

London Steiner School

Curriculum Policy Part 1

Introduction to Pedagogical Practice

There are 3 parts to this policy:

Part 1: Introduction to pedagogical practice

Part 2: General principles of the education offered

Part 3: Schemes of Work

1. Legislation and Guidance

The policy is informed by the following legislation:

- [Independent Schools' Standards Part 1 \(paragraph 2\)](#)
- [The Equality Act 2010](#)
- [The Special Educational Needs and Disability \(Amendment\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [Coronavirus; Supporting Pupils' Mental Health and Well-Being](#)

2. Background

The pedagogy in Steiner/Waldorf schools all over the world arises from a set of principles based on Rudolf Steiner's unique understanding of child development. The curriculum borne out of this pedagogy is designed to support the healthy development of the students.

Many of the practices common in Steiner/Waldorf Schools are increasingly recognised by modern scientific research to be invaluable in developing physical, emotional, and cognitive skills. For example: The 2019 APPG report on Mental Health Through Movement begins: "*Children's mental health: has become an issue of real concern.*" The report goes on to summarise many recommendations including: *All education professionals to receive*

training on ways in which to maximise movement strategically, thus enhancing the wellbeing of children of all dispositions, abilities and needs. (1) Movement is thoroughly embedded into Steiner/Waldorf pedagogy.

While the principles of pedagogy are shared by schools world-wide, the curriculum of each school is tailored to reflect the local physical and cultural environment. Moreover, as time passes, a school develops its own unique character based on its history.

London Steiner School is a small school in an urban environment with a multicultural community. It educates children from parent and child group, through kindergarten, to formal school beginning in the seventh year, up to age fourteen. Our warm, inclusive community is woven together through small combined year group classes contributing to a small school, where all the staff know all the children, and also through the consistent celebration of seasonal festivals throughout the year and termly celebrations of children's work and achievements.

The coronavirus pandemic has added significantly to mental health challenges in children and young people. The First Waldorf School in Stuttgart was founded at the end of the First World War. A school open to all, regardless of financial circumstances, its curriculum was founded while needing to cater for the needs of many traumatised children. As such the curriculum inherently respects and adheres to many aspects of the Recovery Curriculum.

3. Key Principles of a Steiner/Waldorf Curriculum

The curriculum is informed by pedagogical theory, practice, and discussion. (2) Out of this a framework is developed, a scaffold for learning achievements to be built upon that is continually reviewed. It is informed by the children in front of us and the times we live in.

We live in a fragmented, individualised society that has lost many of its traditional social structures and values. One of the principles of Waldorf pedagogy is to create a learning community of shared experiences. The rituals, festivals and social life of a class and school community reinforce a collective identity and sense of belonging, which is so essential for each person to have as a basis for their own development. It teaches narrative empathy (the ability to tell another's story), a much-needed skill in today's socially complex society and forms a foundation of intercultural competence.

To strengthen and develop this, class teachers remain, as far as possible, with their classes throughout the eight years of formal school. These eight years follow core themes. Lessons are planned to include every child within the same theme, although there is differentiation with what the students do within a class. There is also differentiation between classes to reflect the needs of a particular group. Harmony in difference builds community (see LSS policy on Tolerance) and the art and craft of pedagogy is to enable all students to learn and develop by offering differentiated tasks within a shared community.

Another key principle Steiner was clear about is the advantage of a cross-curricula, multi-disciplinary approach with a practical skills-based element to teaching and learning. This principle is achieved by teaching in 'main lesson blocks' (two hours each morning) of three to four weeks on the same theme. The main lesson, unique to Steiner Schools, allows for continuity, flexibility, and an immersive experience. The time and space this afford, enables a skills-based experiential approach that provides for physical, artistic, and

academic skills to be acquired; skills that can be built upon over successive years. Aric Sigman, a psychologist and child health education lecturer, in his paper *Practically Minded* says:

'Research in cognitive neuroscience and psychology continues to find surprising and previously unrecognised benefits that are conferred upon pupils' (receiving a practical skills-based therapeutic education). 'Moreover, the mechanisms behind these benefits point to the urgent need for greater incorporation of such practical elements into mainstream education'(3).

And

'..in particular, practical curricula develop visual and three-dimensional skills and an understanding of materials and processes. Researchers believe, 'in the transition towards a digital future it is important that an experience of tangible 3D qualities is maintained'(4).

The foundation of day-to-day teaching and learning in a Waldorf school is the key aspect of 'recall;' the recalling of material taught the previous day. The ability to recall what was taught yesterday requires an inner effort on behalf of the student. By encouraging their own inner efforts, aided by the class community, we strive for students to grow and develop into active co-creators in the world rather than simply consumers.

4. Assessment and The Curriculum

In London Steiner school, assessment of children's developmental processes is key to planning and curriculum development and is reflected upon in depth in the teacher's meetings. (Discussed below.)

