

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

Wednesday 25th March 2015

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 26th March – last day of spring term
Thursday 16th April – workday (11am-3pm)
Monday 20th April – First day of summer term
Wednesday 22 April – AGM (provisional date)
Friday 1st May – Mayday festival
Monday 4th May – Bank holiday – no school
Thursday 7th May – Polling station day
Friday 22nd May – break up for half term hols
Friday 19th June – St Johns festival
24th – 27th June – Willow class Olympics camp!
Saturday 11/Sunday 12 July – Summer fayre
Friday 17th July – Last day of summer term

Elder Class study Music Theory

By Claire Duncan, music teacher

This term many students in Elder Class, who could not do so before, are learning to read music. Alongside this they are further developing practical music making by playing the recorder in unison and in two parts. Although many are proficient musicians already, this is designed to encourage independent music reading which will open up a whole new world to them in terms of social music making as well as helping them to gain extra accreditation academically. Being able to read music and turn what seem to be random dots and shapes into beautiful melodies and harmonies is life affirming and the confidence it gives can benefit many other areas of the curriculum.

By Easter the group are aiming to be able to play several pieces of two and three part music, including rounds and canons, using both descant and tenor recorders. By the end of the academic year our expected outcome is to be able to play some music for four parts by Baroque and Classical composers, as well as more well known twenty-first century pieces with the possible addition of treble recorders. It is easy to see that students have been taught well in their younger years but as with all

education they have a range of learning styles and speeds. However all are progressing week by week and seem to be enjoying the challenge. I have been very impressed with the commitment and application they are showing and am sure they will continue to discover the joy in bringing music alive from the page.

Footnote – Claire is an experienced Steiner class teacher who loves to teach music and offers private lessons in the flute (the silver ones, James Galway style). If you are interested in your child having private flute lessons, Claire would be delighted to hear from you.

Safeguarding Children in School

Jacqui Armour, lead DSP

‘Safeguarding Children’, quite simply, means keeping children and young people safe. It is not limited to child protection, to abuse and neglect, but covers the many issues and concerns faced by children and young people, aiming to ensure that they grow up happily, healthily, safely and able to achieve their full adult potential.

The school has embraced its legal duty of care towards the children, and has developed policies and practical procedures to help us to keep the children safe.

All staff attend regular safeguarding and child protection training (which is what we will be doing on this Friday’s INSET day). We have a strong, proactive safeguarding team of two ‘DSPs’ (Designated Safeguarding Persons) – currently Michael Higgins and Jacqui Armour, and a designated trustee for safeguarding- John Hales.

The DSPs are available to support the children, parents and staff and to deal with any concerns. We also work closely with families and external agencies in order to provide the

best support and outcomes for the children and their families. We meet regularly and have a constant open dialogue about safeguarding issues that may affect children across the school- from Kindergarten to Upper School- everything from recruiting staff, or handling concerns about children's welfare, to internet safety or making sure that the children are dressed appropriately for the weather.

As a parent, carer or neighbour you may sometimes be worried about the wellbeing or safety of a child, and not be sure what to do. We would be happy to talk to you about any concerns that you may have, and can point you towards organisations that are able to provide further advice and support.

If you have any questions and would like to talk to one of us, please get in touch via the school office.

Our Child Protection Policy can be found on the school and kindergarten noticeboards, or downloaded from the school website.

Further information on safeguarding and issues such as protecting children at home, online safety, self harm and sexting, or what to do if you are concerned about a child, can be found on the NSPCC website: www.NSPCC.org.uk.

From the Land of the Labyrinth

Jacqui Armour, kindergarten assistant

The kindergarten children have discovered a new land.

They have traversed, explored, surveyed and mapped the labyrinth- strolling, walking, striding, marching, jumping, crawling and rolling over the rugged terrain- over hills and mountains, through valleys and ravines, forests and jungles, crunching over frosty artic tundra and wading through dewy streams.

They have unearthed important ancient archeological artifacts: coins, buttons, stones, crystals, sweet wrappers, pottery, wax and other treasures; discovered and studied native inhabitants: birds, beetles, spiders and ants and have even found evidence of a new species- the fast-food-fox.

