

NEWS IN BRIEF

Wednesday 24th September 2008

A message from the Trustees

The Trustees would like to thank all those who contributed to getting the Lakenham School building ready for us to open at the beginning of term. We were frankly astounded by what was done in such a short space of time. People have given resources, expertise and above all their time, many with tireless dedication. We feel extremely proud to be associated with a community able to achieve such a result on a voluntary basis. The short timescale was beyond our control but your efforts have given us a fantastic opportunity to secure a healthy future for the school.

CONGRATULATIONS - WELL DONE -THANK YOU

From Lucy Parker, Antoinette Berry, John Hales & David Jones

Dates for your diary

Monday 29th September – Michaelmas will be celebrated by teachers and children in the School (see article on Michaelmas)

Wednesday 1st October – Open steering group meeting – all welcome.

Friday 3rd October – Michaelmas - festival will be celebrated by teachers and children in the Kindergartens (see article on Michaelmas)

Wednesday 15th October – Kindergarten Parents Evening (both kindergartens)

Saturday 1st November – Information Day at the Forum, Norwich – 9-5pm. Please let the Publicity and Events team know if you are able to help.

Saturday 8th November – Open day at the School, 11am-3pm (to be confirmed). Help needed with baking refreshments, selling crafts, supervising children, storytelling, talking to visitors, setting up and clearing away at the end of the day.

Friday 14th November – Martinmas (the lantern festival), to which all school & kindergarten parents & children are invited.

Thursday 20th November – Parents evening for class 3/4 children, 7.45pm start.

Saturday 22nd November – Parents morning for class 1/2 children; times to be confirmed.

Sunday 30th November – Advent Garden/Spiral

Saturday 6th December – mini advent/Xmas fayre
Thursday 29th January 2009 – ‘Games lessons in Steiner Schools’ an evening talk by Martin Baker from Michael Hall Steiner School (see article on games)

Games lessons & playtime in school

By the staff at Norwich Steiner School

With the move to our new bigger premises and the welcome appointment of a games/bothmer movement teacher, Nicholas Charles (known as Charlie or Mr Charles), we felt it would be a good time to explain the impulse in a Steiner school behind the games curriculum. To do this, it's helpful to look to our evolution as human beings.

Around the time when the physical body evolved to the upright position, we gained a new consciousness and became human. The upright stance made us vulnerable with open chest and rib cage, but it also freed the upper limbs for creative action in the world.

Everything made, planted and created, every bit of clothing sewn – has been done with the hands. Human beings have changed the world with their hands....taken there with their legs and feet, so that there is inherent purpose in our human form.

In a Steiner school, it is felt that games lessons should reflect these human capacities. When we play games together, it matters how we engage with each other in play, and fundamentally the games we play reflect the need to use legs for locomotion, and leave our hands and head free to be creative and to think.

For school aged children (6-13) the most appropriate games are those that involve chasing, as well as rhythmic activities like skipping, hop scotch and four-square. These games help the child to develop an awareness of personal space and encourage them to become more ‘grounded’.

Ball games are less used in these early school years because the unpredictability and speed of a ball creates a sense of anticipation and tends to make children excitable. In general, ball games and more formal sport are introduced in Steiner schools around the age of 13, when children have developed an

awareness of individuality. Then they can test their strength and ability, with an understanding and respect for the personal space of self and others.

Over the coming months, teaching staff plan to introduce a range of traditional games and activities into the playground. We're looking to acquire the following materials to support this plan, so if you can help by contributing any of the following, please let us know: skipping rope (individual and long lengths); french skipping elastic ('knicker elastic' - about 3m lengths); open-ended barrels (see red one in the playground - a great source of fun for the children), hoops, logs and strong lengths of wood for den-building and tennis balls (for rhythmic clap and catch games against the wall).

And if this introductory article about games/sport in Steiner Schools has aroused your interest, make a note in your diary for Thursday 29th January, when Martin Baker, inspiring speaker and games lesson teacher at Michael Hall Steiner School is coming to Norwich to speak on this topic at our School.

Finally, for those of you who are wondering what Bothmer movement is, Martin Baker has been practising Bothmer Movement for a couple of decades. He teaches courses worldwide. So anyone wishing to learn more about Bothmer Gymnastics and the Movement curriculum in the Steiner school, should come along on the 29th January 2009.

