Children are always provided with age appropriate guidelines for independent project work, which usually begins in Class 3/4.

Social Skills curriculum modifications

As many of the children transfer into state school into after year 4 we have identified certain aspects to help with this transition.

1. Reading comprehension practice. (To enable children to work with subject matter immediately rather than the following day.)
2. Study lessons. To develop the ability to work independently on individual work with individual targets in a focused, concentrated, organised, mature manner.

3. Acknowledgment of ICT and future impact on children, especially regarding competence in searching for information, saving and retrieval skills and e-safety.
4. Gradual build up of homework and personal organisational skills.

Music curriculum modifications

In addition to the curriculum in Rawson and Richter, the Kodaly method is introduced. The classes learn the Sol-fa, with gestures whilst singing, in Classes 1 and 2. In Class 3 this is introduced in stick notation. The children are not introduced to the violin within lessons but there are opportunities for children to have private music lessons.

The classes begin with one music lesson per week which incorporates singing and playing instruments. From Class 3 the lessons include study of music and an additional ½ hour singing lesson takes place. Classes sing as part of the morning routine. Two classes often meet together once per week to sing. In this way, in spite of classes being small, singing in 2 parts and singing in rounds can take place. The older children have the opportunity to join with the village choir to sing.

In addition, from Class 3/4 one class orchestra lesson takes place per week. This increases when the children are rehearsing for the yearly concert.

Due to the number of lessons per week the children are expected to reach a good standard in musical literacy and in instrumental playing.

Physics and Chemistry curriculum modifications

Science lessons evolve within a relevant historical context, and literature, art, clear diagrams, succinct personal writing from observation, biographies and class trips are an intrinsic part of the science lessons.

Endorsement:

Name: Linda Parker

Position: Chair of ECTE

Date: 28/11/2021