Outside play is transformed: from running up and down, racing, shouting, screaming and chasing to play that is at once more purposeful and more imaginative, more thoughtful and more co-operative. There is more pottering too. The play feels more held, the children are relaxed and at ease here. They are settling themselves in- building dens, fairy houses and nests, staking their claim, making their mark, hanging their hats from the trees.

The labyrinth has provided a long ramble in the country, in a small urban space, offering possibilities for the type of physical play, movement and exercise that is so vital to healthy development:

'It is important for a young child to have opportunities to say "YES" to physical challenges. By being physical the child is stimulated in her curiosity and she can discover her surroundings. By exploring the body's challenges and possibilities the child gets to know itself. From very early on it is important for children to have opportunities to go for long walks and become inspired by their natural surroundings and experience the changing seasons. It is essential to let children crawl, jump, dance, play with mud and so on. All these things help children to develop and give them a natural confidence. Movement helps children to test and know themselves better. This way a child can meet other children in inspiration, in play and in care for each other.'

Janni Nichol, quoting Helle Heckmann,
Kindling: The Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education (UK) Autumn/Winter 2011

Adults and children view the form, scale and function of the labyrinth differently. For us it is a man-made path that we walk on festivals, a bit difficult to get round with our big feet, especially in wellies, and perhaps a nuisance to maintain. The children do not see it as an entire structure, and for them it does not have a set purpose, a correct route, a beginning or an end, or even a fixed size. It can be huge for them- or tiny, microcosm or universe. As it changes with the seasons it both sustains and shifts their interest. It is different every day- a

different world every day. They do not know why it is there, or how it came about, and they don't ask.

Perhaps inspired by the labyrinth, or by watching the school children re-shape the garden, the children have been making beautiful, intricate arrays and patterns of their own, from objects that they have found 'lying around' (thank you Harriet!)- twigs, pinecones, logs, hay, and of course, mud- creating sculptures that are Andy Goldsworthy-worthy.

They have also started to tunnel...

Eclipse, Observations from the Kindergarten

The world did not come to an end
The rain did not put out the sun
Our eyes didn't get any darker
'Mine are brown already'
We didn't fall asleep
We did go outside
To do skipping
We did get colder
The wind got faster
The birds started singing
And it seemed to get lighter
It looks like we missed it then
Maybe there'll be another one later

School Development & Premises

By Sandie Tolhurst, school administrator

As the school grows and develops, we have continually to look afresh at our use of space and reorganise how we do things in order to meet the growing and multi-faceted needs of the school. So there are a couple of changes that are going to happen over the summer holidays, one of which is conversion of the reception room into Carol's office and the sick bay. This will allow the room that is currently our front office to become a staff room, with space for plenty of work stations so that staff can do their planning, check their communications and have somewhere quiet to sit and work when they are not teaching. One of the knock-on effects of this is that it will no longer be possible to have the bookstall or shop in the reception room. We will also have to reorganise the entrance hall so that

there are a few chairs kept there for anyone waiting to attend meetings and so on. However, we do hope to be able to find space in the entrance hall for a cabinet, so that a small shop can continue to operate.

The additional purpose behind moving the staff room into the current main office, was to free up another small room (ie the existing staff room) for pupils to have pastoral support sessions with their teachers and for small group or individual lessons.

News from Willow Class

By Nina Scaife, class teacher

Happy Naw Ruz! (Persian New Year, March 21st). Spring has definitely sprung and as the ground and the air warms up, the children are starting their yearly requests to remove shoes in the field and run free on the grass. It is with great satisfaction that the Willow children can now join in with 'Storm the Castle' for the first time, having had what seemed like an agonising, endless wait until they were old enough!

Thanks go to Frances in Oak Class for helping us set up our Class Library, which has proved a great success. More thanks also go to everyone who has given donations for the cakes at our Monday Cake stall. The proceeds will be spent on new books as recommended by the children and from a visitor from the Norfolk Children's Book Centre in Alby next term.

