

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

12th July 2017

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 14th July – Last day of term

Wednesday 2nd August, Tuesday 8th August, Monday 14th August, Tuesday 29th August, Thursday 31st August – Work days at school

Tuesday 5th September – Autumn term starts

Friday 20th October – Inset day and half term

Monday 30th October – Back to school

Friday 15th December to Monday 8th January – Christmas holiday

FAREWELL ELDER CLASS – THE END OF AN ERA!

Carol Ainsworth, School Secretary

It is not without a few tears in our eyes that we are preparing to wave goodbye to Elder Class. It is a very special & poignant moment for us all, as they will become the *FIRST EVER* class to graduate from our School. As an Elder class parent, School Secretary, and someone who has been involved in the school for a long time, it seemed fitting to share with you a little bit of the history of the school and its founding class, as hopefully this will impart a sense of what a truly special moment it is for them and the school. (Apologies now for those of you who already know most of this. I have tried to be brief but have failed - I suggest you save reading this for sitting down with a cup of tea. I hope I haven't run on too much - and apologies also for my sentimental tendencies and liberal use exclamation marks....!)

It's hard to believe when you see the school now, but when the school first started in 2005 in a Church Hall on Bowthorpe Road, it was with only three children, and two of these founding pupils are still members of Elder Class i.e. Ella & George - Admission Number 01 and 02! Now there are over a 100 pupils attending! Of course, the journey didn't start there - before the school was the Steiner Kindergarten, and before that the Parent & Child Groups.

After a short time at Keswick Reading Rooms, the P&C Groups moved to the Belvedere Centre. It was run by a small group of committed volunteers, including Valentina, Catherine, Helen & Richard, and my children attended regularly. It was much nicer than any other toddler group we had been to, and we were drawn in by the calm gentle atmosphere, the pastel coloured cloths, wooden toys, pine cones and wooden blocks, which created space for the children's imagination. Not a brightly coloured plastic toy in sight! Each day after the session finished, all of the play equipment had to be packed away and then lots of tables had to be replaced to their former position in order for the elderly people who next used the room to eat their dinner on. There was no getting away early!

As some of the Toddlers outgrew the P&C Group, a group of volunteers started searching Norwich for Kindergarten premises and St Augustine's Church Hall was found to be available 3 mornings a week. So after painting, laying new carpet and sourcing lots of suitable play equipment (mostly from boot sales and charity shops!) we celebrated the opening of the first ever Steiner Kindergarten in Norwich. At this point, however, parents were required to stay with their children, as it was not Ofsted registered. It was a very tentative beginning relying heavily on volunteers, and with only a handful of children attending initially. I remember Richard House, who was Kindergarten Leader at the time, falling off his bike on the winter's ice, and still turning up the following day in order to keep the kindergarten running - even though it later turned out he had broken his shoulder!

Shortly afterwards, we were very pleased to welcome Sherrie, as our new Kindergarten Leader – she had the relevant Qualification and experience to enable us to obtain Ofsted Registration, and parents were finally able to leave their children at the door and go home. Unfortunately, the days of having to pack all of the play equipment into a store cupboard at the end of each session were not quite over!

As some of the Kindergarten children approached school age, we decided it was time to try and start a Steiner School in Norwich. The School Founding Committee was formed and several people attended its inaugural meeting. We produced flyers to advertise a new Steiner School which was intended to open in Norwich the following year and I distributed some of these at a Home Education group – where I bumped into Sandie & her son! Shortly afterwards she enrolled George in Kindergarten, and joined the School Founding Committee. She very occasionally refers back to that time with irony, as it soon became apparent to her that there was no such school on the near horizon and that the parent/volunteers were having to set up the school themselves! Thankfully she stuck around, and seemed to know what she was doing, bringing her skills, commitment and heaps of energy to the project.

The task was huge and very daunting - none of us had any experience of setting up a school. There were no guarantees that we would succeed and we were also taking a huge risk for our children, some of whom should have been starting (mainstream) school by then. And once the enormity of the task became apparent committee members dwindled and the project fell to a very few, very committed people.

The first major obstacle was to find suitable (and affordable) premises which could house both the kindergarten and new class 1. After scouring literally the whole of Norwich, we found that Bowthorpe Road Church Hall and Rooms were available, and we could use it for five days a week without having to store away all of the Kindergarten Play equipment every day – just once a week!) After a lot of redecorating, and clearing the outside area, the kindergarten was ready to move into. (The school was to open a year later than planned due to a change in Ofsted regulations.) At this point we couldn't afford to pay a cleaner, so we set up a rota for parents to help with this once a week – and most of the time they remembered to show up! This also continued for a time when we moved into Hospital Lane.

