POLICY: FRAMEWORK OF KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

With the Steiner Waldorf approach to Early Years education, we provide time and space for the natural, unforced development of key skills as a basis for literacy, numeracy, social and emotional competence. This is fostered by a warm and secure learning environment, where the qualities of childhood are nurtured.

Kindergarten is for children who are between the ages of approximately 3 ¼ - 6 ½ years old. The mixed age kindergarten group contains up to 16 children per day creating a family structure where older children can become aware of the needs of the younger children, and the younger children can imitate the older children. Older children who are familiar with the rhythm of the kindergarten are encouraged to help the younger children and to ease their integration into the group. The number of sessions a child attends varies according to age. The morning session lasts for 4 hours. There is also an afternoon kindergarten provision where a packed lunch is eaten, followed by play and then a story.

In the kindergarten, parents of the children are given both informal verbal updates regarding progress and development as well as more formal updates at individual teacher/parent meetings. In addition, there are more general termly parent evenings. We follow the ***Early Years Foundation Stage Framework,*** delivering the learning and development requirements for our 3-5-year-olds through our Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Curriculum. We deliver the 7 areas of learning and development in order that children may attain all their early learning goals (ELGs). We have been granted exemptions and modifications in some areas of the educational programmes and assessment arrangements, in order to preserve the integrity of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum and practice. Throughout each child's time in kindergarten, a profile form is maintained tracking progress in all key areas and providing a written record of development. This profile form incorporates the EYFS goals minus agreed exemptions (***see separate list of exemptions and modifications***).

The children are assessed for readiness to enter class one during the year that they turn 6, usually entering class one in the September following their 6th birthday. The findings of the assessment are used to guide kindergarten staff in providing suitable differentiation for the 5- and 6-year-olds with planned, structured activities designed to support continuing development and extension of learning and skills, as well as taking into account their individual needs and interests (including those with an EHCP or who are identified as having a SEN). There is a formal admissions procedure to joining class 1 as entry is not automatic. A transition report is always provided for parents and their new class teacher.

Cycles of development

Steiner's educational philosophy recognises three broad seven-year cycles of development: birth to 7, 7 to 14, and 14 to 21. Each stage of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum is designed to work with the developing interests and emerging developmental needs of the child. Educational activities and learning opportunities thus reflect the developmental stages of the child, and the learning environment is purposefully and carefully structured to foster both personal and social learning. During the early years, children learn through example, or imitation, rather than via formal instruction. In general, the curriculum is aimed to adapt itself to the child, and not the other way round. Children are given plenty of time to develop and unfold the many faculties and competencies they will need to thrive in later life. Formative observation and summative assessment, rather than testing, is practised throughout.

Chronological development

The Steiner curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of the child's development. The era of human history being taught at any one time within a Steiner school will correspond in many ways with the stage of development of the child in that particular year group class. For example, early years leaders present children with fairy stories to match their "dream-like", un-awakened state of consciousness; class four (around 9 years old) study the Vikings and Norse mythology to suit their "war-like" feelings; class five (around 10 years old) learn about the Greeks just at the time when their intellect is awakening and their sense of fair play is coming to the fore - and so on. The total curriculum has been likened to an ascending spiral: subjects are revisited several times, but each new exposure affords greater depth and new insights appropriate to the developmental stage of the child.

Kindergarten life in practice

Our kindergarten provides a warm, home-like atmosphere and an opportunity for the children to learn through imitation, free play, rhythm and repetition. During creative play children are allowed to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery, nourishing creativity and the imagination, and thereby cultivating each child's capacity for inventiveness and adaptability. The toys in the kindergarten are simple and intentionally unsophisticated, and the majority of toys are made from natural materials. The simpler the toy, the greater the creative space for the imagination to be exercised and to develop in a natural way.

It follows from this approach that we strongly believe in giving children the free space to develop their

creativity, fostering a life-long love of learning, which in turn helps to lay the foundation for a healthy adult life. In our kindergarten we aim to create an environment that encourages co-operation, sociability, reverence and respect for life and nature.

Play and imitation

Young children are excellent players, and they display an extraordinary talent for imitation. It is the task of the Steiner early childhood teacher to respect and work with this powerful age-old learning process and, as far as possible, not to obstruct it, nor unduly nor unnecessarily to intrude into the play of the children whilst they are in the teacher's charge. Free creative play strengthens the imagination, and repeated research studies have shown that children who are encouraged to enjoy creative play tend to show more empathy towards others and to display less aggression. They are more likely to have the capacity to see things from the perspective of the other, and demonstrate fewer signs of anxiety, distress or fatigue. In Steiner early childhood education, children are encouraged to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery, enabling them to become inventive and adaptable.