Celebrating the festival of Michaelmas

By Jo Sawfoot, Class 1/2 teacher

“Heavenly Hero Michael, stay close to my soul
That on the earth I may do the good
And conquer the darkness, with my love”

Modern journalism has of late, taken to presenting a rather gloomy perspective of our disturbingly increasing “amorality”. There seems to be, more and more, a need for a unifying mythology to help society in general, but children more particularly, to connect with the age old struggle of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Within the Steiner-Waldorf education movement, the story of the archangel Michael and his triumph over the dragon has always served to enact this drama in a vivid inspirational way which remains memorable for the children throughout their lives.

Our approach to the festival is to guide the children, through music and movement, from a sense of turbulence to a place of calm containment – Michael does not ‘slay’ the dragon – rather he tames it. In the school, we use a billowing red cloth to embody the agitated beast, which the younger class children have

to flap ever more wildly to a rising crescendo of drum beats – which the older class children provide. On a signal the drums begin to slow and calm - as the older children control their impulse to anarchy - their example and the lessening tempo provide the necessary constraint for the younger children to physically ‘calm’ the dragon, while the youngest of all, protected by the sheltering shields of the older class, pin the dragon down with their swords.

We have songs to sing, poems to recite and Eurythmy pieces to perform – all celebrating the bravery and strength of the Michael figure. But of course what the children experience is their own inner strength and resilience. The focus of the festival is very much within, and this experience of inner strength is far more potent when the festival is celebrated as ritual more than performance – in this way it will resonate between them with much greater clarity. This is the main reason why the Michaelmas festival is generally celebrated in Steiner Schools amongst the children only – the pageantry serves as a tool for deep and crucial work.

I hope that this piece has managed to impart some of the spirit of our Michaelmas work to you all, and I wish you all a very joyful Michaelmas tide, with at least one shooting star for everyone.

News from Chestnut Kindergarten

From Anna & Margaret

Harvest time has been very busy indeed in kindergarten. We have threshed wheat together, and then ground it into flour to make our bread. We have also collected apples from our garden and made delicious crumble. We are looking forward to making apple juice too! The children’s play has been full of imagination and they are settling well into their new environment.

News from Maple Kindergarten

From Sarah & Susan

There was a moment when Susan and Sarah shared a mutual glance that expressed the satisfaction of finally being in their new roles. The children had almost immediately befriended each other and instantly started creating a beautiful disorder to their new surroundings.

The Maple children seem to have already made the kindergarten their own – experimenting with the acoustics of the room, seeing how fast they can ride Harry (the rocking horse), sharing great anecdotes with each other at snack time and contributing interesting objects to the nature table.

The children are always excited to see their Chestnut friends in the meadow, and to bring back apples on the “Maple Train” for Fridays baking, then returning for a little story before the end of the day.

Both children and teachers are benefitting from the rhythm of the day, and enjoying the space. It feels great for all of us to be making use of such a special, new building.

Autumn term lessons for class one & two

By Jo Sawfoot

The combined class 1/2 curriculum has certainly got off to a flying start. The children seem to be motivating each other well, especially in the area of their main lesson work, and they are making solid progress in their separate fields.

After our recitation, rhythmic time and songs, the children settle down to our current main lesson block of form drawing. This will probably be the only 4 week main lesson block of form drawing that we will do together this year and it is a crucial stepping stone for all our literacy work in the coming months.

Class one are concentrating on straight lines, circles and spirals, having been reliably informed that ‘everything in the world is either a straight line or a curve’. (They delight in trying to prove me wrong, but haven’t found anything so far!) Most importantly, all our work on writing this year will involve the skilful execution of straight lines and curves, so a good start in these forms will provide solid foundations for the rest of the year. They have all taken to the main lesson work like ducks to water, and I have been greatly impressed by their enthusiasm and maturity.

Class two have been wrestling with the challenges of mirror forms – to the left and right of the vertical mid-point, crossing over the midpoint and soon crossing the horizontal line. This work has been found to be invaluable for strengthening the left-right brain connection and thus improving chances for an uncomplicated acquisition of literacy skills. Their competence and ability in this tricky work has been a joy to behold and despite the stresses of the premises move and our larger number now the classes are combined, class two are still rising magnificently to the challenges I set them, (I hope that vice versa can also be said to be the case!)

