

# Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School, Kindergartens & Parent & Child Groups

1<sup>st</sup> December 2009

## Dates for your diary

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December – Christmas celebration  
Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February – Parent's evening (Birch)  
Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February – School Open Day  
Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> March – Parents evening  
(Kindergartens)  
Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> May – Parent's evening (Birch)

## From Birch Class

By Sarah Higgins, class teacher

The temperamental November weather has been the perfect impetus for the children in Birch class to understand the necessity of building a shelter. A lot of emphasis was placed on the significance of the hearth. This coincided with the Martinmas festival, after which the children built a tiny tipi in the playing field – with demonstrations and precise hard work from two kind and knowledgeable volunteers. We are now looking for the right moment to sit around the fire in front of the tipi, pretending we are at the dawn of time, closing our ears to the passing traffic.

The children had an introduction to measurement before the building lessons. They measured some of the school with long strides of yards and cubit ropes, and then decreased in length to make their own 12 inch rulers which they used to draw and aerial map of the school building and fields.

The 7 pole tipi opens up eastward to the morning sunrise, which leads the class in to the last subject block of 2009 – time. The children have so far looked at time like a Russian doll, with all of its smaller components existing within the larger being. It is good to hear the children's explanations for a subject that is so perplexing and immense, despite continuous attempts to define it.

Finally, it has been a great beginning with Birch class. The children have been enthusiastic and produced very artistic work. Thank you to all of the parents for your support and assistance so far.

## Afternoon care; the unsung heroes....

By Rachel Heeds, school & kindergarten parent

In this article I would like to draw attention to and thank the unsung heroes of Norwich Steiner School and kindergartens - the afternoon care staff.

Due our family circumstances it became necessary for our children to attend afternoon care twice a week. I was initially concerned about how the children would cope with this, and indeed whether I was happy for the children to be away from home for such long hours when the kindergarten and lower school finish at 13:00 for most if not every day of the week.

It soon became clear that not only were the children happy to stay later, they were also benefiting from their experience in ways that were different from and additional to the benefits of kindergarten. At first Susan, now teacher in Maple kindergarten, was the afternoon care leader, and she made every effort to meet the individual needs of each child and help with any particular issues. Poppy at the time was having difficulty adjusting to kindergarten and the time she spent with Susan in afternoon care was invaluable in helping with this. Established social groups were changed when some children went home and Poppy found it easier to fit in and play with the remaining children.

Initially afternoon care was founded with the aim to provide childcare outside of normal school/kindergarten hours that was appropriate for and sympathetic to the needs of children in Steiner education. Many other settings are run in a way contradictory to the anthroposophical approach of a Steiner school and involve activities that we feel are inappropriate. They may be "awakening" for the young children and may involve things like reading. Since our children joined afternoon care it has seen some staff changes and has grown into a setting with its own identity and premise under the guidance of Priscilla Gibbons.

In my experience afternoon care has been hugely beneficial to our children, staff have gone above and beyond the call of duty to meet the needs of an individual child. For example Oscar has problems with muscle tone and co ordination and Priscilla took it upon herself to engage him in physical activities that would help to improve this whilst also helping Oscar to learn to communicate more effectively.

Afternoon care has its own rhythm, when school ends the children have around half an hour of free play followed by a blessing and then lunch. Here are a few words from Priscilla:

*“During lunch we try to promote good manners, social skills and interaction. Followed by story time which is either the children telling stories, acting out a play or singing songs individually or in small groups. When we have a lot of children I read to them instead. This is our rest period so the other children are all laying down whilst this is taking place. Emphasis is placed on communicating, listening, turn taking and respect of others opinions and beliefs. We then tidy everything away and go into one or other of the gardens for free play, seasonal and/ or gardening activities. Today for example we went into the new garden and some of the children fetched water for the willow, others dug up some of the carrots and spring onions they had grown ready to be made into their soup for tomorrow. Whilst other children helped me to set up a wormery! After which it was time for home.”*

Poppy has particularly enjoyed growing carrots and other fruit and vegetables with Priscilla and my children often emerge from afternoon care with a cherished piece of seasonal craft they have been working on that afternoon.

