

SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION FOR STEINER WALDORF EDUCATION

RESPONSE TO THE CULTURAL COMMISSION

The vision set out by the Culture Commission of a truly cultural and creative Scotland in which everyone participates is very welcome. What is particularly exciting about the vision for those of us involved with Steiner Waldorf education is how much the same vision also lies at the heart of Steiner education - an educational approach which has been implemented in Scotland for over 65 years.

Because of this striking similarity of vision and because of the long experience of Steiner schools in promoting cultural, creative and social skills, we believe that Steiner Waldorf education has an important contribution to make in helping to turn this vision into a reality for Scotland.

It might be helpful to give a brief history of Steiner Waldorf education in order to underline just much this emphasis on creativity and cultural knowledge underpins the whole curriculum, ethos and educational approach in Steiner schools. The first school was established in Stuttgart at the end of the First World War when a factory owner approached the scientist and philosopher, Dr Steiner, and asked him to devise an education for the children of his factory workers. Steiner proposed that this new education would be such that it would inspire in young people the ability to think creatively and responsibly - so that, it was hoped, a war such as they had just lived through, would not take place again. The education therefore grew very much out of the spirit of working towards developing a new and creative culture - with children being seen as the foundation on which it could be built.

Steiner's ideas, which were way ahead of their time, have gained increasing recognition and there are now 950 Steiner schools in more than 50 countries. It is now the fastest growing educational approach in the world. Recently schools have been set up in many former communist countries such as Hungary, Croatia, Latvia, which, as Austria was doing in 1919, are working towards developing a new cultural identity. There is now a school in the Gaza strip, and in Israel. There are schools in South African townships and in the shanty towns in Brazil. In Scotland, there are four schools: in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Forres.

The education thrives in such diverse cultures because it is rooted in the creative development of the human being - similar throughout the world - and also leaves freedom to accommodate the individual cultural identity of each nation.

The Cultural Commission asks what is the best way to maximise the creative potential of the people of Scotland. It is obvious that a long term view must lie

with education – with the ability of schools to so awaken and nurture the creativity that (as Jack McConnell and Frank McAveety note) is innate in all children, that when they move into adulthood they continue to want to develop that creativity and will seek out ways to do so, whether as audience, participators or contributors. As is clearly recognised in the information you have given on the website, education is therefore at the hub of this vision and it is vital that schools across the country provide a sound and wide-ranging creative experience for pupils of all ages.

You outline the kind of education and schools that are part of that vision and which could become a reality by 2030 as the following:

'The child reaches primary school endowed with self-confidence, able to learn and enthusiastic to contribute. The primary curriculum is designed to make the transition from pre-school easy. Subsequent learning continues to place a high value on acquiring and developing creative skills with the continuing objective of building confidence, learning successfully and interacting well. All children leave primary school able to read and write. They also sing, dance, perform, play an instrument, paint and model. They understand and respect their own environment and heritage and those of other cultures. The outcome of primary school is that children remain enthused about both learning itself and each element of the creative experience.'

What is immediately striking in reading this vision is that it is almost identical to that which exists already in the four Steiner schools in Scotland.

The following are all vital elements of the education provided in these schools:

- Children remain in the Kindergarten or nursery until the age of 6. Here their work is creative play and learning the pre-literacy skills of singing, performing small plays, putting on puppet plays and reciting poems. Craft work, which awakens an appreciation for beauty, is a further strong element, as is the experience of colour through drawing with beeswax blocks and painting. Because there is no emphasis on formal learning, children can relax into this 'play' and gain confidence and the physical and emotional maturity to have a positive experience when they move on to formal learning.
- Music is a central element in the holistic Steiner curriculum. Children sing each day and learn to sing in rounds and harmonies, in French and German as well as in English.
- All children learn to play an instrument. At the age of 8 they make their own pipes, thereby learning at first hand the relationship between the size of the hole and sound
- They perform songs, poems, musical items and plays throughout the year before the school and parental community.
- Craft work is another vital element in the curriculum: its value is on a par with academic excellence. Children learn to knit at the age of 6 and soon can work on complicated designs. They learn to sew, progressing on to

- sewing machines at the age of 13. (The boys too become accomplished and by the age of 13 are making shorts or sweatshirts for themselves).
- They model, beginning with beeswax and plastecine then moving on to clay. As they grow older they also learn woodwork, metal work and weaving skills.
 - Art work is a central element throughout the full curriculum and pupils learn to draw, and paint in a programme that gives them a deep experience of colour and a feel for form. Their own class books are expected to be colourful and artistic for all subjects.

