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YORK STEINER SCHOOL

KINDERGARTEN

DAY AND YEAR

The Kindergarten Curriculum

A Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten consists of a mixed age group of children from 3 to 6 years old. This method of working is an established principle of Steiner Waldorf education, and the Kindergarten curriculum is recognised by the English Department for Education and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as a valid and effective approach in Early Childhood. Although the Kindergarten children of all ages take part in many of the same activities, these are skilfully differentiated by the Kindergarten teacher and assistant.

The curriculum is holistic, and as such, subjects are not considered separately but are woven into the daily rhythm, thus reinforcing the inter-connection of artistic, scientific, mathematical, creative and aesthetic impulses. In this way, the activities and environment meet the cognitive, emotional, physical and social needs of the children in a variety of different ways. Students experience all subjects within the wider context of their daily life and environment.

Activities are carefully planned to ensure that the needs of the individual children and the group are met. The students' interests and stage of development are regularly assessed through the Steiner Waldorf profile and this information is used for planning. This enables staff to ensure that provision is carefully differentiated depending on the age and needs of the children.

This can be seen in the Developmental Descriptors

The Kindergarten Day

There is no designated structure to the Kindergarten day in Steiner Waldorf education, but Kindertages all around the world share a similar rhythm and include the same kinds of activities, adapted to the local and cultural context. Children move between focussed, adult-led activities characterised by meaningful and effective interactions, sustained shared thinking and child-initiated, child-led play where children work with their peers to apply and practise what they know and can do, to process and rehearse their experiences, and to explore, imagine and create. Any Kindergarten session will include the following:

- An artistic, practical or craft activity, e.g. gardening, baking, weaving, woodwork, paper craft, painting, sewing etc.
- A shared meal or snack of whole grains and fruit and vegetables (organic where possible).
- Time spent outside in work and play.
- A 'ringtime' of songs, poems, action rhymes, finger games, counting songs and movement activities, rooted in the changing seasons, families and festivals of the year.
- An oral story or simple puppet play, telling folktales and fairy stories from a range of cultures around the world.
- Extended time in free play, with access to a wide range of open-ended resources.
- 'Tidy up time', where children spend an extended period of time ordering and caring for their environment in a structured way.

All curriculum subjects are delivered through these carefully planned activities in a range of ways. Please see the 'Kindergarten Deep Dive' documents and Kindergarten Literacy Statement which give concrete examples.

Although the Kindergartens are formed of mixed age groups, the expectations of children at different ages are very different. Please see the Developmental Descriptors, which gives detailed information on the expectations and assessment criteria for learning at each stage.

The Kindergarten Year

Just as the rhythm of the day is important within the Kindergarten, the curriculum is also shaped by the rhythm of the year. Teachers work to develop a sense of coherence for the children, ensuring that activities are manageable but also comprehensible, relevant and meaningful. This includes creating links between different activities and the seasons and festivals: a week in Springtime might include planting seeds, painting eggs, singing about ducklings and frogs, a story about rabbits in the garden, and a Spring festival. This helps children to make links and connections between the different parts of their life experiences, developing their conceptual understanding of the world. An important aspect of this work is the use of processes. Teachers plan activities that follow a process from beginning to end over a significant period of time, matching each activity to the relevant time of year. This might include:

- Planting wheat seeds, harvesting the wheat, threshing it, winnowing it, grinding it to make flour, and using the flour to bake bread. This might also be linked to songs about windmills and bakers, and stories such as 'The Little Red Hen'.
- Washing fleece, drying and carding it, dyeing it, and using the wool in felting or doll making. Again, elements of this process would be explored in songs about sheep or knitting, and books and stories such as 'Pete's New Suit'.
- Planting vegetables using compost, weeding, watering and taking care of the plants, harvesting the crop, peeling, chopping and preparing the vegetables for a soup, cooking and eating the soup, and taking the waste to the compost heap.

Moral and ethical education underpins the Steiner Waldorf early childhood curriculum, which fosters responsibility, humanity, empathy, acceptance, curiosity and interest. The wide range of available activities bring together aspects of literacy, maths, science, geography, social science, technology, craft, art, design and music. The emphasis is on developing a healthy relationship to self, 'other' and the World through direct experience, close attention and language, with children using recall, play, language and artistic expression to represent and consolidate what they have learned. Children go for nature walks in the local area where they learn seasonal changes, features of their local environment and the need to take care of their environment and look after our world. These activities not only lay a foundation for responsible and sustainable behaviour and understandings about the relationship of human societies to their geographical spaces but build a basis for subsequent scientific and economic understandings. The approach is founded in an ethos of sustainability; in a recent book, Pountney and Timmers cite the Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten as an outstanding example of 'an embedded environmental curriculum approach'.

¹ Pountney, R and Timmers, K (2023) The design of the curriculum for sustainability and climate education in the early years. Routledge.