The next hurdle was the matter of finding a teacher and convincing him/her to take a risk with working in a school with only 3 children with no guarantees it would succeed. It was starting to look desperate when thankfully Mr Limburger joined us and enabled the school to start. Then in September 2003, myself, Sandie & Valentina proudly said goodbye to our children as they entered the classroom to start their first 'Steiner' school day. We had done it!

However, after only two terms unfortunately Mr Limburger left the school. We began another desperate search and fortunately one of the parents whose children were attending the parent & child group was persuaded he was perfect for the role. He agreed to step in at the deep end and undertook the Steiner teacher training course at the same time - thank you & well done Mr Higgins! Then school settled into being and very gradually expanded.

It was around about this time that it was decided we should have someone at the premises to take calls/enquiries and to receive any visitors etc. This would appear more professional and provide the staff back-up should they need it. So we installed a phone line, and desk with a screen around it, in a small corner of the Church Hall kitchen and I volunteered to work there two or three mornings a week. It was very exciting when the phone rang with an enquiry. If I needed support with anything I could always e-mail Sandie at work! After dropping off her son on her way to work she would always stay and sort out logistical problems that frequently occurred – even if it meant arriving rather late for

work. I remember one time when I was working in the office which I can laugh at now. Two or three children had come down with Measles, and I found myself answering the phone to some very serious Public Health Officials who wanted to know our policy on vaccination! They were surprised to say the least that there were no other administrative staff in the building to talk with and I struggled to know how to deal with it. Thankfully I managed to get hold of Trevor and, despite them both being at work, he and Sandie miraculously managed to turn up that very afternoon to attend a rather serious meeting with the officials and the staff. Needless to say it all turned out OK.

We had some lovely times at Bowthorpe Road - we held festivals and Open Days, and Kevin Avison from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship Advisory Service started visiting occasionally to offer support and guidance. Mrs Higgins made her first appearance and joined the team as Kindergarten Assistant. A Publicity & Events Team formed (lead by Charlotte) and worked hard to publicise and raise awareness of the School, Kindergarten & P&C Groups. Information Days were occasionally held on Saturdays in the Forum - and one time, Mr Higgins decided to create a sand labyrinth on the floor - much to the fascination of the people visiting!

Too soon, our school outgrew the Bowthorpe Road premises, and we started *another* search for premises. Nothing suitable or affordable was to be found and we became desperately worried that this would be the end. Then a miracle - only a few months before we needed space for the next class 1 - the current building on Hospital Lane came up. *And* premises big enough to expand the school right the way to class 13 - we couldn't believe it! So the parents, volunteers and staff got out the paintbrushes, filler and elbow grease again, and after a few months of decorating & renovating, the School, Kindergarten & Parent & Child Groups moved in during the summer holidays of 2008.

It seems like a long time ago now since we initially moved into Hospital lane, when we rattled around such a huge building. Of course, things didn't go smoothly. No sooner had we moved in but the banking crisis happened and a period of recession began - just what we didn't need! Many more difficult situations arose, sometimes ones that we had to face with nerves of steel, and we even had to ask for parent loans to keep us afloat at one point. However, the school gradually overcame and learned from the difficulties it had encountered and eventually settled into a period of stability and to growth.

During this period the Steiner School at Thornham Magna sadly closed. They had been very supportive to us and it was sad to hear of a fellow Steiner school closing - and one so nearby. However, there was a silver lining for us, and them, as we gained several lovely children & parents - and indeed Mr Nowell made his first appearance when he stepped in to take over as Class 1 in our time of need. Then Mrs Higgins moved out of Maple Kindergarten and became Birch Class's new teacher, and Debora re-joined us to become Orchard Kindergarten Leader.

The school continued to evolve and we made the brave decision not to offer GCSE's, but to find a way to offer the full curriculum right through to age 18/19. It just didn't make sense not to. We consulted with our brave pioneering parents who, virtually unanimously agreed with us! A while later, we heard about the Steiner School Certificate (SSC) which had been developed in New Zealand, and we decided to offer it here, along with 2 or 3 other Steiner Schools in England. A very busy period of upper school development started and we were so pleased when Jeff joined us to help with this! Our compliment of Upper School Teachers gradually grew and it was great to also have various experienced Steiner Upper School Teachers who came from time to time to teach main lesson blocks. At this point I think Elder Class deserve a mention as without them there would have been no reason to start a school....

(Sorry - take a break if you need to - it's taken ages to write this - but how do you fit 17 years into a couple of pages!)

Well ... what an amazing founding Class they have been. I have heard it is said that the founding class

of any Steiner school always carries a unique & special relationship to their school. Certainly Elder Class has shared our pioneering spirit, and whilst the school was evolving and developing, they accepted without hesitation or complaint being our 'guinea pigs'. Their school's future was never certain and the facilities were fairly non-existent in the early days (no music room/science lab/woodwork/art room etc.). There were no older pupils to defer or look up to and their class teachers and other school staff were largely learning on the job. And to top it all, we asked them to take the plunge and forget all about doing GSCE's and instead work a virtually unheard of qualification called the SSC!