For many of us it is necessary to work, some of us are single parents or we may have other complex circumstances which lead to us requiring childcare outside of normal school/kindergarten hours. For some of us it may simply be that we don't have a garden or outside space for our children to play in. Whatever the reasons, it is comforting to know that there is somewhere for our children that does not undermine the magical experience of being in a Steiner school or kindergarten.

The afternoon care staff perform a complex juggling act to meet the needs of children ranging from the age of 3 to 8/9, at the same time, in the same place. Finding activities that are stimulating for the older children whilst not being simultaneously inappropriate for the little ones is no mean feat. Yet they manage it, and not just satisfactorily, the afternoon care staff do an excellent job and I have no reservations in trusting my children to them each day, in the nurturing environment they create for my children to grow in.

## News from the Kindergartens

By Susan Brown, Maple Kindergarten teacher

Our first term together in Maple is drawing to a close with the celebration of Advent and this is a time to reflect on our time together with joy and thankfulness. We would like to say grateful thanks to our new parents and children for joining us in this pioneering school and hope their time with us so far has been enjoyable, and also thank you to our existing parents for their continued support during these difficult times.

Our new children have settled well and made friends with those already in Maple and the room is full of happy laughter and house building. One morning I looked up from my work to see that there were 5 homes in the room, all covered with blankets and sheets, with doors, windows, shelves and carpets, and in each house were at least 2 to 3 children for the rest of the room was empty. They had shared out the equipment in the room and made amicable arrangements for entering each other's homes and swapping household goods amongst themselves. Of course 10 minutes later the mood had changed but for that one moment, it was peaceful and content, all good friends and neighbours. It would be lovely if all of life could be like that moment and we live in hope especially during the festive period.

Further news within the kindergartens is that due to low numbers and to ease financial costs, we will be combining the 2 rooms on Mondays and Maple will be shutting on Fridays until child numbers increase enough to warrant the staffing costs. I will be having Fridays off and the children who already attend on a Friday will be joining Chestnut in their room with Anna and Margaret.

Also, sadly, Margaret will be leaving us at half term in February to spend more time with her Grandchildren and we would like to thank her for the support and assistance she has given us in both kindergartens.

## Article RE EYFS Learning Goals

By Trevor Thorley, Administration team

Some of you may remember last winter in common with other Steiner Schools we applied for some exemptions and modifications from the Early Years Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals that referred to a) communication, language and literacy, including the learning of reading and writing; b) problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; and d) knowledge and understanding of the World.

These goals apply to children who attend the Kindergartens.

At the time we asked for the views of the then Kindergarten and Parent and Child Group parents.

We are now required to inform parents that we have now received a reply on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education, in which he has accepted most of the requested alterations for the communication, language and literacy, with one exception, that relating to the understanding of stories.

The requested modification to the Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy was rejected. Instead of the Goal of beginning to use language and vocabulary related to adding and subtracting, and recognising simple numbers, we had asked for the Goal of beginning to relate to this subject by everyday

activities. The Secretary of State rejected our request stating that there was sufficient flexibility within the Framework so that our principles of education are not compromised.

The requested modifications relating to Knowledge and Understanding of the World were largely rejected on the grounds that we state that we give answers to children's questions appropriate to their age, and within the flexibility of the Early Learning Goals this is acceptable.

The one very important request changing "Find out about and identify the uses of everyday technology and use information and communication technology and programmable toys to support learning" to Observe and find out about simple everyday technology (not including IT) to support learning" was accepted.

To avoid a very long dry article giving all the details of the response, we have scanned in the letter in full and emailed to all those parents for whom we have email addresses. Those without email who wish to read this response please ask Carol in the School office who can give you access to the document.

## News from Elder

By Mr Higgins, Class teacher

This term Elder class have been working with the earth in two differing ways. On the large scale, they have been preparing and digging a labyrinth in preparation for our Candlemas/ St. Bride's festival in February. At the smaller end of things, they have begun their formal study of Botany: a first step towards a scientific worldview. When we discussed and defined the word 'scientist' for inclusion in our vocabulary books, we decided that a true scientist was one who sees the many connections between varying disciplines and then attempts to fathom them, in order to make further connections. In this way, one can see the useful beauty of our curriculum in that, whether observing the gesture of fungi or ferns, we can relate these natural forms to artistic examples already experienced by the children in their study of Islamic or Celtic geometry, or in the movements experienced in Country dancing or Eurythmy. With the scientific materialist reductionism being so rife in our culture, it is hoped that this imaginative, connective perception of the natural world will foster an interest in science that is dynamic and holistic.