We have been enjoying the new Class 5 Ancient Civilisations blocks on India and Persia, culminating with our Play about Zarathustra which we are performing on the last day of term to Willow families and the Lower School. Oh, the agonies and ecstasies of doing a play! So much learning takes place for all the children and the teacher too. For example, the initial disappointment that it isn't a comedy like the story of 'Thor's Hammer', our last play which everyone is very nostalgic about. Then, the simple costumes, lack of props or set that signify a 'proper' play. We have discovered that the power of a voice, however quiet or tentative, is so much more when we believe what we are saying and can transfer this belief to the audience through conviction of movements and gestures. We learnt that although very difficult at times, to be able to support each other when everyone is trying

their best, by being truly present and thinking about what is being said, is the most respectful and wonderful thing. With the beginning of the Persian New Year, comes a new maturity in the class, a new openness to step up, or for some to step back, so that others can shine. The wise words of advice from Ahura Mazda to Zarathustra go deep: 'The first best is GOOD THOUGHT. The second best is GOOD WORDS. The third best is GOOD DEEDS.'

Knitting and thinking

By Mrs Higgins, Class teacher

For someone who only learnt to knit for the first time last summer, the thought of teaching children how to do it was daunting to say the least. Knitting is an intimidating subject to introduce, more so than writing and numbers, because it is just so important on so many levels. Most of you handwork veterans can do it unconsciously while chatting or listening to music, but to newly developing minds and hands, or in my case, stubbornly muddled adult reluctance, the rules and patterns of knitting are bewildering new territory. First the environmental conditions need to be just right. No distractions, quiet - this is just about possible in a room of seven year olds. Then learning the patterns through verse, and co-ordinating the fingers and hands to dance around the needles in the right way is enough to make the head spin. Luckily the experienced Oak children were on hand to be of assistance. It was great for the children in Maple class to have an older, responsible child right next to them to guide their hands. They worked together for three weeks, and now Maple class are knitting on their own. When I watch the class knitting now, going at their own pace, getting used to the rhythm, I can almost see in the weaving their own inner thought patterns and rhythms connecting and moving, as well as the spatial co-ordination, and fine motor fluency. Knitting is the best example of thinking being freed by the hands creative activity, and it will perfectly assist the Maple children in their own cognitive development.

Request for White cloth!

By Mrs Fraser

Willow class are going to the Steiner Olympics this summer and If you have any quality white cloth you would be willing to donate, such as old bedsheets, that we could turn into togas, Willow class would be delighted to accept them.

Food and Clothing

By Mrs Higgins, from the teachers

There have been questions recently at various parents' evenings about food brought in at snack times. Children tell their parents that it isn't fair that some children bring in crisps or chocolate cake for their lunch, while other parents insist on a healthy diet. From the teachers' point of view, our food policy (in the parents' handbook) is both clear, but open enough for parents to make their own decision.

We understand that it is sometimes tricky to always know what the right diet is for your children's school day, and that a lot of products can be deceiving. For example, some food that contains chocolate has a lower sugar content than so called healthy fruit bars. We also know that sometimes emergency meal deals are purchased and that processed food is often more convenient to pack on a busy morning. What we do find though, throughout the range of classes, is that a lot of sugar does have a negative effect on children, on concentration and on energy levels, and that crisps always get envious glances from the children who don't have them.

If we do feel that some snack items are really not acceptable (sweets, fizzy drinks etc), then we insist that the child has them after school hours, not in the classroom. Birthday cake is always greatly appreciated however.

Our clothing policy is less ambiguous, and while it mostly applies to our teenagers who want to express themselves through fashion, it has an impact on the younger children too. Oak class recently had a discussion about the schools clothing policy, and they are well aware of what is discrete and what isn't (animal pictures -fine, animals being killed- not fine, bright colours are nice- fluorescent colours hurt). Younger children are not yet able to think about the impact their clothing has on

others, about peer pressure and so on, so as teachers we encourage all parents to judge what images your children are wearing, what these images express, and what might be distracting in a learning environment.

Sequoia Class

By Mr Higgins, Class teacher

Since January, Sequoia Class has heard how the world was created, how Adam and Eve were cast out of Paradise, how the first person was (accidentally) killed, how the first animals were tamed, how music was created, how the first plough was made, how envy came to be and how many more things which are common to us now initially made their mark on humanity, for good and for ill.

