

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

12th July 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday 2nd September – Inset day
Tuesday 3rd September – Autumn term starts
Monday 21st October – Half term
Tuesday 12 November – Martinmas festival
Friday 29 November – Advent garden
Friday 13th December – Christmas holiday

FAREWELL FROM MR AND MRS HIGGINS

It is with a mixture of sadness and hope that we leave lovely Norwich Steiner School. For the last 12 or so years this building and the life in it has been an enormous part of both our lives. We have watched it grow from a tiny group of children and their brave and trusting parents, to a bustling, well-established organisation.

We have had the privilege of having to transform our own knowledge of the world (every subject on the curriculum) into imaginative pictures for children to not only understand, but hopefully also be inspired by. Adapting our own outlook into one that is more playfully appropriate to children has been wonderfully enlivening for our own experience. Not only that, but on so many occasions have we brought a subject, whether musical, artistic, verbal or movement based, only to see it brought to greater life by the amazing imaginations and commitment of the children we have had the pleasure to teach.

We have also enjoyed meeting a wide range of adults with varied skills who have brought their own knowledge to the children here. But a special thanks must go to Carol, who has also been here from the beginning, for her permanent smile in the face of endless disruptions, and Sandie, without whom we would never have had this wonderful space to be in everyday...without her there would be no Norwich Steiner School.

Finally, to all of the parents who believe that this system of education is not only beneficial for their own child, but also necessary for humanity, we can confirm through our experience that Waldorf Education is a thing that really works. Childhood is such a brief and fleeting moment in our lives, it is precious and should be protected.

‘Unless you become like little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven’. Norwich Steiner School has always been a creative space away from the pressures of the modern world, where there is no hurry and no pressure and where children feel safe enough to want to learn. Long may it be so. Hold not only this school, but the whole Waldorf school movement in your hearts and the fate of children, and humanity, will be fine.

With best wishes and love to all,
Mr and Mrs Higgins

PS. Sarah Higgins is kindly continuing to support the school for the first half term after the summer holidays, by continuing as Maple class teacher whilst we continue recruiting.

PUPPET MAKING WITH WILLOW CLASS

By Sarah Higgins

When asked to define what puppets are and what they are for, the students in Willow did not have much of a relationship to them, or an understanding of their function in the world. Maybe for some there was a distant memory from the visual stories in kindergarten, for others their idea of puppets is distorted from contemporary representations. The conclusion was that they are objects that are controlled by humans. Their purpose is becoming clear.

Actually, what Willow class did not know at the start, is that in the process of making a puppet, the puppet somehow determines its own existence, its character and role, and that we are merely helping them to evolve. That sounds a bit strange, but it was the best part of the teacher training that Mr Higgins and I did all those years ago. Making puppets is magic, and Willow class are already beginning to form a connection to what they are creating.

Puppets can also often say so much more than a human, can sometimes say what we can't, which is why it is a perfect exercise for class 9 students. And it is also quite a complicated process. Willow students are showing their dexterity (all of those handwork skills they have developed over their lower school years are coming to good use). They are also researching fairy stories in order for their puppets to express suitably entertaining stories for the younger children.

SEQUOIA CLASS

By Mr Higgins

It certainly does not seem like seven years have passed since the original six Sequoia pupils timidly entered Class 1 one September morning, long ago.

Since that time, we have had shared wonderful experiences together, - whether making amazing Temples of Solomon out of cardboard and sitting in a circle afterwards, a tiny 7-canded Menorah illuminating them, - planting a Sequoia sapling which we were all taller than (now it is taller than me!), - embarking on what was expected to be a wonderful day trip to the Cambridge Botanical Gardens and The Fitzwilliam Museum to enjoy examples of Greek and Roman Sculpture, but instead being stuck on an immovable and very hot train for most of the day!, - building a large and intricate den adjoining the trees in the school field and enjoying a story and lunch within it, - going busking to raise money for the homeless one day just before Christmas and almost fainting with the cold!, - jousting with seagulls at Wells as we defended our fish and chips after spending three days cycling to the sea, - or wearing fake backsides and engaging in bawdy language in our performance of 'The Canterbury Tales'.

Many interesting characters have come and gone during Sequoia's time thus far, and two have even stayed since the beginning!

It has been a wonderful experience to have worked with all of the wonderfully independent, imaginative and playful children that have constituted Sequoia class over the years, and I trust that they will continue to thrive and bring joy to the school as they gradually move up the school together.

I look forward to coming back to see the class tackling Shakespeare or something equally suitable for their talents together in the future.

Thank you Sequoia, and Goodbye!

MAPLE CLASS OLYMPICS

By Mrs Higgins

This was the seventh Olympics that I have visited, and the third that I have been part of for the three days, and it still astounds me in its beauty and thoughtfulness, but my favourite moment of the whole trip was not even at Michael Hall, it was on the journey there.