When we finish this 4-week main lesson block, we will embark on the voyage of discovery with our alphabet letters – upper case for Class One and lower case for Class Two. For the first term of the year, while I introduce our alphabet work, I will be using the Class

One curriculum of fairy tales (although I am weaving in some Russian and Swedish tales for extra ‘spice’ for Class Two).

After half term we will have a numeracy main lesson block, involving work on the essence of each number, and how to write the numbers both in Roman Numerals and Arabic forms. Class Two will be able to revise their work on number bonds at this point. In the advent period, it is traditional to present the ‘angel letters’ – the vowels – and I plan to do this with the much loved advent stories I used last year. Class Two will continue with writing more complex pieces and begin the process of ‘reading’ their own writing in preparation for the spring work on sample readers.

It sounds like an awful lot to pack in – but the children’s enthusiasm makes the work flow along and I am constantly so grateful that, in the words of the morning verse, they do indeed “Love to work and learn” with all their might. I am a lucky teacher and we have all made an excellent start to this autumn term, my heartfelt thanks to all who have helped us along the way.

Class 3/4 curriculum – Autumn term

By Michael Higgins

The first 4 week main lesson block has been spent studying Norse myths, literacy and Celtic form drawing. Class 3/4 is also beginning to look at what people do as occupations, e.g. farming, building etc. Folk music is a good introduction to the occupations of different people around the world and the first song the children have been learning is a Begging song.

Every week the class are taking and learning different songs from around the world; so far they have learnt an Alaskan war chant, a festive song from Sierra Leone and an Italian tragic song. They have also been working on the song of Mimir; this Irish song is based on advice to a would-be King:

*“Be not too wise, nor too foolish,
Be not too conceited, nor too diffident
Be not too haughty, nor too humble
Be not too talkative, nor too silent,
Be not too hard, nor too feeble.
If you be too wise, men will expect too much of you;
If you be too foolish, you will be deceived;
If you be too conceited, you will be thought vexatious;
If you be too humble, you will be without honour;
If you be too talkative, you will not be heeded;
If you be too silent, you will not be regarded;
If you be too hard, you will be broken;
If you be too feeble, you will be crushed.”*

The Celtic form drawings have been based on plait, key and step patterns.

The study of Norse mythology is a typical class 4 theme and it is the last time in legend where the gods and humans are still very closely interconnected. It contrasts to last year's class 2/3 study of the Old Testament in which one God issues commands from heaven and has absolute authority over the people. In Norse legend, there are many gods and they are not all good. The relevance to children and the Steiner curriculum, is that by class 3/4 children are beginning to question the authority of adults and the Norse myths help to meet this questioning that is taking place within the child.

In this current study of Norse Mythology, chapter one is "The Creation"; chapter two is "The War of the Aesir" and Chapter 3 is "The building of Asgard's Wall". Each week a different chapter is studied as part of the main lesson.

In clay lessons (on Tuesdays for class 3/4), the subject matter from the previous week is covered; so, for example, in week 3, the children moulded/created Mimir's head from the song of Mimir introduced in week 2.

To support the children's learning of literacy, they have been writing sentences in connection with the Norse Myth content and the alliterative content of the poem "Forge me with Fire". The class have also been doing group and individual work on an alliterative alphabet animal poem, where they look at two animals for every letter from A to Z.

The class 3/4 children have been practising step-by-step drawings of dragons in preparation for painting dragons onto their own shields for the Michaelmas celebration. Painting lessons are again generally based on the Norse myths; so far this term the children have painted the rainbow bridge – the meeting of fire and ice from chapter 1 of Bifrost.

Eurythmy lessons support the alliterative work in main lesson, using Eurythmic gestures.

In music the class are continuing to work on the flutes and with notation (learning to read and write music); they are also beginning to look at rounds. As part of the outdoor rhythmic session each morning, the children are learning a Victorian circle song, "Green Gravel", which they are also learning to play on the flute. In preparation for Michaelmas, the children are learning two Michael songs.

The next main lesson block for this class is in numbers.

