

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

12th July 2018

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 13th July – Last day of term

Tuesday 4th September – Autumn term starts

Monday 22nd October – Half term

Friday 14th December to Monday 7th January – Christmas holiday

KINDERGARTEN: THE SPRING AND SUMMER FESTIVALS

Debora Walker, Kindergarten Teacher

In our previous article, we left Kindergarten just as the children were about to enjoy their well-earned holiday and look forward to celebrating the twelve days of Christmas. Each of them took home a golden star to hang on the branches of their Christmas trees.

*Deep mid-winter drawing near,
May Light arise in our Garden here.*

We returned in the New Year, just after *Epiphany and The Festival of the Three Kings*, when Winter had really set in:

*Deep is the winter, cold and wet and grey,
The earth has gone to sleep and spring is far away....*

This was a time when we were able to draw upon our inner light, the warmth and hope that we had banked during the previous summer and autumn, that kept us going through the long cold dark nights. In addition, the activities and winter ring-time that we engaged in were energetic and warming – the ring-time in particular, an extended poem to those who continue to work hard and keep going through those dark weeks before the first signs of Spring appeared. Even Little Duck Shingebiss in our story at the end of the morning session showed tremendous courage as, despite the odds, he refused to run away from Great Chief North Wind.

*"North wind, north wind, fierce in feature,
You are still my fellow creature.
Blow your worst, you can't freeze me.
I fear you not and so I'm free"*

Our first Spring Festival in Kindergarten was *Candlemas* on Friday 2nd February. We helped to warm the earth by lighting an earth candle in our garden in order to encourage the growth of the first of the spring bulbs.

*"Little seeds lie hidden
In the dark brown earth,
Waiting until bidden
To rise up for their birth"*

Although we did not celebrate Shrove Tuesday in Kindergarten this year we were still able to make pancakes to celebrate Candlemas as elsewhere in the world it is a traditional treat to eat on this day.

Although we were moving towards the Spring, Winter was finding it hard to loosen his hold over the Earth:

*When March winds blow "who-00-00-00",
In a gruff and growly way,
They are saying "keep your mittens on, it's blowing cold today".*

*But when they blow "who-00-00-00",
In a soft and gentle way,
They are saying "take your snowsuit off, it's blowing warm today"*

Eventually though, after blizzards and snow, Lady Spring was now finally on her way....

*King Winter goodbye,
King Winter goodbye,
you may no longer stay.
Lady Spring is on her way.*

We held an early celebration of **Easter** when we held our annual Easter egg hunt at the end of the spring term.

We returned in the Summer term and began to prepare for the **May Festival**. Every morning we practiced dancing around our mini maypole in Kindergarten. The flowers were all blooming at the same time so there was suddenly a profusion of beautiful daffodils, tulips, cherry blossom, primroses and bluebells in our garden. We made willow crowns for the children to take home to be decorated with flowers and brought in for the festival.

*Here's a branch of snowy may,
A branch the fairies gave me.
Who would like to dance today,
With a branch the fairies gave me?
Dance away, dance away,
Holding high the branch of may.*

Later in May we went on to celebrate the **Whitsun Festival**. The children came dressed in white in order to reflect the mood of the festival. We told the story of the Whitsun Daisy and made white Whitsun doves, which we hung outside on the trees in the kindergarten garden. The doves symbolise the gift of Peace and Reconciliation. Peace which is achieved through heart-felt communication in the Spirit of Truth.

*Flaming light, shine so bright,
Flaming light, give your might.
Make us strong, and make us bold,
Turn our words to living gold.*

"Whitsun is pre-eminently a festival of flowers. If a man has a true feeling for this Festival he will go out among the buds and blossoms opening under the influence of the sun....The heart of man as it opens may be symbolised by the flower opening itself to the sun; and what pours down from the sun.."

Rudolf Steiner

The final summer festival we celebrated in Kindergarten was that of *St. John's*. We made felted St. John's fire-balls. The older kindergarten children (those who turn 6 in their final year) are called **Sun** children. They are strong and energetic, imaginative and curious. This festival mirrors their inner being as they approach the second seven-year period of childhood. They watched the school children jumping the fire and yearned to experience this themselves. They now began to actively look forward to the exciting challenges of Class 1.

At the same time, through the summer months, they were working hard to finish all their projects, practice their graduation ring time and devise their end of year puppet show. Our stories now contained the trials, tribulations and successes that this age group require to feed their inner fire. Stories such as "The Friend of the Bees" and "The Frog Prince". Even so, the dream consciousness of the first seven years still remains strong within them, and at the height of the Summer they are connected to, and dreaming of, the depths of the Winter as they continue to sing the advent songs and carols, and re-enact the Nativity story in their play.