In a jocular vein, we have been helped in this task by a study of Edward Lear's absurd 'Nonsense Botany', a collection of preposterous plants such as 'Phatfacia Stupenda': a plump head on a stalk - 'Barkia Howlaloudia': several dog heads sprouting from a branch and 'Manypeeplia Upsidownia': several people growing droopily from a bowed plant stem. By the way, if anyone would like to help with the digging of our labyrinth, please let Mr Higgins know.

## Music lessons in Birch Class

By Mr Higgins, music teacher

In Birch class music lessons, Mr Nowell and I have been attempting, in our weekly session, to give the children as broad an experience of music as we can. We have focused on the importance, for the musician, of listening; of seeing how quietly and tenderly we can hear and play with each other. As well as developing improvisational awareness; playing pentatonic music on marimba, xylophone, and other percussion, Birch have begun their study of music notation, composing short pieces for their flutes. In our singing, we have ranged from Norfolk folk song to Ghanaian street chants. It is hoped that this multiple approach to music will help the children to continue to listen and to play in a socially coherent way once they leave the classroom.

## Update on the finances

By Sandie Tolhurst, School Admin/finance team

A warm thank you to those parents and grandparents who already have responded with generosity and support. A little more than one week on from when our letter on finances went out, we currently have offers of £11,000 interest free loans and £12,000 advance fees for next academic year 2010-11.

Several families have also offered to pay the rest of this year's fees in advance, which is a great help with cashflow – so thank you very much to those parents/grandparents as well.

Several parents have come up with interesting ideas about how to make money and with offers of help; we will be compiling these and putting them up in the entrance lobby very soon. If you have any comments or offers of help, please do pass them back to us as soon as you can.

To summarise, we are still seeking the following, in order to raise the shortfall funds required:

- Two more families willing to lend the school £3,000 each;
- Five more families willing to lend the school £1,000 each;
- Commitment by as many families as possible to contribute £100 donation from their family this academic year – raised either by personal fundraising efforts or by direct donation.
- Support for Publicising the school and running of events at the school. There have been some great ideas for fundraising e.g. offers of a band for an evening of entertainment, jumble sales etc – but these all need your time to help organise them.

## Stairway to Heaven

By Jeremy Nowell, class teacher

An unlikely title for an Oak Class overview, but one that reflects quite well the journey on which we have embarked for the last few weeks of term: a numbered stairway, leading up and over the mountains into the bounteous kingdom beyond, where the seven golden oak trees stand.

Our golden acorn has been on a long journey since the beginning of term. The children of Oak Class have carried it in their hearts, across bridges guarded by trolls, through enchanted forests, down into the caves of the dragon and beyond into the underground home of the exiled kings – the five elven kings who hold the secret of sound and music. Michaelmas saw the demise of the dragon and the restoration of the kings. Oak Class played their part in the school festival, holding up their hands before the fearsome, thundering advance of the Birch dragon and crying, 'STOP!' We gave him a tummy-ache with our drumming and watched as he was transformed into a beautiful, shimmering maiden, whose grace filled the world.

We were very lucky, during one rehearsal of our Martinmas song, to have the song's composer, Kevin Avison of SWSF, in the classroom. He made no comment, but was able to enlighten us as to whether it was a case of 'Ma-ar-tin div-ided' or 'Mar-tin di-i-vided.' On such details may the success or otherwise of a festival depend! Bigger Oaks began to learn the tune on their flutes, so Martinmas may resonate in our classroom for some time to come.

