

Talking Trees

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

8th July 2011

Dates for your diary

Friday 15th July – Break up for summer holidays
Monday 5th September- Inset day
Tuesday 6th September – Inset day
Wednesday 7th September – Return to school

Workdays this holiday (11am-3pm)

Wednesday 20th July
Wednesday 10th August
Wednesday 17th August
Wednesday 24th August
Wednesday 31st August – Cleaning Workday

Please come and help for a few hours on a workday if you can so that we can open again in September with the building looking beautiful for all our children. Workdays can be quite social occasions for adults and children alike and it's a good chance for the children to keep in touch with one another over the long summer holidays. If for any reason, we have to cancel a workday, we will send an email around at least 24 hours beforehand notifying parents of the cancellation. If you are not on email, we ask that you check with someone who is on email before you come that it is still going ahead; or phone Sandie on 07549 651016.

French with the older classes

By Madame Moyle

I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching French to Birch and Elder classes over the last two terms but I feel that I am now ready to start my maternity leave!

We have covered a wide range of topics and skills incorporating language games and songs to help children with their vocabulary learning. We started the New Year celebrating the French epiphany festival with a special cake and worked on the 'Roule-Galette' children's story as a follow up. The children performed the story in French in class choosing an animal from the characters. We also performed a French restaurant scene when covering our food topic, which was done with a lot of humour and confidence from the children!

We have subsequently worked hard on the leisure topic whilst looking at some more complex grammar such as French nouns, adjectives and verbs.

We are finishing the term with an art project based on the work of French artist, Matisse. This will enable children to demonstrate their artistic skills as well as including the French that they have learnt on colours, shapes and sizes. I am looking forward to seeing their masterpieces!

Wishing everybody a good break! Bonnes vacances!

Oak Class

Jeremy Nowell, Class teacher

After half term we went straight into a three-week 'Building' main lesson. Miss Nelleke and Mr Dyer provided much of the practical input, with the children making a model yurt with a cover which they felted, and Mr Dyer helping the children to make a cob oven. Miss Nelleke also provided a number of inspirational books on traditional mud houses. These were remarkable not just for the pictures of mud buildings from all over the world, but also because of the wonderful Celtic forms we were able to glean from them, and which we developed both in our clay and main lessons.

Oak class began to notice architectural forms everywhere – from the arches over the school windows to the scrolled gable ends on neighbouring houses. We learnt a great deal about roofs just by observing and drawing them: valleys, flashing, gables, ridges, gutters and down-pipes all became part of our daily vocabulary. We learnt about the skeleton of the roof that lies beneath the tiles, and we built this skeleton out of planks – plates, joists and rafters, with two children hanging onto either end of the ridge.

We also sketched the various brick bonds we found around the school, and learnt about others that we didn't. We decided the school itself was principally Flemish, that the English bond made a good form drawing and that the Garden Wall bond presented the fewest challenges to student and builder alike.

Despite all this fascinating technical stuff, we kept finding ourselves coming back to the idea of 'home'

– after all, what’s the point of a building if it can’t be properly lived in? In their own writing on the theme of ‘Home Sweet Home’ the children decided for themselves what it is that really makes a home special, and perhaps in doing so became a little more conscious of why it is, however much they may love school, they so love being picked up at the end of the day!

Some of us went on an outing to the Royal Norfolk Show – definitely not one for the faint hearted! Whilst eating our lunch we inadvertently learnt how *not* to handle a loaded shotgun – something which caused one or two of us to choke on our cucumber sandwiches. We were then entertained in the ring by sheepdogs, Indian runners and even our very own Poppy! Thank you to Katie for all her hard work in organising this trip. And well done Aviva for managing to recruit nearly every child in Norfolk to promote its inflated, though unfailingly uninspiring, brand name.

Reflections of a Volunteer

Rachel Hales, Personnel

The school had recently moved to its new building in September 2008 when I first joined as a volunteer. Four of my grandchildren were already happily in attendance.

When I woke on Monday morning this week I was left with the warm satisfaction of the previous days happy event, the summer picnic. What a glorious occasion it had been – a time when so many of us were able to gather socially with our families and friends in a relaxed atmosphere created for us by our hard working events team supported by the teachers and volunteers.

The previous week the pupils and teachers had delighted us on St John’s Day with their festival where their music both singing and instrumental was quite charming. As we see the school grow and the children get older it just goes from strength to strength with such beauty it never ceases to amaze me.

This year the school has seen a really good official School Inspection carried out which confirms that the experience the children are having is all that it should be and I have no doubt more. When I arrive in the mornings I feel confident as we deliver the children for their day that they are experiencing a truly inspirational form of education. Minutes after nine o’clock I can hear the school filled with music or see children out in the playground engaged in skipping or a ball game to warm them up before they start their lessons.