However, there were compensations – no SATS pressure or stressed out teachers. Many class trips (of course all with the Steiner Curriculum at its core): The first ever class trip to Easton College farm. Then camping and cycling all the way to Stiffkey. The Globe. And abroad to stay on a Finca in Spain to prune olive trees, build walls and hike up mountains. Paris, then last of all Munich. Lucky them!

As a parent, my most favourite moments are their class plays and musical performances. I remember one of their first plays, when the audience was entertained by the sudden appearance of a life size canoe on set! (Mr Higgins' sense of humour I'm sure!) One year they performed The Wizard of Oz – and it was a miracle that this actually went ahead. It had been a scorching hot week and our Lion (Barnaby) suddenly became afflicted with heat stroke due to the Onesie he had been wearing during rehearsals. We (and poor Barnaby) were so disappointed for him – he had worked so hard with lines and rehearsals – and would have made a great Lion! However, the 'show must go on' as they say and Mr Higgins and Niko miraculously managed to memorise the lines in just a few hours in time to act in the matinee & evening performance. More challenging roles followed, with Fiddler on the Roof, A View from the Bridge and The Importance of Being Earnest (the 'handbag' line was hilarious!). And to top off their final year – not one but two plays - The Bald Primadonna which was absolutely barking mad and brilliant, and as I write we are looking forward to 'Murder at Rundown Abbey' – can't wait!

Their music performances each year at the Anteros Arts Foundation were absolutely amazing – it brought tears to our eyes - and how they had the nerve to stand up in front of the parent audience we'll never know!

Of course, as well as all of the above and much more too, Elder have worked equally hard on the academic side of their schooling, and we are so thrilled (as you will have read from Jacqui's article), that they have been accepted for various universities, colleges, and courses - proof that the Steiner curriculum and qualification work – but we knew that anyway didn't we!

Just to share my own family's perspective, as being one of the parents who chose to take a risk all those years ago, the above comes with a sense of relief and confirmation that we made the right decision. At the beginning, it was hard to go against the flow of mainstream education. Doubts and concerns were expressed by friends and family, and when the school had to start a year later due to the change in Ofsted regulations, Ella had to wait another year before starting school. There was also the financial sacrifice, the endless volunteering of time and effort and all this whilst my children were still very young. But somehow, it just felt right and always has done.

So now I can sit back and relax (for a while that is!) and feel everything is working out OK. Ella received three university offers – with an unconditional from Durham no less! (She wouldn't even have applied but for Sandie's persistent and gentle encouragement!) And this without any grades in a musical instrument and learning the guitar and piano, and starting singing lessons all relatively late in her school years. I am sure the music she will have imbibed from Mr Higgins in lower school played an important role, and the huge variety of music performed at our school festivals. And probably this is a testament to the way the Steiner Curriculum and the SSC are structured. 'Steiner' pupils must surely positively stand out from the crowd when considered for jobs/interviews/universities – in fact I heard that one of the universities actively welcomes Steiner schooled pupils. The curriculum gently teases out of the pupils a realization of what they may not have realized they might be good at, or

have an interest in, and gives them the opportunity to specialize, whilst still keeping their options open in other subjects. Certainly in Ella's case, the regular plays and yearly musical performances played a part. And the requirement of a Class 12 Project prompted her decision that hers would be to produce an album, with all of the songs being written, performed and recorded by herself – even down to the art work on the CD! (Would this have happened but for the curriculum and SSC qualification....?) How much better than having the pressure of having to choose at age 14 what subjects to take and sit life changing exams at the tender age of 16, when the teenage years can be a very turbulent and anxious time!

So Elder Class – well done – you've made it through. We will miss your humour and camaraderie, and the discussion, laughter and music we often heard emanating from various places; also your participation in festivals, and your drama productions; your enthusiasm – and even the odd complaint! It was such a joy and a privilege for us all to be part of the school whilst you were here. We wish you well in all that you do – and hope you take a little bit of the pioneering spirit of Norwich Steiner School wherever you go and in whatever you do.

Please keep in touch dear Elder Class and let us know how you are getting on, and we can also tell you how much more our school has developed since you've been gone.... And maybe we can rope you into coming and taking part in another talk!

AND finally here's to all our wonderfully knowledgeable, intuitive teachers and staff who know our children so well. The Trustees – past & present. To all of the people over the years who shared our vision, committed endless amounts of their time and energy, and a good deal of blind faith into making Norwich Steiner School happen (and indeed still continue to do so). Long may she continue and far may she travel in the souls of all the children who sail for a time with her!

ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE OF ELDER CLASS

Rosalyn Taylor, Parent

My son joined Elder Class at the end of 2010 after I had been home schooling him for a year, his old school had given him several 'labels' and it would be fair to say I didn't have the highest of hopes for him!

But as soon as we walked in to the school we knew we had found the right place for him and everyone made him so welcome. One of my greatest memories was when I received his first report which said 'There is no evidence that B is dyslexic'.

We were delighted to hear the plans for an Upper School and then for the SSC. B has now completed his final year and the progress year on year has been astounding, he gained a merit in level 1 and then it must be said was pretty gutted to complete level 2 one mark off a Distinction! This year all has gone to plan and he has completed his final year with that much-coveted Distinction and in the Autumn, he will move on to the University of York to study an integrated Master's Degree in Maths and Computer Science. A few weeks ago, he went there for an interview and afterwards received a letter from them which said they were particularly impressed by his clear passion for the subject and without doubt that comes from the school who have encouraged his endeavours whilst allowing him to be himself even if he can be somewhat opinionated at times!

But it is not just the academic level that he has achieved it is so much more, the most unathletic child ever has learnt to climb, to sail even to enjoy going to the gym! He has been able to travel to France, Germany and Spain, he's learnt to ride a bike, to pitch a tent, to cook and even to build his own shower and toilet! He has developed a great appreciation of both the world around him and all the people in it too, the child who hated to read has developed a love of reading as well as an

enviable work ethic. It is all these things that will move with him wherever he goes and on whatever paths he chooses in the future.

I believe a Steiner education was the perfect fit for B and would be for many other children. Any child would be lucky to be a part of the Norwich Steiner School

On a final note, one of the first things B did at the school was gardening which was lovely for me as we had recently moved into a new house and the garden was nothing more than a bare patch of ground and he seemed to instinctively know what we should pull up and what should be left to grow. In one corner of the garden was what appeared to be a small plant we left it to grow and see what developed. Over the seven years B has spent at the school it's continued to grow and after a year or so we realised it wasn't a weed but a tree. A tree that has continued to grow and now is taller than our house with beautiful blossoms in Spring, then berries in the Autumn..... It's an Elder tree!

ELDER CLASS

Jacqueline Armour, Administrative Officer

(This article was published in the SWSF Newsletter, which goes to most Steiner Schools in the UK.)

In July Norwich's founding class will be leaving...

Our vision of a school that would provide a Steiner education for all of the compulsory school years was first voiced at a school founding meeting in 2003. Since the school (3 pupils in a room in a church hall) opened in 2005 we have aimed to provide an education that would enable pupils to develop into balanced, well-rounded and mature young adults, able to pursue their own futures and destinies with confidence and self-belief. And that is exactly what we are seeing this year as our founding class, including 2 of the original 3 pupils, leave us to set off on next stage of their journeys at age 18/19.

As one of the first UK Steiner Schools to offer the Steiner School Certificate we have been able to teach the Steiner curriculum throughout the whole school, and to provide a level 3 qualification to those pupils choosing to take it.

We have found that this has enabled us to us to help our students to meet and work through adolescence in a healthy way, giving them sufficient time to find resonance and direction for their next step in life while providing a balance for the extremes of emotion and ideas that they have experienced and between their inner worlds and the outer world.

The subject specific material in the upper school curriculum has supported and encouraged the students' emergent intellect and moral faculty so that they have developed the ability to make independent judgments about themselves and the world, and their place in that world. Artistic work, group work, project based and practical activities and subjects have been used to engage the intellect and the social/emotional life of each student, helping them to find insight, inspiration and meaning in themselves and the world in which they live.

The breadth, depth, diversity and richness of a purely Steiner upper school curriculum has equipped our students to understand the world that they are moving towards, and they take with them a love of learning nurtured through allowing unpressured time to absorb, reflect on and re-visit knowledge, as well as practical and transferable skills that will help them along their way.

They have studied, played, performed, and grown together, sat SSC exams, completed UCAS applications, attended interviews and auditions, revealed themselves to the wider world with trepidation and with confidence. All those who have applied for university courses (in computer science, music,

computer graphics, and photography) have received offers of places and other students will be going on to do apprenticeships, foundation courses or further education courses in law, literature, American studies, drama, education studies.

It has been a privilege for us to work with these pupils and we are so proud of them all.

REFLECTIONS ON A SUN CHILD'S KINDERGARTEN JOURNEY

Nat Goldthorpe, Parent

If you ask my two eldest children what day of the week it is, don't be surprised if they reply "dahl and rice" or "bread rolls, yippee! I'm having marmite!"

Kindergarten is that magical pink room at the end of the corridor where days are known by their snack-name, where a pirate ship in the form of wooden crates may just sail in, where cosy houses are built using wooden racks, twizzles and sheepskins and where my son will happily eat two bowls of cabbage soup!