ROWAN CLASS

Mrs. Mason, Class Teacher

Rowan class have been very busy practising for their class play. The play represents several fables that the children have learnt about in class. They have listened to the Fable being told and then explored the tale's deep meaning through drama and modelling.

They are now beginning to write their own accounts of these fables into their writing books and are feeling very proud of their own work.

Last week the whole class went on a very long walk around Whitlingham Broad and then continued the walk back to the School. We began walking around the Broad at 9.15 and after plenty of food and water breaks walked back through the school gates at 3.25! This was a great achievement and we were just in time to eat the ice lollies in the freezer.

Half way around the Broad, the children looked back across the great expanse of water. They could not believe how far they had walked in such a short time. It was not even snack time!

I think one of the highlights of the day for the class, was to climb a high mound in the woodlands and slide down on the other side. This was done many times!

The children are looking forward to many more adventures together!

MAPLE CLASS

Mrs. Higgins, Class Teacher

Maple class concluded their studies on Local Geography, and celebrated the closing of their school year, with a walk to the Norfolk Broads. It was a very nice day out, and I was impressed with the children's positive attitude, optimism and stamina – the walk was more challenging than I had anticipated, with grass, full of thistles and nettles, growing taller than most of the children.

Here is one student's account of the day –

We began our trip at Upton Dyke. There were lots of sailing boats there. We saw an Irish wolf hound

and it was huge. We followed the path by the river Bure and saw lots of boats sailing past. Dominic thought that all of the motor boats should be called stinky. We stopped at an old drainage mill and had some food. There we saw a boat sail past with a man in a pirate hat and a woman in a pink bikini! We kept walking and soon the grassy path started to be longer. Harry and I made a pole with feathers on top. Eventually we got to South Walsham broad, after seeing an ice-cream boat. We took our shoes off and paddled in the water.

On the trip we saw 5 huge, elegant herons; 2 stinky, deady, dead fish; 8 talkative ducks; 1 gleaming white swan; 1 very curious mallard; 13 buzzy damsel flies; 6 huge, colourful emperor dragon flies and millions of pretty butterflies!

(A. Newton)

It was a perfect way to end the summer term, and all of the students had earned a day out in the sun – they have worked hard over the year.

SEQUOIA CLASS

Mr. Higgins, Class Teacher

This term Sequoia Class has been working with the book, 'Lost Words', by Robert Macfarlane. This book takes as its inspiration about 40 words taken out of the Junior Oxford English Dictionary in 2007, as they were deemed to be no longer relevant to contemporary children. The children each chose one of these words and wrote acrostic poems based on them. Here are four examples of the children's work:

Ravenous Ravens Rip up Rodents

Attacking aggressively

Violent and Vicious, Vile and Villainous

Eating in the evening sun

Neatly Nipping the Neck of their prey

He flies as though no one is there

Earth's creatures the heron and the hare

Ravishingly he adapts to life

Once known as the guardian of the night

No one is there to witness the light

Rainbows of colour lurk in pitch black,

A dark, cruel bird can have joy, it's a secret!

Very belittled for being the home of deep, dark horror, though there is that small secret, can you keep it?

Evil may seem to describe the raven to perfection, but even ravens chase rainbows with childhood affection.

Never judge a raven by how they appear, or else soon you'll be the one everyone shall fear.

Rainbow feathers fly through the sky

And baby ravens waiting in the cold

Vicious is the hunter looking for the nest

Every hunter has his gun, running to the

Nest, the rainbow raven hears her baby's call

WILLOW CLASS

Mrs. Fraser, Class Teacher

Well, this will be the last Talking Trees I will write to tell of Willow Class' adventures. They did so well on their mammoth cycle ride to Stiffkey, in their fabulously performed class play, and as I write, they prepare to stagger us again with their Circus skills. It's been an exciting two years for me, watching them grow and develop, hearing the beginnings of their social consciousness coming to the fore in discussion. What marvels they all are! It's been a total privilege to have known them since Class 2/3, and to have played but a small part in their education. It goes without saying that these will be treasured memories mostly made up of laughter, song and most of all, joy.

May I take this opportunity to thank the many friends, parents and staff who have shown our family such love and support with the loss of Justin, and to say that, as always, the tread of your feet on our path will be forever welcome.