All the craft activities have as their ethos the vision of producing work which is both useful and beautiful and the children craft items from an early age which are of a very high quality. This fosters in children a respect for the work of Scottish craftspeople generally, together with an appreciation for beauty which is to be strived for.

- A large element of the education, particularly in the primary years, is listening to and working with stories and myths from Scotland and other cultures
- At the age of 14, before they enter the Upper School, they work to produce a major play and are involved in all aspects from lighting to costume design as well as acting. Plays by Moliere, Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare, among others, have been produced. This year it is to be 'The Tempest.' All pupils are always involved.

This emphasis on creativity continues to be high profile in the secondary school years too, ensuring a healthy balance between the more formal examination work and creative skills. As a result, the confidence of pupils in their skills and their enthusiasm for learning remain high.

It is important to point out that the aim of Steiner education has always been to be fully inclusive. Steiner education is for children of all abilities. There is no academic selection procedure. Each class has its share of children with abilities ranging from those with special needs to those of high academic ability. All children participate in all subjects from sewing, to woodwork, to music, art, humanities and science.

The young people who leave Steiner schools often move into employment in the cultural world, whether through becoming actors, artists, craftworkers, musicians, photographers or working on the administrative side. However, they also move into work that is not directly related. Here too, the creativity that their education has worked to develop, is evident in their leisure time, with most former pupils still very much developing and enjoying their personal creative skills as well as participating in the cultural life of their local environment.

It is also important to point out that Steiner education is meant to be for children from all social backgrounds. As noted earlier, the first Steiner school was for the children of factory workers. In most countries in the rest of Europe,

Steiner education is provided on similar socially aware basis and is state funded. This enables children from all financial backgrounds to attend their local Steiner school. This is not the case in Scotland. Although the Scottish Steiner schools very much want to uphold the founding aim of being genuinely inclusive, they have at present no alternative but to charge fees. This, inevitably, prevents children from families who cannot afford to pay from accessing a Steiner education. As a result the schools are unable to be the genuinely comprehensive schools that they have always aimed to be. Even if, as some of the schools try to do, there is a sliding scale of charges to reflect ability to pay, it still puts the education on a very different standing to that of mainstream schools.

The Cultural Commission asks how education can attain the vision of creativity, cultural and social skills. There are of course many routes that could be followed with equal validity. However, Steiner education has many elements that the Ministers and Cultural Commission would like to see more widespread in Scotland. It also has a proven track-record. One viable route therefore that over the years could make a significant difference would be to enable Steiner education to move from the periphery into a more relevant position in Scotland's educational provision. It could then make a practical contribution through sharing ideas, experience and best practice with other professionals.

This process has already begun. The Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner School is now working with Balgreen Primary on a Future Learning and Teaching project that is receiving Scottish Executive funding. Titled 'Multi-Sensory Learning and Creativity' the project aims to explore how elements from the Steiner curriculum can be implemented within a mainstream context. The main elements currently being worked on by the Balgreen teachers (with training by staff from the Steiner school) are kinaesthetic learning, singing, art and drawing. It is an exciting project and the first of its kind in the UK. It has support from the Local Authority who say that it ties in very well with their current themes for teacher development.

The Future Learning and Teaching project is an example of the kind of sharing and learning that could be carried out elsewhere in Scotland. However, without additional resources, Steiner education is not in a position to make the kind of contribution that might otherwise be possible.

The route that we are proposing therefore, that could contribute to a renewed drive towards creativity for all in Scotland, has three components:

- The first stage would be to ensure a more secure future for the Scottish Steiner schools through a programme of state funding. This would enable the schools to achieve their founding aim of being genuinely inclusive. Funding routes might be through the National Schools or Centres of Excellence or simply as a new element in a more diverse provision.

In any plans to establish a more creative education the quality of teacher training available is paramount. Without teachers who themselves are confident in their creativity, it is difficult to ensure lasting creative success in schools. The Steiner teacher training course places the teachers' personal creative development firmly at the heart of their Lower School Training. It works extensively with the teacher trainers on their singing, speech, musical skills, art and drawing skills, as well as giving a sound basis in the Steiner curriculum and approach.

- The second stage, therefore, which could be concurrent with the first, would be for the existing Steiner Teacher Training Course to be accredited and funding secured for that too. This course is part-time, takes place in the Edinburgh Steiner School and has a growing number of applicants each year.