Maple class got off the first train and walked to the bus stop near Liverpool St station. We had to wait 10 minutes for a bus, so we put Simas' hat down on the pavement and he played his ukelele to earn us our bus fair. The whole class spontaneously surrounded him and started singing. We didn't get any money in the hat, but the smiles from workers bustling by was satisfying enough.

We finally joined the 430ish other children, and despite the ferocious heat and unrelenting wind for the duration of our stay, Maple class put up the tents, kept the fire burning, did two full days of training, and fought off colds and hay fever, all without complaining or arguing.

They truly earned their medals. When asked what the most challenging part of their Olympics experience was, the answers were -

The wind, the sloping ground, the marathon, the sun,

And the best things -

Making new friends, the fire, the marathon, and most importantly, the food.

On that note - There were many schools there with the same amount of children camping, and they had 3 or more helpers cooking the food (and they still ordered pizzas!) We had only Carlotta feeding all 22 of us, and she managed to fill our bellies with delicious food 3 times a day on one gas stove. As Jack said on the second day "The food is really good and I can't believe Madame Lizier is doing it all on her own." So thanks Carlotta, (and of course thank you to Andrew and Charlie for their assistance too), and thank you Maple class for making my seventh and last Olympic experience so enjoyable.

ROWAN CLASS

By Mrs Mason

Rowan class worked very hard this term to present a play: Noah and the flood, an Old Testament Tale. It auspiciously rained for nine days leading up to the play and Rowan class were pleased that they had actually built an ark in preparation for the play and maybe beyond! There were many lines to be learnt and scripts to be lost!

Rowan class made many amazing and beautiful animal puppets to bring on to the ark. Ash class joined us in making puppets and taking on the roles of animals coming on board, two by two. This was accompanied by all the children and a very large audience singing: 'Who built the Ark? Noah! Noah!'

For this play, the children had many lines to remember....also to know your own place in the play and have an awareness of the rest of the actors and their lines too. This was a new learning for all the children and they worked so well together as a class to bring the play to its final conclusion and present to parents and families. Well done Rowan class!

GOODBYE TO THE HIGGINSES...AND A BIT OF SCHOOL HISTORY

By Sandie Tolhurst, School Administrator

Michael & Sarah Higgins have become part of the fabric of the school. They have been cheerful and energetic and loving of the children and the school since soon after it began. They are positive 'can do' people and we will miss them greatly.

Michael began work in the school in Easter 2006. He took on the first three pupils of Class 1 (Elder class) when the first teacher (also a Michael) was unable to carry on. In those days, the only staff were Sherrie and Margaret in kindergarten and Carol in the office. So Michael had minimal colleague support. However, with his creativity, good humour and intelligence, the children being educated by him (Elder class) learnt well and were very happy to have him as their teacher. Elder class went on to become our first graduates from the school in July 2017, and I am sure that the wonderful character of that class was due to a significant extent to their class teacher.

We first met Sarah in the autumn term of 2007 at an 'Auction of Promises' organised by parents and in January 2008, Sarah became a kindergarten assistant. In summer of that same year, Michael and Sarah married and in Autumn 2008, on moving to our current premises, we split the large kindergarten into two smaller ones. Sarah became the Kindergarten teacher in one of them and in Autumn 2009, she moved into the school and became the Birch class teacher.

The academic year 2008-2009 was the schools most turbulent and troubled year. Just as we moved into our new premises, the country went into a recession and affected our parents, their ability to pay and consequently the schools ability to survive. Two staff including Michael also became unwell in the Autumn term and the school became overwhelmed by difficulties. After a relatively short period of absence, Elder class were delighted to be reunited with Michael in the Spring term of 2009. However, it was the troubles in that stressful academic year 2008-9 that led to the School being taken to an employment tribunal in 2011.

One morning in the Autumn term 2011 following the tribunal, of the four class teachers, two had become ill on arriving in school (one had hurt his back and was on all fours; the other was being sick with a migraine) and just as we were deciding how to manage the morning, the school received a phone call from the chief inspector of the Schools Inspection Service that he was about to arrive to carry out a no notice inspection.

So there we were, with four combined classes and only two teachers...Michael and Sarah...and a School inspector about to walk through the front doors. But as has been the case many times over the years, Michael and Sarah have always refused to be daunted and without any fuss and with a great deal of skill and good humour, each of them combined another class with their own.

In 2012, Elder class became our first upper school class and Mr Higgins went back to the new class 1, which he named Sequoia. Even that name, with its five vowels, is typical of something about Mr Higgins and his enjoyment of the different, or the funny or the ridiculous.

Two years later, Mrs Higgins said goodbye to Birch class as they moved into upper school and went back to the next class 1, which she named Maple Class.

Aside from their class teacher roles, Michael taught Music and Religion, and for a number of years has been one of our designated safeguarding persons; and Sarah taught art and debating lessons. As a team, they have held and taken responsibility for over 70 school festivals. They were both members of the school management team and have given hours of support to their colleagues, both past and present.