OAK CLASS

Sarah Brocklehurst, Upper School Teacher

What a year this has been for Oak class - a year filled with opportunity and new experiences; Oak truly are a class blessed with fortune.

The trip to Devon was an experience that will live long in the memories of those that were there. As the first class from the school to make the journey to Oxen Park Farm, there was much that was unknown and there was a spirit of adventure that persisted for the duration of the trip. The difficult weather only enhanced the pioneering feel of things with the snow and cold temperatures 'showing us what we were all capable of'. It was a transformative experience for many and whilst some had their struggles, everyone ended the trip with a greater understanding of their own capacities.

Jumping from one 'frying pan' into the next, the class soon found themselves immersed in the complexities of a full five act Shakespearean drama. The commitment and level of determination shown by the class ensured that everyone was able to take part to the best of their ability. The resulting performance was memorable.

A week of work experience followed Shakespeare. Placements were diverse, from music stores to organic farms, and from the Broads Authority to financial advisors. Everybody, including the visiting students, found placements - some came away knowing for certain that they never wanted to work in such environments again, others with a new appreciation for the world of work and everything that life may have to offer.

The year comes to a close with Organic Chemistry, Conic Sections, Art, German, Cooking, CPR, Leadership Development and a long prepared for Circus performance (another first for the class and school).

BIRCH CLASS

Sarah Brocklehurst, Upper School Teacher

Birch class have experienced a year packed with personal development and academic achievement. The pupils have faced many challenges but have met them with resilience and generally a smile! In English the lessons have been filled with stories and poetry about individual identity, the search for truth and perspective. In January the class encountered Parzival, the heroic knight, whose epic journey through many trials and difficulties leads him back to himself. It takes Parzival years to overcome his soul wound before he finally reaches transformation after long periods of suffering, isolation and loneliness. It is only at the end of his journey that Parzival is able to integrate the faculties of thinking, feeling and willing that will enlighten him. The pupils of Birch read these tales, contemplated the ideas held within and explored how they related, both to their own personal journey, as well as humanity as a whole.

During the summer term Birch studied the lives and poetry of Keats, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Blake, and Wordsworth. The words of the 'Romantic Poets' filled the class, immersing the pupils in 200 year old ideas that seem wholly relevant today. This was quickly followed by Circus training, as well as Functional Anatomy, Mechanics, Botany, Textiles, Class 12 Project Preparation, History of Art, Maths, Bothmer, and Music.

Preparations for the end of year play now dominate these last weeks of the summer term. Birch pupils are embracing the challenges presented by learning lines, and staging a complex, fast paced story. The academic year closes with a great sense of accomplishment and the very real need for a rest before heading full speed into their final year at school.

KINDERGARTEN TRAINING COURSE

Maddie Heley, Kindergarten Assistant

After four years of study (part-time I should probably add), the end is finally in sight. All assignments have been completed, my performance has been assessed in person and all relevant information has been filed away in the correct coloured folder. Hopefully my level 5 diploma in Steiner Waldorf early childhood studies will soon be on its way to me in a brown paper envelope.

It has been quite a journey, from only having the vaguest idea as to what Steiner Waldorf education might be, to actually working in a real school, with real pupils and real staff. Watching the theory become reality before my very eyes has been more fascinating and rewarding than I could possibly have imagined.

The training required a good grounding in the principles of the kindergarten, balanced by an equal amount of personal development. This was achieved through one Saturday a month in London, and 4, week long, residentials in Stroud over 2 years. Oh, and a few essays as well. Lectures, painting, singing and craft work, amongst other things, all helped to guide us through the training. Along with patient and experienced teachers, who shared their knowledge with us and didn't seem to mind too much if our essays were a little delayed.

After this I was lucky enough to come to Norwich for my 2 years of practical experience. I have learnt huge amounts, not just from Debora's example, but from the children as well. They have introduced me to new words, new games, new ways of looking at the world and the fact that Christmas carols are

not just for Christmas. Apparently it's never the wrong time of year for the Sans day carol (or the green grows the holly song as we know it in kindergarten.) It does only seem to have one verse though!

The last 4 years have confirmed that my initial interest in Steiner Waldorf education was the right choice for me. As I finish my training I'm looking forward to the future, to all the new experiences still to come and most importantly, to finding out what the other verses to the Sans day carol are.

FAREWELL LETTER TO WILLOW CLASS

Susan McGurk, Learning Support

Dear Willow Class,

As I write, you are on a journey cycling and camping across Norfolk. I wonder how you are and reflect on the journey that I have been on with Willow Class for the past seven years.