Two accredited degree teacher training programmes have recently been established in England, at Plymouth University and Greenwich. Both programmes have received excellent OFSTED results. In Scotland, it could equally well be possible to extend this teacher training into University provision. The process of accreditation is currently being explored and discussions have been initiated with Stirling University who have expressed an interest in being involved. Northern College, which already offers a BA in Curative Steiner Education is another possibility.

Funding the Scottish Steiner schools and ensuring a degree Steiner education training course would in the short term enable the education to have a much sounder footing. From this it would be vastly more possible to reach out more extensively to other schools and local authorities and to establish with them a creative and working partnership of the kind that would ensure a high profile for creative learning.

- Stage 3 would be to set up Steiner kindergartens or nurseries in other areas of Scotland, including in deprived and rural areas. This is the practice in most other European countries. The schools then grow organically into Steiner primary schools that build on the creative and cultural skills already established.

At the age of 14, when pupils move into the Upper School (as opposed to 12 in mainstream which is a harder age for transition) larger Upper schools could then be in place to ensure that the 12 years of the formal Steiner curriculum can continue. This would involve either taking part in a new building programme or the gradual shifting of a mainstream school into that of a Steiner curriculum based school.

The vision of the school in 2030 is one where 'the physical environment within the school is inspirational.' Again, this ties in very strongly with the emphasis that Steiner schools have always placed on the quality of the environment the pupils learn in. Steiner's ideas about architecture have led to some very striking schools being built in the rest of Europe. In the UK when a Steiner

school has the opportunity to build new premises, they uphold the importance of creating a beautiful space and many of the buildings are recognised for their architectural quality. The Kindergarten at the Edinburgh Steiner School is one such: it has taken part in the Edinburgh Open Doors Days, because of its unique style and environmentally friendly construction.

With Steiner education funded in Scotland, a new international network would be created for the country which could offer many cultural advantages. Scotland would immediately have a new link with other countries and pupils and schools would have the possibilities opened up for them of taking part on cultural and educational exchanges with Steiner schools in other countries. This kind of exchange, which has taken place for many years in the Edinburgh Steiner School with pupils swapping schools for 4-6 weeks, reinforces the pupils' sense of own national culture whilst broadening their understanding and appreciation of that of others.

To fund the four existing Steiner Schools at their full capacity would cost just over £3 million. This works out at an average of about £4,000 per pupil and is in line with figures quoted in the press for the McCrone adjusted per capita payments made to mainstream schools.

There are obviously issues to be resolved with respect to practicalities of catchment area and GTC registration and teacher quality etc. However, in almost all cases, there is either a precedent (ie the Gaelic school in Edinburgh has a city-wide catchment area as does the Edinburgh Music School at Broughton) or it should be possible to resolve the issue through negotiation. The GTC is supportive of the idea of educational diversity and past discussions have opened up the way for additional registration possibilities for teachers who are unable to secure full registration. With respect to teacher quality etc the Schools already receive regular HM inspections which are positive in most areas and in some areas very positive indeed.

Other countries have made the decision to fund Steiner education and have benefited from the possibilities for increased debate and sharing of ideas and practice. Sweden took the step just over 12 years ago and has seen a gradual but definite increase in the number of Steiner schools that have been established as parents find out more about the education and as results continue to show the benefits. Three years ago, Hungary committed itself to fully funding Steiner education. Finland, Norway, Germany, Holland, Denmark also fund Steiner schools. In these countries there is a much more flexible approach to education – for example Holland has more than 6 different educational systems, Steiner being but one of them. All of them are funded by the state. In each of these countries, the creative influence of Steiner education is recognised and valued.

England is now working towards setting up a Steiner Academy in Hereford. The Westminster government is fully committed to establishing this first publicly funded Steiner school and is aiding the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (the UK body for Steiner education) by putting up 90% of the

capital costs for the school. The government has also waved the national curriculum, and will not require Steiner qualified teachers in the Academy to have qualified teacher status. I am happy to provide more details on request.

In summary therefore, we fully endorse the Minister's proposals and the aims of the Cultural Commission and would very much like to play our part in helping the vision of a creative and cultural Scotland become a reality.

We have outlined one possible route that we believe would make a difference and very much hope that Scotland can have the imagination and creativity to recognise what other European countries have already recognised and to thereby ensure that Scottish Steiner schools can not only become more inclusive, but can also become a stronger voice within Scottish education.

This would work directly to help uphold the beliefs of the Cultural Commission and Scottish Ministers that every child has creative potential and deserves the opportunity for that potential to flourish.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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