German & Handwork Lessons in school

By Ms Anka (Ann-Kathleen Krätzig)

"Guten Morgen, guten Morgen, wir winken uns zu..." - a German greeting-song with which we always begin our lesson and "Hallo" as well to everybody else who does not know me yet. I am a new subject teacher, just arrived from Germany. My tasks for the future will be to expand the horizons of the children towards another foreign language and additionally, to cultivate what Rudolf Steiner said is the real difference between us human beings and the animals and thus, real freedom – the free and creative use of our hands. I am looking forward to a colourful and creative school year and to get to know everybody by and by.

Parent and child groups update

From Helen, Sylvia and Tara

Our parent & child groups have now moved into our new space. Our new room is beautiful and has been lovingly decorated over the summer break. We now have a group every weekday morning with the playgroup having moved to Friday morning. This September has begun with very full groups and the response to our new room has been wonderful. Both staff and families are settling into our new premises well and we look forward to many happy years at this site. We would like to thank all the parents who helped to prepare our new room, especially the parents who made our curtains at very short notice and those who scrubbed the bathroom floor for a whole morning.

There have been some staff changes in the past six months. Helen Kibblewhite and Sylvia van Bruggen remain as leaders, and we would like to welcome Tara Phillips, as the new playgroup leader. Sylvia and Tara will be sharing leadership of the Wednesday group, which Tara was leading in the summer on a temporary basis. We are sorry to say a fond farewell to Richard House, who was a founding member of Steiner Education in Norwich and has led the playgroup last year, as he is now lecturing more at Roehampton University. However, he will still continue to champion Steiner early years education in the media.

Susan McGurk and Cati Majtenyi remain as assistants, and we would like to thank them for all their hard work and reliable support. We are currently looking for more assistants, who are interested in working on a supply basis and training later to work as leaders, which will help us to continue to provide parent and child groups in the future.

Sylvia, Helen and Tara are going to attend the 0-3 year's workshop at Steiner House on Saturday 25th October. Anyone interested in this workshop, or in the 0-3 years long course starting in January, should contact the parent and child group staff, or contact Rudolph Steiner House in London.

We are keen to explore the possibility of an outdoors group and are currently looking for a suitable outdoor venue. If you have any ideas or know of a suitable location, please let us know.

Cleaning

Caroline May (Jasmin's mum) is organising the end of week kindergarten cleaning rota, while Sue Lowther (Joseph's mum in class 3/4) is organising a rota for school parents. Cleaning can take place from lunchtime on Friday until 3.30pm at the latest, when Caroline will lock up the building. We suggest that if you're on the cleaning rota and you're able to bring your own Hoover, that this might speed the cleaning process up.

If you are cleaning and you have your children with you, please be aware of where they are and what they are doing, as you are responsible for their safety and for ensuring that they do not get up to any mischief whilst you are busy! In particular, you may want to remind children, that they must not go on the external fire exits or climb the external walls.

Workdays & work on the building

The school currently cannot afford to pay a caretaker, so two or three parents are effectively covering essential daily caretaker roles (e.g. cleaning toilets, operating the heating system etc.) on a voluntary basis. However, we're looking for regular volunteer help with certain weekly routine tasks, such as litter picking and sweeping leaf debris on the playground to prevent it becoming too slippery. Thank you to those parents who've been helping out with these tasks so far.

We are also able to offer some simple redecoration work during the normal school day, including filling holes in walls, cleaning windows, rubbing down and preparing windows for painting, painting of walls in less-used parts of the building etc. However, we need to know in advance which days you are coming, so we can be sure someone is available to show you the work and that we have the appropriate tools/materials ready.

All parents working in the building during school time will also need to be CRB-checked and character references will need to be collected.

Workdays during term time will be mainly for essential repairs and maintenance rather than redecoration, as we have to be careful not to create a mess that could interfere with normal operation of the premises. We can be a bit more ambitious with workdays during holidays in terms of continuing with the internal refurbishment works, because we can make sure there's a cleaning day organised at the end of each holiday so the building is ready for use again at the start of each term/half term.