Some of you I met in Parent and Child Group, some in Kindergarten and many of you have joined along the way. You all bring different but valued qualities to the class.

We have recited poetry, played flutes, sung, danced, knitted, read, painted, solved problems and asked countless questions together. We have repeated the cycle of the year and celebrated its festivals. We have been through joy and sorrow, gain and loss. I have watched you grow and blossom into the wonderful young people you are becoming.

Thank you for travelling along the road with me and as we go in different directions I wish each of you fulfilment and satisfaction on the road ahead.

May the qualities of strength and flexibility found in the Willow tree and in Willow Class continue to serve you.

Wishing you well,

Susan McGurk

NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES

Rachel Hales, Chair of Trustees

In March this year John Hales retired from the Trustee Board after eleven years of service to the school. We are very grateful to him for his commitment, dedication and all the time he has given. We wish him a happy and healthy retirement.

We are delighted to welcome three new Trustees who have joined us during the early part of this year. Their appointments were officially confirmed at the AGM in June. The Board is now seven members strong so we are looking forward to the year ahead and getting on with the role of governance.

Reports of our meetings are posted on the school notice board in the entrance hall. If you wish to contact us the details are on the school website.

PUPIL PATHWAYS

Jacqui Armour and Carlotta Lizier, NZCSE coordinators

As the school year draws to a close we are busy planning for Oak's first year of the New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education, and Birch's final year at school. This seems like a good time to check in with Elder class, our first graduating class, and see where they are now.

When they left us in the summer some were headed for university or college, and had been offered places for:

- Commercial Music at Bath Spa University
- Mathematics and computer sciences at York University
- Music and Art and Music at Bath Spa University
- Computer graphics, imaging and multimedia at the UEA
- Photography at UCL
- Music at Chichester University
- Mechanical engineering at City College Norwich
- Music at Durham University
- Level 4 Drama BTEC at the Garage
- Early Years Educator Course at City College Norwich
- HNC musical theatre course.

We have caught up with most of them again, and they are studying at university or college, working, as a Barista, a chef, an assistant at the John Innes Institute.

One student has now received an unconditional offer from the University of Surrey to study a Masters degree in Aerospace Engineering.

Others are preparing to study philosophy, political science, economics and sociology, drama at Anglia Ruskin University and drama and scriptwriting courses at the UEA.

One former student from Elder Class has written a short article describing his first year at university:

Since leaving school my time at university has been absolutely amazing and one of the best experiences of my life. It has been a lot of work, with many lectures every day, but even so I've been able to enjoy every moment of it.

Even with all this work I have managed to enjoy all the many other activities university has to offer by joining different societies (mostly the performance ones!). The best one I have joined has been the Pantomime society (where I have already been the Dame twice) which reminds me of every time Elder ever put on a performance and has really made my time at university that much better.

I am so glad for my time at the school, which has prepared me for the hard academic life I now lead as well as the fun and quirky side I always enjoyed at the school.

In this article we are looking back to the end of last year, when Elder Class completed their journey through Norwich Steiner School:

REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 18th JUNE 2018

Ann Swain, Trustee and SENDCO

Looking over the academic year 2016-17 it is with a very justifiable sense of pride that the teachers, pupils, parents and trustees can celebrate what, in many ways was a crowning year with many moments of accomplishment, blossoming and tests duly met.

The academic year began with a full cohort of classes 3½ - 19 year olds for the first time. This crowning after steady growth over the past 15 years from early beginnings that Carol Ainsworth described so well in Talking Trees July 2017.

The school enrolment was at its greatest with 110 pupils - 11 children in the kindergarten, 49 in the lower school and 50 in the upper school. With roughly 15 of those pupils visiting from abroad over the course of the school year, some for short and others for longer stays.

With pupils in all 8 classes, space was at a premium. Cramped into every available inside space, there was very little room sometimes for too much extra. But in true fashion the teachers and pupils made do and accommodated easily and graciously.

In the spring term we were inspected by the Schools Inspection Service (SIS) whose findings included statements that:

“Leadership and management are good, being strong and effective, and under continual review. Management groups have been developed to address the school’s identified needs; self-evaluation is clear, accurate and rigorous.

The effectiveness of the school’s strategic planning is evident in the extension into the 16 to 19 age range. Planning and administration for this sixth form group is particularly good.

The early years’ provision is good. Its planning and organisation are especially good. The pupils’ personal development is outstanding.