Formative Assessment is the bread and butter within the important teaching and learning relationship. Waldorf pedagogy recognises that pupils have a need and a right to formative feedback they can understand; feedback that helps them take the next step in their learning.

Ipsative Assessment (the individual in relation to themselves) is also key. The process of a child's development is recorded in their main lesson book (another key concept) which is a comprehensive record of their work over both the course of a block, a year, and their time in the school. It provides a highly valued form of assessment for the teacher and also the child herself in relation to her own progress.

Summative Assessment is an essential tool for teacher accountability, transparency and research and is also useful, used in an age-appropriate way, to help students understand their own learning processes and progress. Our curriculum provides a framework of developmental tasks designed to nurture and challenge the whole developmental process. Progress in learning is complex and depends on a variety of factors. *'Educational activities are 'healthy' if they strengthen and support the health-building processes in body and mind' (2).* Waldorf pedagogy refrains from measuring learning achievement solely in terms of academic success or failure and both Harlen and Crick (3) and Martyn Rawson have spoken about the relationship of testing and grading with stress; *'Stress is obviously not a promoter of health, nor is incomprehensibility.'* (2)

More research is needed in schools world-wide to ascertain how best to summatively assess pupils taking account of the many varied factors involved in the learning process. Waldorf Schools, including London Steiner School, are developing systems that take these factors into account. LSS uses summative assessment forms to portray a fuller picture of pupils' progress. (Please see LSS Pupil Assessment Policy and LSS Marking and Feedback policy)

5. Continual Development of The Curriculum

The educational researcher John Hattie points out (Hattie, 2012), that a key factor in the quality of student learning is when the teacher recognises it is their role to understand the effects of their teaching on the learning process of the pupils, and when the learners understand their own learning process. This research matches much that Steiner recommended (2).

Teaching enables and supports the self-activity of the student and offers formative feedback as discussed above. It uses narrative and living pictures at all levels to convey complexity; it is based on 'reading' the child and cultivating pedagogical tact (the ability to act meaningfully in the pedagogical moment) and is skilled artistry.

What is more, the personality of the teacher is an educational factor in its own right. Pedagogy requires the ability of critical self-observation together with the self-development of the teacher who offers pupils moral guidance through example.

Educational practice is based on; inquiry by the practitioners, open discourse among practitioners and between institutions, and collegial accountability in any given school.

Steiner established the practice of continuing collegial professional development- he actually spoke of the teachers' meetings as a living university or academy in which the teachers bring the fruits of their work in the classroom and their deliberations about that and the students, into the 'pool' of teachers so that they can all critically reflect and learn (Steiner, 2004, see lecture 12). This is the central task of the teachers' meetings- reflecting on and evaluating practice (practice is always what you do and why you do it), deepening understanding of practice, learning processes and individual children, planning, taking action and reviewing action leading to ongoing change and adjustment. Martyn Rawson (2).

Our teacher's meetings strive deeply to reflect all these aspects of teaching life with comprehensive child studies, shared reviews, and reflections of practice. This is augmented by peer mentoring, dialogue with other schools particularly via The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship and conference attendance all of which inform continuous evaluation of the curriculum.

It is also worth mentioning that governance in London Steiner School is collegial (which is non-hierarchical and distributed). Educational leadership is based on knowing and working with the children (and their parents), a shared vision of the educational principles and the developmental good of the school. There is a commitment by each person to personal and spiritual development. This collegial responsibility in governance and leadership allows the children to experience a model of living within a community of shared experience, service, and mutual support.

Further Reading

Sigman A. (2019) Practically Minded: The Benefits and Mechanisms Associated with a Practical Skills-Based Curriculum. Report Commissioned by Ruskin Mill Trust. PDF available by contacting Aonghus.Gordon@rmt.org

Related Policies

LSS Curriculum Policies parts 2 and 3
LSS Assessment Policy
LSS Marking and feedback Policy
LSS SEND Policy
LSS Inclusion and Equality Policy

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References

1. https://royalpa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/mentalhealththroughmovement_301019.pdf
2. [Martyn Rawson 2018 on feedback: Foreword to the Chinese edition of The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum by Martyn Rawson](#)
3. Sigman A. (2019) Practically Minded - The Benefits and Mechanisms Associated with a Practical Skills-Based Curriculum p.3 <http://londonsteinerschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PRACTICALLY.REVISION.14.10.19-1.pdf>
4. Sigman A. (2019) Practically Minded - The Benefits and Mechanisms Associated with a Practical Skills-Based Curriculum p.4 <http://londonsteinerschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PRACTICALLY.REVISION.14.10.19-1.pdf>
5. [Harlen W, Deakin Crick R \(2002\) A systematic review of the impact of summative assessment and tests on students' motivation for learning. In: Research Evidence in Education Library. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.](#)