All these stories can be found in Jakob Streit's book, "*And there was Light*", which is a collection of tales culled from various Jewish and Middle-Eastern traditions. What is striking about these tales, which seem, in some ways, to match where the Sequoia children are in themselves at the moment, is the simultaneity and polarity of the forces of dark and light. Jubal, the first musician, may be playing beautiful music on a hill, with the animals and children entranced by his angelic harp-playing, but beneath him in the blacksmiths' cave, two young metalworkers are wrestling and fighting.

This tension is reflected in the children's artwork, the class being encouraged to express the good and bad impulses of the stories' characters with equal care and attention. With there being, and rightfully so, much talk of the beauty of the Waldorf curriculum, it is important to remember that beauty, in its fullness of expression, contains and explores the whole human experience, with all its ambiguities and clarities, and while a class of 8-9 year old children are, quite properly unconscious of this, it is right that they should be guided towards this completeness in their work.

The class have also had an experience of shelter building and, if you are able to peek through the field gate at pick-up time, you will see their huge den which, amazingly, seats all seventeen of us!

A happy Easter from all in Sequoia Class!

Gardening Lessons

By Harriet Watson, gardening teacher

Since September, Oak, Willow and Birch classes have been gardening each week and I thought I would share their progress.

Oak class have worked hard and transformed their area in the corner of the field. It has grown from the original two beds that were there and they now have four more vegetable beds and a flowerbed with a willow arch entrance, all dug and improved with many bags of manure. A few crops are growing already; raspberries, strawberries, rhubarb, broad beans, peas and garlic and lots of seeds have been sown ready for next term.

Willow class have also been digging and manuring their plot and have strawberries, broad beans, peas and garlic growing. In between digging the class planted daffodil and tulip bulbs in pots which are now in flower outside the Kindergarten entrance and also crocus bulbs which are coming up all around the willow den in the Kindergarten field. In January they worked diligently to clear up the rest of the soggy Autumn leaves left in the playground.

Birch class have undertaken a variety of jobs, initially creating a flower border next to the vegetable garden, then some Winter pruning. Now work has begun on two new projects; the boys are creating a garden to grow fruit and vegetables, work has progressed quickly and they have three beds prepared and ready for next term. The girls are developing a corner of the Kindergarten area into a secluded garden which we hope to fill with scented plants and flowers to attract wildlife and to give interest all year round. Already they have planted a small ornamental cherry tree and a willow arch entrance.

The purpose of these lessons, as well as acquiring new skills, is to give the children a sense of the cycle of the growing year and an opportunity to build a feeling over time of how nature works. It is strengthening for the soul to experience how, through ones own efforts,

'new life' can be created.

Regarding the Kindergarten, the aim is to gradually transform the whole of the Kindergarten outside area in to a creative and enlivened garden space in which the children can become absorbed.

If anyone has something they think might be appropriate for the garden, plants, bags of manure, or even a lawnmower, please let me know.

Thank you to those who donated flowerpots and seed trays and many thanks to Joe Murray for the table which has been incredibly useful for sowing seeds and potting up.

I intend to start the after school gardening club again in the summer term which is open to anyone who would like to come along and lend a hand for an hour with some communal weeding, grass cutting or a specific project for the Kindergarten garden. Day to be arranged after Easter.....

An Update: the Steiner School Certificate

By Jeff van Zyl, Upper school teacher

Elder students, the class 10/11 pupils from the school, are back in their classroom. They are currently working in teams of three. Each team is using its data sets as well as its practical knowledge of the land that it has studied, surveyed and got to know intimately over the last seven days of fieldwork. The teams are transforming their data and knowledge into maps.

This process of moving from the direct experience into questions, and then into the 'finding' of underlying laws and concepts, is implicit in the Steiner Upper School curriculum. It is the way that the students are able to develop and build the 'thinking skills' that will support them through life.

What is happening concurrent with the above described Surveying Main Lesson is that the students are gaining and 'banking' credits towards their Steiner School Certificate (SSC) qualification.

The school is now well into its first year of running the SSC.

The SSC is a Level 3 (University entrance level) secondary school qualification that is approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). In essence, this means that the schools which have opted to offer the SSC are able to help their students attain an externally recognised Level 3 qualification while participating in, and completing, the Steiner/Waldorf curriculum.

Like the students, in implementing the SSC, we are learning through our direct experience!