Another duty of the early childhood teacher is to provide the presence of a "working adult" – someone whom the children can freely imitate. A combination of practical, domestic and artistic activities are undertaken in the company of the children, designed to encourage skills such as concentration, perseverance and independent activity. Children are fascinated by adult activity, and it is certainly a great responsibility to be worthy of a young child's imitation.

Another application of learning-by-imitation is in the rich variety of (often seasonal) songs and verses offered, sometimes including verses in different languages. These are learnt quite naturally and seamlessly, and constitute an invaluable foundation for later creative living and learning.

Rhythm and repetition

Steiner education recognises rhythm as an educational principle of key importance, and a strong framework of rhythm, routine and repetition is employed, particularly in the early years. Rhythms provide reassurance and security for children, and in the home these would be provided by, for example, regular bedtimes, shared meals and restful moments and enjoyable walks. Beyond these daily routines are the rhythms of the week, the seasons and the year. The seasonal rhythms are closely connected to the celebration of festivals throughout the year. Working with rhythms in this way helps children to understand the past, present and future: it is a healthy way to start to find their place in the world.

Repetition plays a key role in establishing continuity, and it assists in the development of memory. Daily, weekly and yearly events become recurring experiences, and are often eagerly awaited and anticipated. Stories, commonly with archetypal themes, are told many times to give the children a chance to familiarise themselves with the content and deepen their understanding of it.

Festivals and celebration

Festivals are celebrated with the children so as to nourish body, soul and spirit. Although the Steiner curriculum is non-denominational, many Christian festivals are observed, and the children love the activities and preparations involved, such as finding seasonal materials, baking, making lanterns or other simple craftwork activities. Festivals from other cultures are also marked and celebrated in many Steiner schools. Rooms and classrooms can be specially decorated, and songs and poems are collected and shared. In early childhood education the teacher or leader tells appropriate stories - for example, at Whitsun they will not speak of the event as described in the Bible, but instead tell stories and fairy tales of transformation such as "The Whitsun Daisy" or of the birth of a butterfly. When the festival is over and the celebration comes to an end, the preparation for the next one can soon begin.

THE MAIN FESTIVALS IN SUMMARY

Michaelmas is the first festival of the school year and falls at the beginning of autumn. It celebrates courage and strength of will, which are described for the (school) children through the legends of St Michael, Conqueror of the Dragon. In our kindergarten this festival is celebrated with a harvest feast prepared by the teacher and children.

The whole school together celebrate Martinmas and make and carry their lanterns in a procession, celebrating with songs the bringing of light into the darkness of winter. This is celebrated in the school grounds that have been beautifully adorned with lit lanterns to show us the way.

The Advent Garden. Every year all the children of the school come together on the eve of Advent to walk around the evergreen spiral to light their candles. It is a festival of quiet reverence, of darkness slowly turning to light. The kindergarten children experience Christmas through ring time themes, nativity stories, and the nature table with the nativity scene, the special foods that we bake, and the gifts, which are made. We aim to create a mood of reverence and goodwill around this festival.

Candlemas is celebrated in February by all the children in the school. Usually, a candle is placed in the earth to celebrate the return of the light and life in nature.

Easter is the festival celebrating new birth and the force of life, which we experience all around us in nature at this time of the year. The Easter hare brings eggs and hides them for the children in the kindergarten.

May Day is celebrated by all the children in the school with maypole dancing.

Whitsun marks the descent of the Holy Spirit to the earth, where the spirit of community resides and mutual understanding is fostered. It is traditionally celebrated by the speaking of a verse or a passage from a book in many languages. Kindergarten celebrate this festival with a special meal.

St John's Midsummer is a festival celebrated by the whole community with a bonfire, singing, games and a picnic.

Story-telling

The environment created in Steiner early childhood education promotes the development of competent talking and listening, enhancing the child's ability to use words with confidence. Children are encouraged to speak freely, and learn to listen to others. There is an overriding concentration on the oral tradition, and many wonderful stories are related. A well-told story creates an appreciation for the human voice and the beauty and rhythms of language. This assists in the development of a strong and rich imagination, and helps to extend the vocabulary and develop a good memory. Traditional fairy tales and nature stories are told and retold, to cultivate a love of language and familiarity with the spoken word - an excellent prelude to, and foundation for, more formal literacy learning in class one and beyond.

The Kindergarten Daily Rhythm

Approx times:	
9:00 – 9:10	Arrival time.
9:10	Ring time.
9:30	Daily activity and free play, followed by tidy time.
11:15	Snack time.
11:45	Outdoor play.
12:45	Story time.
1:00	Home time / transition to afternoon kindergarten.
1:00 – 3:30	Afternoon kindergarten.