We inhabit a lovely, light classroom, and the children have lent to this light a quality all of their own; a brightness that threatens to spill over into the world and fill it with goodness. A class is often described as a constellation. Made up of many individual stars, each constellation has its own particular shape, illuminating the world in its own special way. What Oak Class radiates, above all, is joy. There is a deep, sometimes uncontainable joy present in the classroom when the children are together, whether they be looking out of the window at the activities of the kindergarten children in the meadow, or lining up to go outside.

It took the best part of half a term for the children, old and new, not to mention their teacher, to find their way around the new classroom and discover the colourful individual perched behind each desk. But we have come a very long way and there is now a strong class identity, reinforced by a keen desire to learn and an even more powerful impulse to have fun!

## Feasibility study for the future

By Sandie Tolhurst, School administration team

In January 2003, at the inaugural meeting of the School Founding Committee for this school, the 15 or so parents, trustees and teachers present together defined its purpose: to start and develop a School which would grow to offer Steiner education for children from age 7 to school-leaving age.

During the past 6 years, this has remained our intention, reviewed at intervals with the Steiner Waldorf Advisory Service (SWSF) and at major development stages in the school's history – one of which was notably in Summer 2008 when we had to decide whether to stay very small with 2 combined classes in our existing location, or move to our current premises and continue upwards.

Steiner Schools vary in the age they go up to: some stop at age 11 (standard primary school age), many go to age 14 (so incorporating the full 7 year class teacher period identified by Rudolf Steiner), some go to age 16/17 and a very small number go to age 18/19.

As our oldest school children are now 12 years of age, we propose that a feasibility study should be carried out during the coming academic year to determine whether the school will stop at age 14/15 (class 7/8) or whether it will be able to continue to an upper school providing a Steiner education for children up to age 16/17 (classes 9 & 10).

As part of the feasibility study, the intention is to look in detail at the facilities, staffing, financial and academic requirements of developing an upper school, as well as to look at the timescales that may be involved in its establishment.

If any parent has particular skills in carrying out feasibility studies of this nature and would be willing to offer some time into this important area of work to inform the school's development, please speak to Sandie in the Administration team. We will keep parents informed of progress as the study gets underway.

## Physical reflections

Mr Charles, Physical Education Teacher

I have enjoyed meeting the challenges involved in providing the movement curriculum for the school children. I have had the opportunity to put into practice much of what I have experienced during my Bothmer training. I hope that the children have enjoyed the traditional games and the gymnastic element of the Jungle gym I have provided.

It is therefore, with regret that I shall be leaving the school at the end of this term. In the new spring term the existing teaching staff will take on the games lesson.

During my time at the Norwich Steiner School, I have been on the receiving end of an education. I have learned many things; a school is a hive of activity with so much going on behind the scenes. I have witnessed a small, but dedicated team of voluntary and employed staff working over and above the line of duty, to provide for the children. The considerations for the children are many and varied. As well as those required by the state to run such an institution, (ensuring the welfare of the children) those of us who have completed Waldorf trainings or are currently training, strive to support each other and the children on levels other than the practical or physical.

What is this spiritual support? We often talk of the 'inner life' of the child or teacher. I believe that each and every one of us comes with gifts and challenges – these we experience on a daily basis, both in the school and out – we endeavour to realise the gifts in us all and really 'meet' the challenges. These challenges are many, but considerably rewarding when met.

In the modern world there are many advances that lessen the physical burden upon us, but as with all good things, there is a shadow cast by these advances. The human being has and always will have struggle. Along with these advances is our modern consciousness – our individuality – this provides us with the ability to make judgements. We are surrounded by these judgements, only, there are so many differing points of view. The modern task is a complex one – we must use this ability to observe situations in life and come together and work as one. Think of the centipede with all those legs to co-ordinate. When we come together with our individuality, we have to be able to work as one organism.

During my movement training a visiting tutor worked with us on just this principle; we would line up, hold hands and attempt to walk from one side of the gymnasium to the other as one organism. This requires starting together and keeping time, but without the use of voice or other practical measures. Instead we needed to 'feel' when the right moment was to move. When occasionally we achieved this it was quite an experience.

Working 'together' in a school - teachers, staff, parents and volunteers – is a difficult task, but whenever we can meet the challenges with love, compassion and empathy, the children learn from our experiences, these very important life skills. And if our children receive our positive thoughts and actions they too can develop these qualities for themselves and for the future, in which they may evermore be required.