We all then settle down to the tasks ahead of us for the day which will be many and varied. We never have enough time to complete them all but the manner in which they are conducted is so pleasant that, to me, it doesn’t feel like work. The atmosphere within the building is one of positivity and continuous growth with support for each other. I really do congratulate the staff for maintaining, day after day, the environment they accomplish.

I know how valued the contributions are of all the people who volunteer in any way to encourage and help with the tasks that need doing. We can never have enough volunteers so if you can give of your time, your treasure or your talent please let us know. Anything from an hour upwards makes a difference. Tasks from washing up to admin, painting to gardening skills are all welcome. Please do let us know if you can help.

This year we shall sadly be saying farewell to Anna & Anka as they proceed on their life’s journey to their own new beginnings. We shall be sorry to see them go and to lose them as part of this dedicated team but we do wish them well and thanks for all they have contributed and brought to the school. Sandrine, the French teacher is leaving to have a baby so we wish her well and we thank Nelleke for her year as Handwork teacher. Also we would like to thank Mark Lord for the year of gardening experience he, as a volunteer, has given the children.

In September we shall be welcoming some new faces joining the school to add to the team and of course the delight of some new children with their families for us to get to know.

Summer in the Kindergarten

By Debora Walker, Kindergarten teacher

We have enjoyed some beautiful festivals this term in Kindergarten. We came back to the May festival, filled with blossoms and dancing around the maypole: a joyful, light-filled festival of spring, bringing the promise of re-birth. This was followed by our Whitsun celebration on the Friday before Pentecost. The children came into Kindergarten wearing white and bringing white flowers with which we decorated our table. We held a special Whitsun ring-time using the symbolism of the white dove and enjoyed a snack of fresh fruit salad and biscuits decorated with white icing after we had spoken a verse “*Flaming light, shine so bright. Flaming light give your might, make us strong and make us bold. Turn our word to living gold*” and we lit 12 small candles surrounding a tall central one. Our story was called “The Whitsun daisy story” echoing the image of the flowering of the spirit at Whitsun. We enjoyed joining in the celebration of St.

John's tide festival so close to the Summer Solstice, the two interweaving their meanings. For the first time our Sun children were invited to jump over the fire, following their soon-to-be classmates from Willow! Our activities, stories and ring-times have followed our celebration of the festivals and nature as it appears at this time of the year. We have made butterflies and doves, fireballs and bees; our stories have followed a similar two-week cycle and we are now completing the year with "The friend of the bees". We are singing songs about farmers and scarecrows, snails and all manner of creatures.

Our snacks have also shifted with the seasons and we have been following our summer menu, taking full advantage of the fresh fruit on offer at this time of year. We will introduce soup once again in the Autumn, when Thursday shifts from being garden day back to soup-making day. On the second to last Thursday of term we are going to make pizza using the fresh herbs from the garden. A recipe for one of our favourite snacks is given below (the children in Chestnut requested that we include this one!).

Anzac biscuit recipe

By Andy Phillips Smith

Ingredients for 20 biscuits:

145g plain flour
145g porridge oats
80-100g caster sugar
1 tablespoon golden syrup
100g butter (or if vegan 100g vegetable oil)
1 teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda
2 tablespoons of boiled water

Preheat oven to 160 degrees centigrade

1. Add sugar, oats and flour together in a bowl and mix.
2. Melt butter/heat oil in a saucepan and add golden syrup.
3. Add bicarbonate of soda to the boiled water. Next add this to the golden syrup mixture and stir.
4. Create a well in the centre of the dry ingredients and then add the frothy golden syrup mixture.
5. Stir mixture evenly, you may need to add more flour/oats if the mixture is too sticky.
6. Grease/use baking parchment on a baking tray. Use a desert spoon to measure out quantities of your mixture. Roll into balls and flatten slightly when you place them on the baking tray.
7. Cook for 8-10 minutes. Then allow to cool on a rack.

Serve with fresh fruit salad.

We will end the term with a Sun child graduation ceremony to which this year we are inviting the parents of the Sun children. The six children have worked very hard on their final year projects which includes making a puppet. So, of course, they will be putting on a puppet show at the graduation as well as singing their favourite ring-time songs from the year. This marks a culmination of their three years with us in Kindergarten and also is the first step on their journey through the school years and up the steps to class 1!

We say a loving good bye to this small group of graduates, we look forward to seeing our 4 and 5 year olds again in the Autumn, and we warmly welcome our new group of 3 year olds about to embark on an exciting three year voyage through Kindergarten.