Daily activity and free play

The daily activity is always led by the teacher, and often involves the preparation of the snack whereas the free playtime which follows is very much child initiated, with minimal adult involvement. It is during this time that the child uses their own creative imagination to – for example - make a building site out of wooden planks, a shop, a train, a spaceship or a den with wooden clothes racks and pieces of fabric. Our weekly activities are as follows:

Monday:	Seasonal Craft
Tuesday:	Baking
Wednesday:	Watercolour Painting
Thursday:	Soup-making (Garden Day in the summer term)
Friday:	Crayoning / Movement games for the 5-6 years old children

Ring time

Once children have arrived and are settled, we gather in a circle for ring time. At this time the emphasis is on teacher-led activities, such as singing seasonal songs and saying verses together with appropriate gestures. We also practice finger rhymes at this time, as well as the traditional nursery rhymes. At the end we often play a ring game together. The ring-time activities are chosen to reflect the time of year and the current mood that we find in nature. As repetition plays a key role in establishing continuity, and assists in the development of memory, ring-time themes are repeated over many weeks. Sections of the EYFS are delivered here, through games, movement and song.

Sun child projects

The older children have on-going projects, such as weaving and sewing, which they will continue throughout the week or for however long is necessary to complete them. The projects are designed to engage the will and develop the skills of perseverance and persistence. During festival times a particular craft or baking activity may be added in. During the Summer term the six-year-olds participate in an additional transition group once a week as preparation for beginning Class 1 in September. For additional information please see *Whole School Curriculum Policy: Kindergarten through to combined Class 1-2 Section.*

Tidy time

After free play everyone is expected to help put everything back in its proper place. It is important for children to have order around themselves, not least so that they can find what they want to play with the next day. This is a time of co-operation as we sort, fold, put away toys and set the tables ready for snack time.

Snack time

After tidy time and when the children have washed their hands, we gather at the table for our shared snack. This is vegetarian and organic if possible. We have a particular snack for each day of the week, usually with a daily grain, following the seasons in our menu planning, as we prefer to use local seasonal produce. Monday: rice and lentil dahl, Tuesday: bread rolls and apple, Wednesday: millet and carrot sticks, Thursday: vegetable soup, or in the summer: roasted vegetables and couscous, Friday: fruit crumble, or in the summer months: fruit salad. We always say a simple grace together and give thanks for our meal. The older children have the task of setting and clearing the table. When a birthday is celebrated, we bake a cake in Kindergarten for the children to enjoy.

Outdoor play

Outdoor play follows snack time, where the children are free, conditions permitting, to run, jump, climb, dig, skip, play games and make constructions or work in the vegetable/flower garden. The outdoor activities are varied and are left up to the child's own initiative. During the warmer months, we usually have a garden day once a week, where we start the morning outside, returning inside for snack and story when the sun is at its' height. The children are always dressed appropriately according

to the weather conditions. Warm waterproofed clothing, hats, gloves and wellingtons/snow boots for the wetter, colder months; sun hats, sun cream and cool clothes covering their shoulders and backs in the warmer months. We go outside, regardless of the weather, every day.

Story time

After outdoor play we cover the sandpit and collect all our tools to return inside for story time. The children remove their outdoor wear, put their slippers on and then return to the kindergarten where they sit in a circle and story time begins with a song. The teacher tells a traditional fairy tale or nature story, thus enabling the children to create *their own* pictures out of their imaginations. The stories are repeated over a number of weeks, which assists in the development of a strong and rich imagination, and helps to increase the vocabulary and develop a good memory. We often find that story themes are delightfully re-created during free play. Sometimes the story can be made into a puppet show for the children to watch. These stories are seasonal, link in to the ring times and the festivals and are repeated each year at the same time. Birthdays are also celebrated at this time, with the birthday child being given a crown, and special chair to sit on, and given an age-appropriate gift, made by the teacher, at the end of the session. The morning ends with a good-bye song and the children then either get ready to go home with their parents/carers at 1pm or go to afternoon kindergarten for their lunch.

Afternoon kindergarten

This session is currently available on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The afternoon session provides continuity of care, in a family- like environment, which supports the ethos of the kindergarten, until the school ends at 3.30. The rhythm of the afternoon continues the breathing in and out rhythm of kindergarten, and allows the children to rest as well as to play. Lunch is a sociable time, with the table set with seasonal flowers and a candle. The children bring their own packed lunch. The kindergarten blessing is sung before starting the meal. The children chat and catch up on news - often talking about their morning, or things they have been doing at home, or planning what they are going to play later on.

After lunch it is time to rest, work on projects or play. There is also opportunity for outside play. The children play with hoops, build dens, play in our all-weather sandpit, or play role-playing games. There are often gardening jobs to be done, like weeding, watering or raking leaves. Then we go indoors and finish the afternoon with a story before it is time to get ready to go home.

MONITORING, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE

This policy belongs to Norwich Steiner School, which is the operational name for the Charity the Norfolk Initiative Steiner School, registered charity number 1099377, company number 4815492

Compliance is monitored through internal audits, policy review as part of self-evaluation, and annual reporting to Trustees on concessions awarded, value, and any compliance issues.