When I ask my six year old Sun Child to list his favourite memories of kindergarten over the last three years, he gazes out of the window smiling and then turns to me and solemnly replies "playing and playing and playing. And work."

We have watched him flourish during his time at kindergarten since he skipped in on his first day age 3 with serious playtime on his mind. He has looked up to the older children, watched and learnt from them as they go about their games and tasks and gradually become the eldest himself, confidently taking on the responsibilities that come with being a sun child. And with that responsibility comes privileges such as being the leader, working on extended craft projects and the ultimate joy of being able to go in on apple crumble day!

He has made strong connections within the class spanning the age groups and, while the dynamics change every year due to the eldest children leaving and the new 'littles ones' arriving, Debora, Jackie and Maddie have consistently provided a warm, nurturing and secure environment; a smile and hand shake at the door; the comforting repetition of songs, rhymes and stories at circle time; a respect for the children which is mirrored in the children's respect for their teachers and other children.

In between all the playtime my son has learnt how to make apple juice using a press, he has made butter, bread rolls and elderflower cordial. He has wet felted, painted, filled drawing and colouring books, used clay, sewn a needlecase and made a bag from his weaving. He has made a postcard holder, skipping rope and handles and has become a keen finger knitter.

Having spent a lot of time in the class while my daughter was settling in, I was struck by the children's play. Each individual child contributed to the games in their own way, some taking charge and every so often reminding the younger children of the rules ("no snatching in kindergarten!"), some drifting in and out of the game and some doing their own thing entirely. It resembled a dance, where each child's imagination is an invisible thread, woven in and out to create an everchanging picture. And through this uninterrupted imaginary play my two children are learning so much about themselves and others; a strong foundation of essential life skills which they can take forward and continue to develop. The four Sun Children are preparing secretly and excitedly for their graduation ceremony and their final day of intensive play together as Kindergarteners. They are all prepared for the next stage of their journey; their transition to Class 1.

Thank you to Debora, Jackie and Maddie for providing such a nourishing and magical space for our children.

THE KINDERGARTEN YEAR

Debora Walker, Kindergarten teacher

The autumn term

In September we started with a harvest ring-time and "The little red hen" story for the first two weeks. Children made twizzles (cords made out of twisted yarn) and sewed little felt mice. The older children started their weaving and finger-knitting. As we moved toward **Michaelmas** we made apple juice using our press and butter. Our ring-time became more autumnal and we told the story of "The three apples".

In October we began making conker webs and decorated tea lights ready for **Martinmas**. Our story was now about the animals getting ready to hibernate as the days became shorter and darker, and the earth began to sleep followed by one about Mother Earth weaving an autumn blanket for a slumbering world

*The sunlight fast is dwindling,
My little lamp needs kindling,
Its beam shines far through darkest night,
Dear lantern, guide me with your light.*

While the natural world lies dormant, Humanity continues to shine a light throughout the long dark nights and months of winter, lighting a path towards the spring. With this in mind we turned to a story about a little girl keeping the seeds of hope alive through the cold dark days until the sun returns bringing with it the spring. In Kindergarten our winter festivals are all about keeping that light alive until the spring returns. We finished the term with a candle lit **Advent** spiral.

The spring term

We really experienced the sensation of the winter season in our winter ring-time and various stories. We were chopping wood with the wood cutter in the forest, and hacking and cracking rocks and stones with the gnomes deep in the caverns below the earth as well as feeling the effects of King Winter and his servant Jack Frost upon the cold and wintry earth. As the first spring bulbs appeared we introduced them into our ring-time. We enjoyed lighting an earth candle in our garden during **Candlemas**, warming the earth to encourage the seeds to wake up.

For the first two weeks we listened to the story of Babushka and her encounter with the three kings in the snowy forests of the North as they followed the bright star to Bethlehem and celebrated **Epiphany** with a King cake. Next, we travelled to the edge of the Arctic Circle when we listened to the Native American tale of little duck Shingebiss and his valiant overcoming of the cold north wind. We also had the first Grimm's fairytale of the year as we joined the hardworking daughter who discovers Mother Holle's kingdom where it is important to always shake the eiderdown well in the morning so that it might then snow upon the earth.

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

As spring emerged, the ring-time was focused on the garden; digging, planting, weeding, with songs about the flowers we were seeing all around us. First we heard the story of the "Bremen Musicians" which was followed by a story about Persephone - an ancient Greek myth of how the seasons came to be. Towards the end of term we had an Easter Hare story where the littlest hare is the only one who manages to deliver the Easter eggs to the children in their garden, and our nature table was

transformed into an **Easter** Garden. On the last day of term we held an Easter egg hunt and enjoyed a puppet show.