News from the Parent & Child Groups

Helen Kibblewhite, Parent & Child Group leader

This term we have welcomed Katie Baxter as the teacher of the Tuesday group; so there are now five teachers and two assistants, so many different talents are brought to our work and we have many plans for next year.

It is a privilege to work with all the families with young children who attend the groups and we wish you all a healthy and happy summer, and look forward to meeting again in the autumn!

Catherine Mack and I have recently attended some training at Steiner House on the work of Emmi Pikler (which has been very successfully integrated into Steiner early years settings in mainland Europe and the USA). At the core of the philosophy of this work is an understanding of the need to provide an environment in which children are nurtured, respected and allowed freedom of movement, so they may grow and develop in security, relationships to others and self mastery. This fits very well with Steiner Waldorf Early Years education, and we feel enthusiastic about finding out what the work of Emmi Pikler can bring to our parent and child groups in Norwich. The first Emmi Pikler training in the UK is starting in York this autumn, initiated by Dot Male who also organises the "First Three Years" courses for Steiner Parent and Child teachers.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about the recent developments in early years work in Europe and the states, I recommend:

A Warm and Gentle Welcome: Nurturing Children from Birth to Age Three, The Gateway Series Five, Compiled by the WECAN RIE/Pikler Working Group.

This is available from Steiner House book shop. I

have a copy which can be borrowed from September.

The chapters cover topics such as:

- Making Peace With Toddler Conflict
- Emmi Piklers' Trust in The Wise Infant
- Meeting The Needs of The Times
- The Wonder and Complexity of Motor Development in Infants

Birch Class

Sarah Higgins, Class Teacher

"The harmonious proportions hidden within all of nature's offerings" is essentially what Birch class have been studying since the Easter term.

For the children, mythological narrative from India instigated practical construction of Yantras, the purpose of which is to represent a meeting of heaven and earth, and the human's place within that.

For Botany, Birch class children have been keeping a record of the qualities and seasonal changes of the many examples of plant life around the school. Then the peculiarity of the plant itself was revealed to the children when they constructed the geometrical form, in all its perfection, that is contained within it; the rose and the pentagram, for example.

For the children and the teacher, these revelations have been really exciting.

Elder Class

Michael Higgins, Class teacher

Elder have just come to the end of their study of the epic mediaeval poem: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in which Gawain, who beheads the mysterious verdant giant only to watch in dismay as he leaves Camelot with his head underneath his arm. For a year and a day, Gawain travels north to the Wirral where he must meet the Green Knight at his mysterious chapel and let him have his turn in swiping at *his* neck! On his quest, he encounters many dangers, none greater than a disguised Morgan le Fay who, through various means, tries to bring shame on the Round Table. Being a complex and ambivalent poem, she both does and does not succeed, and we are left at the end with a Gawain who is older, richer in heart and deepened by his experiences.

Over its 101 stanzas, Elder have entered into the spirit of the text, reading it aloud as part of their recitation every morning, often embarking on tangents as to its possibilities as a play for next year.

They have also been commissioned to compose their own epic poem over the course of the following year in which a protagonist must overcome a set of challenges in order to achieve a goal. This relates to a wider point currently being addressed in class of the fact that the majority of plots from tales of world mythology and even contemporary fiction are reducible to one essential plot line: David and Goliath. Completed poems in this publication this time next year!

Willow Class

Ms Anka, Class teacher

If you ask a Willow child what they have learnt this year they would tell you this:

"We can count and we can write,
We can knit and we can fight,
We can listen and recite
English, French and German too
But wait until we're in class two!"

Initially they were a bit embarrassed to say that they have learned to fight but we then discussed that it is not real fighting that is meant here but the ability to persevere and to keep practicing whatever needs practicing until it is mastered. And indeed, this has probably been one of our main aims this year: to learn how to learn and to love to learn; as we say every morning in our morning verse:

"...I reverence oh God, the strength of human kind,
which Thou so graciously has planted in my soul,
that I with all my might, may love to work and
learn..."

The children have experienced that learning can be hard work but is very rewarding when you achieve something. They have also practiced helping and teaching each other and are looking forward to teaching their class one friends next school year.

Personally, I would like to say goodbye to everyone now. I wish the school and everybody involved in it all the best for the future. Thank you very much for the great time I had in Norwich. I will always have very fond memories of my time here.

Congratulations and thank you to all those who organised and helped with the summer picnic. It was a wonderful event and also raised a valuable £1,200 for the School.

A special thank-you from the Games teacher and school children to the Jeckells family for their kind donation to the school of the tug-of-war rope!