The school’s procedures for safeguarding pupils are good. The designated leaders for safeguarding have created a culture of vigilance with regard to keeping children safe. They ensure that policies and staff training are up-to-date with the latest government guidance.”

The Trustees recognised with thanks the very focused work that went into preparing the school to give evidence of all learning and development we knew to be taking place. The inspectors were impressed, and we celebrated the acknowledgement received.

Besides shorter day trips, Sequoia travelled down to Sussex to take part in the UK Steiner Waldorf Olympics and brought back medals for endurance, grace, speed, strength, motivation and more.

Birch travelled to Germany for a week to explore first-hand aspects of history that books can only faintly relay.

As Elder, the first graduating class, completed their work towards being awarded the Steiner Schools Certificate, the final weeks of the academic year were full of students finalising and presenting their

projects and plays, as well as their final graduation ceremony during which the class recalled, through song and speeches, their journey from early beginnings with Michael Higgins into the upper school, with many visiting teachers as well as those based within the school.

As a school we bid farewell, not only to the Elder Class pupils, but also to David Luff who had taught both woodwork and music, to Andrea Lord who had taught German for several years and to Jeff van Zyl, who had been key to building up the upper school and the certificate programme.

With one less class the next year, the school will face challenges to recruit more children and families to fill the classes. Focus will also be on recruiting trustees to step into the shoes of those who have faithfully supported the school for so many years and who look forward with a sense of relief to passing the baton on to new-comers.

The very moving words of Elder Class pupil, Jessica O'Leary Jones delivered at the end of term graduation ceremony concluded the academic year and encapsulate the sentiment of many of us.

"I've come to the conclusion that this school has taught me a bigger lesson than mere normal education provides, I will walk out of this school with a deep passion to become my best self and know my best self to be true and for that I am eternally grateful to my classmates in Elder and my teachers."

She then quoted the words of an anonymous native American:

*"I honour the energy of Elder which sees the end from the beginning.
Many lifetimes I have been here
I have the knowledge that I have changed myself again and again.
I will start from where I am now and continue to persist in my path
I will succeed"*

I'm sure we will succeed and thank all for their part played so well in this task.

WORK DAYS IN THE SUMMER

Liz Cooker, Cleaner

This summer I have a cleaning timetable in which I will concentrate on each room, starting with Ash Class. We will clean all surfaces, paintwork, corners and behind furniture, pipes, radiators, windows and look at cleaning the carpet, or at least any marks or stains. We will then move on to Rowan Class and all other classrooms, all areas of the kindergarten, followed by the cloakrooms and toilets, lab and gym, finishing with stairways and corridors towards the end of the holiday.

During the final weekend I will be in to do a final dusting, vacuuming and sweeping outside, ready to welcome the children back for the new academic year.

Please come and help! Sometimes I think I can see parents wondering why they are cleaning radiators or wiping walls when at home they have a pile of washing-up and are three weeks behind with the laundry. However, cleaning at school is different – it's about creating an environment which can support the beauty the teachers create with nature tables and artistic displays and which can help to welcome the children back to a building which has been made new by all the work and attention given to it over the summer.

Helping with work days is part of the contract between the school and parents. If you have never

been to one, or you haven't been for a long time, please think of coming for a morning, a couple of hours or even an hour. All time given makes a difference and is very helpful! I also look forward to seeing the much appreciated regular helpers.

These are the days you can help:

August

9th, 10th, 13th (Upstairs Classrooms)

14th, 16th (Downstairs Classrooms)

20th (Kindergarten)

21st, 22nd (Upstairs cloakrooms and toilets, lab and gym.)

23rd (Upper School toilets, entrance hall, corridors, stairs.)

September

1st, 2nd (Final Clean)

If you would like a specific job or would like to help on a day I haven't mentioned please let me know as I might be able to be flexible. If you can only come at the weekend you might like to help with the final clean, or please ask me about other weekends.

It's always helpful if you can let me know you are coming - lizcooker@gmail.com or 07881624748. Otherwise, please just turn up.

I look forward to seeing you!

GOODBYES

We would like to thank Helena Fraser for her time working at the school. We are very grateful to Helena for stepping in to become Willow Class teacher, and for working with the class for their two years before upper school. We thank her very much and wish her well for the time to come.

Susan McGurk has been involved in the school for many years assisting in a parent and child group, working in kindergarten and as teaching assistant as well as doing learning support with several students. We would like to thank her for all she has given the school during this time. It is not quite goodbye as Susan will still be around the school as a possible supply assistant for kindergarten and as a parent.

Thank you too to Katie Baxter for her time given as handwork assistant.