One of the early learnings is around a question we have had which is: '*how will the students respond to being formally assessed?*' which is based on the fact that prior to this academic year, many of the students had never experienced exam conditions or been put through any formal assessment process. The answer to the question is that the timing was perfect and that the students have taken to the SSC 'like ducks to water'.

We can now recognise that older upper school pupils are of an age where they like to see and test themselves against objective criteria and their peers, and are ready to accept the consequences of what this means. The Elder class students have shown a real enthusiasm and commitment to the process. The mood in the class is decidedly upbeat.

A second learning is that the Steiner curriculum has really taught and encouraged the students to observe a phenomena and then uncover its underlying rules. For example, in relation to the SSC itself, in no time at all, students had worked out the principles which govern the SSC assessment process and aligned themselves to become 'hunters and gatherers'. The teachers began to find themselves confronted by 'SSC point hunters'. What became important to the teachers was to focus on the purpose of the curriculum. We reminded ourselves that the Steiner curriculum is about child development. Our primary purpose is to enable students to develop and grow into healthy human beings able to think for themselves and make sound judgements. Our secondary purpose is that

through participating in the curriculum, the students attain an accredited qualification. Fortunately the SSC had already recognised this potential pitfall. Student participation is built into the process. At enrolment, the students all sign an agreement that commits them to participation in all class activities. Our 'point hunters', when reminded of this, were fine. This tension between 'points' and curriculum is part of what has created a healthy class environment.

Looking internally, we can also see that the SSC is benefitting the Norwich Steiner Upper School teaching team. The team has grown in both numbers and expertise. The teachers are able to stay focussed on the central issue of how to bring the Steiner curriculum, and are not distracted by external examinations.

Elder students will finish their maps this week. Next term they have their musical performance at the King of Hearts venue in central Norwich as well as their class plays to look forward to. Like the surveying, they know that these will also be helping them achieve their qualification.

Handwork volunteers sought

By Sandie, on behalf of Helena Fraser

If you would be interested in helping with handwork lessons for Sequoia and Oak classes, we would be pleased to hear from you. It's helpful if you can sew, knit and crotchet, but just as important are a calm and steady temperament, patience and an enjoyment of working with children.

Please contact Sandie or Carol if you wish to register an interest in helping. For safeguarding purposes, all volunteers are required to complete an application form, provide references, and undergo a DBS check.

Oak Class

Jeremy Nowell

Rudolf Steiner once suggested that, each evening, we take a few moments to review the day in reverse. Our term ended with an eclipse: that extraordinary alignment of cosmic bodies; a shadow cast across the earth,

reminding us of journeys beyond journeys, almost too vast to imagine; the moon, faithful scribe of the sun's nocturnal wanderings, suddenly banishing the light, rather than reflecting it.

At the time of the eclipse Oak Class was looking at the brief life of Joan of Arc, whose light was so ruthlessly extinguished by the English. While Joan's instinctive spirituality harked back to a an earlier time, Eleanor of Aquitaine, born three hundred years earlier, was very much a modern woman whose beauty, vitality and political acumen lit up Europe, giving rise to countless dynasties and helping to shape the destinies of nations.

The perfect balance of sun and moon in the eclipse, and the promise that that which is unseen will be revealed: it's all just algebra really, albeit on a cosmic scale. In our algebra main lesson we allowed humble letters to carry the burden of the unknown and watched as the simple laws of balance took care of both sides of the equation, allowing the unknown to become visible with beautiful and reassuring simplicity.

In our creative writing block we heard, with W B Yeats, 'lake waters lapping with low sounds by the shore' and we tried to listen to whatever might be stirring in our 'deep heart's core.' What is it that we really wish for, and how do our deepest wishes reveal to us the as yet un-trodden paths that we, as unique individuals, might follow through life? With his aphorisms, William Blake showed us how to fold back a corner of the world's dim veil, to take a peek into the wonders of eternity and marvel at the infinite wonder to be found in the flight of a bird, the opening of a flower or the unfolding of a single thought. In our own writing we used metaphor as a spanner with which loose the lid from the everyday.

Finally or initially, depending on which way you are facing, we stepped into the rule-bound world of perspective drawing, interpolating and extrapolating until everything vanished at infinity: where, one must assume, it all begins again. Sun and moon move on and the world is revealed once more: the same old world, but different.