The summer term

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

Our activities reflected our summer festivals to a great extent. We made willow crowns decorated with flowers for **May Day**. For **Whitsun** we hung doves (with wishes attached) within our willow dome. We followed this with felted **St. John's** fire balls, and are now (at the time of writing) in the midst of making butterflies, bees and fairies.

At first our ring time included a focus on celebrating the beautiful may flowers that were in bloom and we explored the transformation of the caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. Our stories moved from "Old gnome and the fairy cradle" through to the fairy story of "Briar Rose" and finished with the story of the "Whitsun Daisy" in the first half-term.

Now our ring time reflects the summer months, and our stories have included "The Friend of the Bees", "Jonnikin and the fox's tail" and at the end of term "The Frog Prince," which is all about transformation.

The sun children have been working hard to finish all their projects. They have visited their new class once a week, copying chalk drawings of fairy tales on the blackboard into their crayoning books and now they are practising their graduation ring time and devising their end of year puppet show.

As we head towards the summer holidays we are coming to the end of our kindergarten year. The children have worked and played hard all year and this has been reflected in the developmental progress that they have made since September. We are saying goodbye to our sun children who will be travelling up the stairs to Rowan class and welcoming children who will be joining us in the autumn for a new kindergarten year.

ROWAN CLASS

Mrs. Mason, Class Teacher

In September it was difficult to envisage where we would be in the final week of the summer term. Now we are here and I ask myself have we covered all the things I intended the children to learn?

Yes I had expectations that the children would have developed certain skills in Literacy and Numeracy and we would accomplish certain tasks in Music, Painting and Handwork etc. The children have done all these things and much more, surpassing all my expectations. While they have achieved all these things, the real wonders of the year have been the small golden moments of a school day.

What I see now are children who skip into school and are joyful and light. I remarked that this was our final week of the term. A child said, "Well time flies when you are having fun."

They are happy to learn and are so enthusiastic about almost everything! The smallest thing can capture our imagination. Today we stopped skipping and looked at a tiny piece of fruit dropped the day before. The Ants were having a feast and we imagined a giant 'Fruit mountain' as this is how it must seem to one so small.

I marvel at the beauty of their handwork projects. One child who finished recently, said “I love my flute case so much,” and gave it a hug. Another is making a knitted Rabbit for his baby sister. He has taken so much care to ensure that it is soft enough for her to cuddle.

Another child gives a friend a back massage as he is feeling poorly.

A child cheers when another class mate wins the game.

Another offers up their shoes as a class mate has soaked their feet in a puddle.

Another finishes their first piece of independent writing. They say, “I am so proud of myself.” Everyone congratulates their classmate and hopes that they can do it too.

The list is endless.

Rowan class may be the youngest class but they are often so very wise and certainly can teach me a thing or two!

MAPLE CLASS

Mrs. Higgins, Class Teacher

Looking back over the year, at the various subjects that Maple class have done, the one block that keeps popping back into my head is Farming. The labyrinth field is the space (other than the classroom) where Maple class have spent most of their time. Of course the Farming block is a practical lesson, and one that is only understood through the cycle of time, so it has been ongoing. In February the class took possession of three small plots. They ploughed and harrowed the soil and put compost and manure on it. Then around the equinox they planted turnips, carrots, onions, garlic and kale. This is all for harvest time, to feed the whole school soup. Maple class also have to make bread for the school, so they planted rye, oats, barley and wheat. The oats and barley were very successful with the birds, therefore the loaves will be smaller in September when the farming cycle concludes with milling and baking.

Every Monday the class have been out to the field first thing to water and weed the plots. Their thoroughness would not have been possible without Harriet’s input and suggestions. Thank you Harriet for creating such a nice space for us all to work in every week. We will give you the biggest slice of dragon bread at Michaelmas.

Finally, a word on behalf of Maple class for the Elder students. Thank you for being great role models. It has been lovely to see lower school children looking up to Elder class in the bustling life of the school, for them to be part of a learning space made up of different age groups, like one giant family.

SEQUOIA CLASS AT THE OLYMPICS

Mme Lizier, French Teacher

It was a great privilege to accompany Sequoia Class to the Class 5 Greek Olympic games held at Michael Hall School in Forest Row where they joined 450 other children from UK, Poland and Belgium Schools.

Our adventure started with the long journey to get there. A walk under the rain to Norwich railway station, a first train to London Liverpool Street, getting two buses to Victoria Station, each of us with a newly bought Oyster card, changing buses in Trafalgar Square, looking at the statue of Nelson, the Big

Ben, Westminster Abbey and the House of Parliament on the way, a run to catch the train to East Grinstead and a final 2 miles walk on a disused railway track to Michael Hall, with no rain this time! On our arrival we were warmly greeted with juice and cakes that gave us the energy needed for the last short walk to our camp.