I sincerely wish all involved with the Norwich Steiner School my very best wishes and trust that everyone's contributions help the children to blossom.

## Update from Parent & Child Groups

By Tara Phillips-Smith & Helen Kibblewhite, Leaders

The parent and child groups have been vibrant and well attended this term and we have welcomed a large number of new families, seen some children move to playgroup and some 'graduate' to Kindergarten.

The recent Martinmas festival was attended and enjoyed by many of our families and we look forward to welcoming them to the Christmas Celebration on the 12th December as well.

The groups continue to blossom and we hope the families really benefit from the nurturing atmosphere of their sessions. Our library continues to be well used and again we ask that if you have a book you no longer need, but feel others would enjoy, please donate it to us.

We had a workday during this term and have built a leaf mulch 'pen' which the children enjoy filling up and playing in. Next term we intend to build a small covered sandpit and another workday will be organised to accomplish this.

Sadly, Sylvia has now left us, and we wish her and her family well. We would like to thank Catherine and Carlotta for making it possible to offer all the groups in her absence. Lastly, we would like to thank Cati and Carlotta for their able assistance this term.

With all best wishes from Tara and Helen

## Moonbread recipe

By Helen Kibblewhite, Parent & Child group leader

After our Martimas festival, there were requests for the Moonbread recipe – so here it is to cut out and keep! The bread becomes stale quickly so it needs to be eaten on the day it is made.

1 kg fine white flour  
3 eggs  
250 g softened butter  
2 good tsp dried yeast  
300 ml (or more) warm milk  
4 tbsp clear honey  
½ tsp salt

Rub the butter into the flour.  
Add the yeast and salt.  
Beat eggs with milk and honey.  
Add egg mix to dry mix and combine to make a soft dough. Cover and leave to rise in a warm place for one hour.  
Heat oven to 200°C  
Knead the dough briefly then divide it into eight lumps. Make two triangles from each lump (using a rolling pin) and then roll up each triangle to make a crescent shape like a croissant. This recipe allows enough dough to make 16 breads.  
Leave to rise until double in size (at least ½ hour) and bake for 15-20 minutes (until golden brown).

## Vacancies

For any of the following vacancies, please contact either Carol at the school office or Jacqui in Personnel team for details and application forms  
[Jacqui@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk](mailto:Jacqui@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk)

### Management team

We have extended the deadline for expressions of interest for posts in the management team until January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The following provides a very brief summary of the work of the management team:

The management team is not 'management' in the usual sense of the word. Within Norwich Steiner School, the management team has responsibility for coordinating the Schools facilities. They support the work of the school support teams (e.g. teaching, admin, finance, premises, gardening, publicity & events etc.) and act as a bridge between those teams and the trustees.

The management team looks at the agendas and minutes from the school support teams, and if there is any work, such as liaising between teams, supporting

the teams in the development of their annual plans or providing information or suggestions, then they do so.

Management team is the team that others come to if they need help, clarity or information. We are ideally looking for a team of around 3 people to meet once a week (with a commitment of around 2 hours per week) to carry out the role as explained above.

### Class Teacher

We are looking to appoint a new class teacher for class 1 starting in September 2010; it is expected that this class will initially comprise approximately 10 children and will combine with the following year's children graduating from the kindergarten in 2011.

The ideal candidate will have Steiner teacher training and experience, although we are open to the possibility of the right person undertaking their teacher training whilst in post.

Due to the particular challenges that face a young school, the right candidate needs to be innovative and flexible and able to work as part of a small team.

Closing date for applications Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2010; interviews in the first 2 weeks of March.

### Handwork assistant

Due to the current handwork assistant vacating this post to have a baby in the near future, we are seeking to appoint a new handwork assistant. Currently required two afternoons per week (currently 1.45pm-3.30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays) working with the Handwork teacher in Oak and Birch School classes.

Enjoyment/love of handwork and a genuine interest in working with children are essential pre-requisites for anyone interested in applying for this post.

Closing date for applications Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December; start date Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January, subject to CRB checks etc being completed.