Use of premises in the evening

There are a number of requests, both from groups within our organisation, and from local community groups in the Lakenham area, to access to use the building for evening meetings/events. Whilst there is no emergency lighting in the building, we have to be very careful about what evening use we can allow. For safety reasons, once a meeting is given the go ahead, a nominated person will be responsible for safe use of the building, including the provision of torches (in case of an emergency or failure of the lighting) and ensuring that only the ground floor rooms/toilets are used. All booking of the building must be done via the administration office before advertising any meeting/event, regardless of its purpose.

School travel plan

As part of taking on the new building from Norfolk County Council, it has been agreed that we will develop a school travel plan, which looks at how people currently travel to and from school, and which supports helping parents and staff to find more environmentally sustainable ways of travelling to school.

County Council are offering quite a bit of support with access to grants for cycle racks and extending schools park & ride schemes to include our school in the drop-off points. They've also indicated that if there are regularly used road routes used by clusters of families who cycle to school, that County may be able to improve the routes for cycles (e.g. cycle lanes). To help inform the travel plan, we'll need to carry out some research into current travel arrangements, so we'd be really grateful for your help and cooperation on this matter.

As part of the process of producing our School Travel Plan, we'll also be exploring the possibility of changing

our start and finish times, which would help reduce potential conflicts with parents arriving and departing Lakenham Primary School.

Shelley Folland, mum of Breagha in kindergarten, has kindly agreed to take a lead on coordinating and developing the travel plan, and the associated research, which is greatly appreciated.

The Great Outdoors!

Teaching staff are taking a lead on how we use the outdoors in terms of the immediate needs of the children and the outdoor curriculum, we're aware there are lots of ideas amongst parents about how the outdoor space might be used and enhanced. So we're hoping to shortly organise an open meeting to give everyone the chance to share their ideas with us and each other. Alternatively, if you're not able to come to evening meetings, please feel free to write/sketch any thoughts/ideas you might have down on paper and submit them in the first instance to the administration team.

However, we'll also have to bear in mind that whatever we might ideally want to do in the grounds may need to be tempered by practical and planning constraints. The listed buildings status of both the school building and the beautiful flint wall surrounding the building and the playground mean we have to seek planning permission for any constructions in the adjacent playing fields.

Garden play equipment

Last year, whilst at Bowthorpe Road, the school/kindergarten formed close links with a community group working with the Norfolk Fire Service. Most Fridays during the summer term, the young people in the group were to be seen helping keep our garden beautiful. Vicky Bond, from Norfolk Fire Service, also obtained a grant to buy us some simple wooden play equipment. We have just heard from the fire service that we will be able to shortly have this play equipment installed in the tree field at our current premises. We're seeking planning advice because of the listed status of the building, but because of the timing, may have to seek retrospective planning permission.

Flower arranging

Tor Jeckells (mum of Isabella in Kindergarten, and Toby in Parent & Child group) has kindly offered to sort out flowers in corridors and public areas every Tuesday morning, so we can keep the school looking beautiful and cared for. We would be grateful for donations of flowers & foliage from your gardens, which can be placed in a bucket of water which will be kept in the entrance area (just behind the information boards) on Monday and Tuesday mornings each week. Thank you.

An update from the publicity & events/fundraising teams

From Claire Byrne (contact details at the end)

Now we are in our big School, the teams are already getting together to plan events and fundraising initiatives and need people on board to provide any help, big or small, to really mark our presence in Norwich as a seriously evolving and progressive School establishment.

The Publicity & Events team is primarily responsible for promoting awareness of Steiner education and raising the profile of our School through advertising, public events and Information days; the Fundraising team's main aims are to raise much needed money for the school to boost income and assist general cashflow .

For those parents new to the School, many other things happen behind the scenes, which can't be detailed here as there isn't the space, but the teams work hard to help the School grow and flourish, so if anyone can spare a little time to get involved, it would be greatly appreciated... we try and hold regular fortnightly meetings at each other's houses or hopefully at the School in the near future, and we endeavour to restrict the meetings to around 2 hours - it's not as daunting as it may seem and can be fun too! We do not ask for any specific level of commitment, and welcome all skills and contributions. We really do need volunteers so we can aspire to do even more in the future. Below are just a few events coming up in the near future.
(*School is used to refer to all groups within the Steiner community)

Claire, parent of James in Class 1 on behalf of the Publicity & Events/Fundraising teams. e-mail : publicity@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk for more info or ring 01603 485544