For three days Sequoia children have camped, gathered wood for the fire, water to cook and to wash up, played many games the most popular being pillow fights, and rolling downhill in their sleeping bags, sang, enjoyed the freedom to explore the surroundings, talked while looking at the burning fire, but most importantly trained.

They were grouped in cities and some of them formed new friendships. Their Archons got to know them, and at the closing ceremony spoke about the qualities they demonstrated during the three days. Each day when I took their snack down to the training field they were tired but happy, sharing their experiences with each other, proud of their improvements and looking forward to the next training activities.

On the day of the Games they were all ready in their beautiful tunics, ready for the games and ready to meet their families.

I am sure the moving opening and closing ceremony, as well as seeing the children taking part in the games with a radiant smile will live in our memories.

I feel the children came back confident, with a strong sense of what can be achieved individually and as part of a team.

Well done athletes!

OAK CLASS

Olivia Vicente, Upper School Teacher

The end of the summer term Oak has been busy with a couple of out door activities: sailing and archery.

They went sailing on Whitlingham Broad. The group in the morning rigged up the blue Quba boats and the red Toppers. Then they set sail to the middle of the broad. They had to sail between two buoys, drawing the shape of a lemniscate (very Steinerly). They needed to know where the wind was coming from and how to use it to go where they wanted to. They played some games that made some sailors fall in to the water.

For most of them it was a totally new experience. Sometimes exciting, when the wind blows hard, or scary and kind of stressful. Sometimes boring or pleasant, when the wind doesn't blow and you can enjoy the beauty of the broad, catch up with a friend or a duck. Some others have had the chance to share their passion with their peers. Watching them sailing was delightful.

In order to get their Stage 1 they need to capsize, which basically means get wet, at least your feet will. Most of them really enjoyed that part. They had to learn some theory, how to make knots and lots of new words.

Then the group in the afternoon packed the boats away making sure they were kept neat and tidy.

It has been a perfect experience for the end of the academic year for these classes 8/9 that have launched their first year in the upper school. It has brought out something different in some students.

SCHOOL PHOTOS

We would like to say a BIG THANK YOU to Dennis & Rachel for the wonderful class photos that we get each year. It is lovely to have a visual record of our children as they move through the school, and I am sure that when they grow up they will appreciate being able to look at these and remember their old classmates and teachers! Thank you dear Dennis & Rachel – we really appreciate all of your time that you give to this each year.

Just also to say, that from next year we will be seeking volunteers to help with sorting all of the orders out as it is quite time consuming and complicated!

WORK DAYS IN THE SUMMER HOLIDAY

Liz Cooker, Cleaner

I have been reading a book (thank you to Mrs. Higgins for recommending it) called 'Why Cleaning Has Meaning.' It is written by Linda Thomas, who ran her own ecological cleaning company for many years, and also cleaned the Goetheanum in Switzerland and several Steiner Schools. Reading this has made me think, not only about my own work, but also about why we ask parents to help with cleaning and building maintenance in the holidays, and what effect this might have on the school, the children and everyone who uses the building.

Linda Thomas believes very strongly that, not only is it important to clean thoroughly but also that our attitude while working can make a huge difference to the feeling of a room or building. She says, 'a cleaned room is transformed into a cared for space, and has an effect on people.' She acknowledges that cleaning can feel overwhelming – that it is the cleaning tasks in our own homes which we often least want to do, and that can feel 'like the task of Sisyphus.' Also that 'we are often brought to our limits and have to face up to our inadequacies through the task of cleaning.' I have also experienced both the discomfort caused by uncared-for spaces (often my own) and the sterility of an environment which has been covered in chemicals and cleaned so that there is no life left in it.

There is a large section in the book about 'spring cleaning' which brings me onto work in the school holidays. 'Spring' cleaning takes place at many different times of year in different cultural traditions, not only before Easter but before new year or before major festivals such as Diwali or Passover. Advent is a traditional time for thorough cleaning in Scandinavia. In all of these traditions the removal of dirt brings a sense of waiting, in a clean and peaceful environment, for something new to come in. It makes me think that the summer holiday is the time for spring cleaning in the school.

In school there can be a lot to do in the holidays – painting walls which have become dirty or chipped, cleaning all the areas which cannot be accessed or there is no time for in the term, such as the corners of classrooms or the pipes in the wash rooms, emptying and thoroughly cleaning the cloakrooms. Sometimes furniture or classrooms are moved around. There is a lot of preparation for a new school year.

We ask for help with this, partly because it is another 'task of Sisyphus' and apparently never ending - but it is not only for that reason. It is also because, for our children, there is a huge difference in quality if they know their parents are coming in out of dedication and belief in their education, to help make their environment as nourishing and cared for as possible. If the school could afford a team of professional decorators and commercial cleaners then the building would feel very different at the start of the new term. It might be very clean but it would not feel cared for in the same way. It is the care given along with the cleaning, and also children being able to see that care, which helps to

create a nurturing environment.

