

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School

# Curriculum Policy

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Elmfield School works out of the pedagogical indications of Rudolf Steiner and with the internationally recognised Waldorf Steiner Curriculum. This is however not a fixed or prescriptive curriculum but rather a broad canvas of general principles and specific examples which individual schools and teachers draw from. At Elmfield, we use 'The Educational Tasks and Content of the Waldorf Steiner Curriculum' edited by Martyn Rawson & Tobias Richter as our main curriculum guide. This states that:

The tasks of the education are to:

- Foster the healthy development of each child
- Enable children to reach their potential
- Help children to develop the skills they need to contribute to society

The achievement of these aims relies on the curriculum not only meeting the needs of the developing child at the key developmental stages of childhood and in adolescence but also that the teachers deliver the curriculum in ways which stimulate important developmental experiences. The Waldorf curriculum has a fundamentally therapeutic task in that it supports the healthy development of the whole person.

There are three identifiable stages in the delivery of the curriculum at Elmfield School; the Early Years, Lower School & Upper School, and each requires a different style of presentation as well as a difference in content so as to be most relevant for that age-group.

## Early Years

In the Early Years, the emphasis is very much on learning through practical experience, by doing and through imitation of the teachers. An important aspect here is 'creative play' where the pupils make up their own games with a variety of equipment which through being non-specific enables the pupils to create a huge variety of settings within which to act out their own social dramas. This activity allows for the development of healthy social skills with the teacher only intervening to guide the play when the pupils are not able to resolve the difficulties themselves. This activity also strengthens and develops the child's own creativity since they are working from their own imagination rather than relying on concepts and characters designed by adults.

The importance of healthy rhythm is also recognised and this is reflected both in the daily and weekly timetable as well as in the particular rhythmical work undertaken both during ring-time and in the seasonal round of practical activities. The repetitive aspect of this work also acts to strengthen the child's memory.

Practical activities include a range of domestic (cooking, tidying) and artistic (painting, drawing, making) tasks which the pupils learn through imitation. There is an emphasis on using natural materials which help the pupils to develop their awareness of and relationship to the natural world. This is also developed through outside play in the Early Years garden where there is an opportunity for gardening activities as well as scope for more imaginative play.

The Early Years Groups also make a number of excursions throughout the year, including a daily walk to the local park which again offers the chance to develop a relationship with the natural world. Finally, the Festivals underpin this rhythmical relationship to the world around us combining the fruits and flowers of the seasons with the deeper underlying experience of the major multicultural religious festivals. Parents are encouraged to participate in these festivals and share these enriching experiences with their children.

## Lower School

The seventh year generally sees the start of formal learning with the curriculum moving away from the more generalised experiential world of the Early Years to the more formal introduction of literacy, numeracy and other disciplines. While there are broad guidelines for both a horizontal curriculum for each year and a vertical curriculum for each subject area across the years, ‘...Every teacher at a Waldorf Steiner school has a duty to shape the curriculum, or better still to re-create it anew to suit every situation.’ (Rawson & Richter).

The main themes for each year are introduced through the Main Lessons which take up the first 2 hours of each day and run for approximately 3 weeks in a block. The Class Teacher will deliver these lessons for the most part, but sometimes towards the end of this stage, around Class 7 or 8 other specialist teachers might deliver a specific Main Lesson.

These themes are described in detail in Rawson & Richter and are delivered by the teachers through the medium of story telling and illustrations and strengthened by use of rhythmical and repetitive activities e.g. bean bag throwing & skipping to accompany times tables, recitation of poems of increasing complexity and the singing of seasonal and other appropriate songs. These activities form an essential part of the Main Lesson in the Lower School and help the pupils to develop memory as well as fine and gross motor skills.

As the pupils progress up the school the content of the Main Lesson changes to meet their developmental needs and broadens out to include a wider variety and increasing complexity of material (see individual year plans for list of Main Lesson topics for each year). There is also increasing involvement from the pupils with regard to individual projects within the main lesson topics and the presentation of these to the class further develops their social skills. The written aspects of the work are recorded in Main Lesson books which are a compilation of dictated and original material and extensive illustrations. In Waldorf Education it is said that art is not a subject but a medium, and in the early lower school years the children work very much out of illustration and colour. High quality drawing materials are used and ink pen writing is not introduced until Class 4, arriving though a main lesson on writing techniques through the ages. Once ink has been introduced, colour and illustration remain an important complement to the written work and the task is to produce a book that is both informative and aesthetically pleasing.

Outside of the Main Lesson, the pupils are introduced to other subject lessons, starting with Painting, Handwork, Eurythmy, Religion, Music, Spanish & German and extending to include English, Maths, Cooking, Gardening, Pottery, Science, Drama and Life Skills and Music, which is being offered by Class Teachers on the whole rather than music specialists. The subject lessons have their own vertical curriculum and generally mirror aspects of the main lesson themes for each year.

## Upper School

The Waldorf Curriculum recognises that the capacity for intellectual thought really develops around the age of 14 and so the style of delivery and the content changes somewhat at this point. The Main Lesson Curriculum is now delivered by a series of specialist teachers and the content becomes increasingly complex.

While subject lessons tend to focus on GCSE curricula the Main Lessons are wider ranging and have in some instances, been likened more to AS level delivery than GCSE. There is still the link between the inner developmental life of the pupil and the Main Lesson topics presented (see US Main Lesson timetable for more detail). We aim to offer a broad selection of the Main Lesson topics available for Class 9 & 10 but the actual content of the main Lesson programme depends upon the teachers available in any one year (including visiting teachers) and the amount of time taken out of the Main Lesson programme due to GCSEs.

For subject lessons, we offer Core GCSEs in Maths, English Language, a language (usually Spanish or German) and Double Sciences. In addition, students are able to choose from a wide range of modules, some of which are GCSE (for example. Art, History, English Literature, Geography, Psychology, Music, Drama etc) and others which are drawn from the Waldorf tradition (Pottery, Religion, Eurythmy, Music and Sport) to maintain a balanced curriculum. We also introduce Lifeskills in Classes 8-10 to bring a greater awareness to the children of issues facing them both as citizens and as individuals in society and to support their applications to colleges of Further Education.