Michael & Sarah, Mr & Mrs Higgins...we will miss you. We thank you for all your hard work and all the years of your lives that you've given to the school. We wish you well and hope you will come back and visit us often.

Love from all the staff and children of Norwich Steiner School

PERSONNEL UPDATE

By Sandie Tolhurst, School Administrator

Welcome to Sandie Arrowsmith (to be known as Mrs Arrowsmith) will be a class guardian for Sequoia class guardian and will also take Sequoia class for their main lessons in English and History, as well as working in upper school.

Also to Aksel Undset has been appointed as our new Music and Drama teacher.

And to Graham Starling, who has been already working with us a few hours a week teaching final year physics and chemistry, has been appointed as our new upper school science teacher.

Mr Dadd, our art teacher has sadly resigned due to the ongoing health difficulties of a very close family member. We thank him for his hard work and hope that all will be well for him in the near future.

OAK CLASS

By Sandie Tolhurst, Class guardian

Oak class pupils have had a good year in the school. Not only have they been continuing their education in subjects across the broad curriculum, but they've been learning about the standards and requirements for Achieving in the New Zealand Certificate for Education. Most of the class have learnt that keeping up with work, not leaving it to the last minute, asking teachers for clarification when unsure, handing in drafts and handing in final work on time, are all part of the recipe to success. Some still struggle with aspects of this, but all are moving in the right direction.

Examples of topics they've studied as part of the certificate this year include: surveying, Bothmer gym, horticulture, art, textiles, trigonometry, algebra, formal writing, poetry, biology, drama and music. This is just a sample, as in all the class have studied for 25 learning outcomes (each a different topic), and those pupils who are also studying modern foreign languages, have done 28 learning outcomes.

Whilst some pupils in Oak class may have a clear idea of what areas they might like to specialise in or what they want to go on to do as a career, the majority don't. And here lies one of the great assets of the NZCSE...that you don't specialise until the third and final year, allowing pupils to keep their options open, and make important decisions only when they are mature young adults.

Oak class has also been host to a number of overseas students over the course of the year, most students coming from German Steiner Schools. The overseas students bring diversity, culture, language and new friendships into the life of the school. Mostly they are from large schools and often comment on how the school has a real family feel to it and how different this makes it from any large school. It's particularly wonderful when you hear our own students conversing with them in German as they walk along the corridors!

Next year, Oak class is moving down into the classroom downstairs next to kindergarten. They will have 2 years left in school and the downstairs classroom marks the final staging post to graduating from the school.

Finally, a thank you to Oak class pupils for your contributions in our last and special assembly of the year, where the words 'Bald Primadona' in a speech about the departing teachers, led to a wonderful rendition with flutes, guitars, drums, and even with one pupil playing a spine binder of the music from

'The Good, the Bad the Ugly!'

ASH CLASS

By Naomi Pratt, class teacher

Ash class started the year in September as a small class of 4 pupils, and has ended with the same number although with one different pupil. It has been a rewarding and enjoyable year. The children have been busy this term getting ready for the sun children to join the class, which will make an even 10 in September. Ash class and the sun children from kindergarten have been skipping, listening to a story and drawing as a group, and we are very excited to have them in the class. We have been building model gardens based on a story of a lark who finds a home in a friendly farmer's field. The class have also been enjoying learning the songs for our festivals and special assemblies this term.....singing with much boldness and joy!

BIRCH CLASS FROM THE GRADUATION CEREMONY

By Sarah Brocklehurst

"I haven't known Birch as long as some other teachers, but in the last two years I have spent many weeks in your classroom, teaching English, Philosophy and of course supporting you through your class plays. During that time I have gotten to know you and I have learned some things from you too. I have learned or perhaps been reminded of what it is like to be 18, but mainly I have learned how to spell and how to use punctuation correctly - thank you Marley. I have also learned that together as a class you have developed a number of lovely qualities:

You are friends, bonded together as a class and very much this unit of nine that you see here.

You are tolerant of the differences between you and accepting of each other.

And you have a very definite Birch sense of humour - I will be checking behind the clock when you are gone as well as taking down any of the remaining awards for flatulence!

Before you leave there are two things I wish to remind you of as you go out into the world. Firstly, be true to yourself. Don't live someone else's life, or follow someone else's path, not your friends, nor your parents or the one chosen by some imaginary version of you. But figure out what it is that you want to do and then do that.

As Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself, everyone else is taken."

Secondly, at some point in the future you may find yourself a bit lost, unsure about what to do next. I know that the adults around will understand what I mean. When this happens remember that you were here at this school, Norwich Steiner School, and that here you learned to be curious, to love learning and to use your imagination. If you remember these things then I am certain that you will become 'unstuck'. So as you go out into the world today I leave you with these words from F. Scott Fitzgerald,

"For what it's worth: it's never too late or, in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be.

There's no time limit, stop whenever you want. You can change or stay the same, there are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. And I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of. If you find that you're not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again."