A parent who has been coming in regularly in the holidays said that she comes 'because it's in the handbook.' Then she added that she also really agreed with the ethos, of parents working together to help the school. The amount we are able to do in the school depends directly on how much help we get. I would manage to do a certain amount but with help we are able to do more transformative work – more painting, and other bigger jobs.

I hope that work days can be enjoyable. We can meet unexpected people. Upper school parents, when their days of standing in the playground are over, rarely get to see other parents. They might meet a kindergarten parent and be reminded of their own offspring when they were much smaller. Someone else may work with parents of older children and learn some useful information for when their own child is older. I know that we also all have jobs which are harder to do because we dislike them (my least favourite housework is folding laundry.) On work days I try to have a choice of jobs, so if something I suggest for you to do happens to be your least favourite task, please tell me and I will find something different! There is always plenty to do.

Cleaning, painting and similar work often has a kind of invisible effect on the building. You might not have noticed that the entrance hall (and the lab and Birch Class) has been painted in the last year but on a subtle level there might be a nicer, more welcoming feeling as you come into the school. All the jobs together, however, can have a huge effect. We will do what we can to prepare the building for our 'new year.' Not to do it at all however, would be unthinkable. Not to worry whether the paintwork is clean, the toilets sparkling, the floors free of debris and the classrooms prepared and tidy and ready to welcome the children back, would perhaps not directly be noticed by the children but would have a profound effect on them.

Below I am listing some dates for work days in the summer. Two of the days, I am suggesting that anyone wanting to come for the day might like to join us for a lunch break and picnic in the school garden. This is a beautiful area, where you can see and appreciate the hard work done by Harriet and the children. Harriet will also be having a gardening work day on those days. As well as this I will be working most weeks Monday – Wednesday so you are welcome to join me on any of those days. It is helpful if you let me know so I can plan work and there will be a couple of weeks when I am not in, so please check with me if you intend to come in.

We are not able to have unsupervised children in the building in the holidays but if your child is happy to work with you, they are very welcome. Upper school students who are able to work independently are also welcome.

I look forward to seeing you.

My contact details are:

lizcooker@gmail.com or 07881624748.

Work Days

Wednesday 2nd August (including optional lunch break and picnic in the school garden.)

Tuesday 8th August

Monday 14th August

Tuesday 29th August (including optional lunch break and picnic in the school garden.)

Thursday 31st August (final cleaning day in preparation for the start of term.)

I will not be in 24th-26th July or 21st-23rd August but will be in Monday – Wednesday most other weeks.

GOODBYES & WELCOMES

We are sad to be saying goodbye to a number of children and teachers this summer.

We would like to wish all those pupils who are going to new schools the very best with their future education and hope they will come back to visit us and let us know how they are getting on.

The longest serving member of staff to be departing this summer is Andrea Lord, who has taught German language lessons in the school since 2011. More recently Andrea has also taught a range of other subject and main lessons. Andrea and her family are moving to Germany where Andrea will be taking on a Class 6 teacher post in a Steiner-Waldorf school. We are grateful to Andrea for her years of commitment and hard work in the school.

We are also saying goodbye to Jeff van Zyl, who originally joined the school in January 2013. Jeff has had an instrumental role in the development of the upper school and the implementation of the SSC. He has inspired teachers and pupils alike and we will miss him enormously. Jeff is also moving to Germany, where he is taking on an Upper School English teaching post in Frieberg Waldorf school.

Last but not least we say goodbye to David Luff, who has spent a year in the school teaching woodwork and music across a range of ages. We are sorry to see David leaving so soon, but thank him for his hard work and contributions in the time he has been here.

We would like to congratulate existing staff Carlotta Lizier and Jacqui Armour, who have taken on the role of SSC coordinator as a job share. Over recent months both Carlotta and Jacqui have become quite intimately familiar with the workings of the SSC as they have both helped to moderate the work of other teachers as well as support individual students. With their different backgrounds, Carlotta (Science) and Jacqui (Literacy) will make a strong and complementary team.

Whilst we are still going through recruitment processes for some of our vacancies, we have in the last couple of days successfully appointed a new member of Upper School staff, Sarah Brocklehurst, who will be joining us full time from September as our new English & PSHEE teacher. We look forward to welcoming Sarah into the school.

THE CLASS 12 (ELDER CLASS) VERSE

In the ever-widening paths of life,
May there be reflected,
What in the golden years of youth,
Impressed itself into the heart
Like a seal of true humanity.
May, what the soul was granted to find
In heart-warmed companionship
Show its strength in the depths of memory-
Through the spiritual guidance of the strong forces
Of a cherished schooling for life.