

Towards a Review of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum

Report of the Rapid Appraisal (RA)
Consultation Exercise undertaken in March 2019

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Executive Summary

This rapid appraisal review of the Steiner Waldorf (SW) curriculum takes place at the confluence of two current movements affecting schools and teaching. The first is the emergence of, or possibly the renaissance in, curriculum thinking. The introduction of a national curriculum in 1988 led to a sense that teachers were no longer in control of curriculum design, and for some time curriculum making has been seen as a less-worthy element of teachers' work. The lack of attention, until now, on the design of the curriculum has had a two-fold effect: it has reduced the making of the curriculum to a superficial concern for the selecting, sequencing and pacing of the learning content to be acquired; and it has directed concerns away from the nature and purpose of that which is to be learnt.

The second movement, concurrent with the first, is the shift in the education inspection framework (EIF) for schools towards conversations about curriculum, characterised by Amanda Spielman's definition of curriculum as the 'substance of education' – conversations that are really about what it *means to be an educated person*. Debates about the curriculum go much deeper than issues about content coverage and timetables. They reflect the deep-rooted convictions and beliefs that we hold as teachers about why we do what we do, and how this underpins the work of schools. When we plan a curriculum, we are designing experiences for young people to have, and while this is mediated and shaped by a whole set of factors, such as the context for the curriculum, it can have a profound effect on how children see and understand the world. The curriculum, therefore, can become the gateway to new contexts and understandings, and as such is a form of social justice, in which young people are able to access not just how the world can be different, but how their place in the world can be different¹.

A curriculum such as Steiner Waldorf, celebrating its centenary this year, is one that its proponents, teachers and parents, have deep philosophical allegiances for, and feel passionately about. The underlying principles that shape the curriculum are seen as the bedrock of what happens in classrooms, and become central to teacher identities, aligned closely with a shared moral purpose of the curriculum. The struggle for resources that teachers encounter are often intellectual ones; the need for a language to express the wishes and desires for their work and the present well-being and future success of their learners. Models and tools that give access to these tacitly held understandings can provide a bridge between their hopes and their practices and, if they need to, to explain and justify what they believe in. This includes making a stand for a curriculum.

The consultation on which this report rests, therefore, sets out the basis of asking key questions about a curriculum. As a review, it identifies how the curriculum is *characterised*, rather than evaluating or endorsing it. There are statements about the curriculum that can be read as strengths or weaknesses. To say this report present findings, however, is not quite accurate. It offers a logic and the means of talking about the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, as a kind of heuristic. Its recommendations are posed as questions. Its aim is to start a conversation about a review of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and to make this conversation more possible. It is a review that can justify a different future, or one that stays the same. What ever happens one should be bold!

¹ For further discussion of social justice in relation to the curriculum see:
<https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/sioe/2018/01/03/epistemic-justice-is-this-what-universities-are-for/>

1. Considerations arising

These questions have arisen as a result of a rapid appraisal review of the Steiner Waldorf (SW) curriculum. They frame conversations about what might happen next.

- How can the SW curriculum be made more comprehensible and more open to others, and more contextualised in current academic research?
- What is the specialised language used by SW teachers that underpins their practice, and which words or meanings have a direct bearing on the design, planning and delivery of the curriculum?
- How are new or novice SW teachers supported in developing their SW practice? What would improve how they are supported?
- What are the skills, knowledge and attributes of a SW Teacher and how are these acquired and when?
- How might the SW curriculum best relate to the national curriculum in order that learners are not disadvantaged at any point in their learning?
- How can learners and parents be involved in designing and making the curriculum?
- What changes to the planning and delivery of the curriculum might make learning even more bold, ambitious, and unforgettable for children?

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2. Introduction and context

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) requested in March 2019 a review of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum currently operating across its network of 31 Steiner Waldorf schools and 14 independent early years' settings. SWSF has operated in the UK and Ireland since 1953 and while Steiner Waldorf schools across the UK and Ireland are run independently from SWSF, each with their own governing body, SWSF fulfils a coordinating and advisory function, providing consultancy, and Steiner curriculum research and development. In 2019 SWSF celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the first Steiner School.

The guiding questions for the review were set out in a memorandum of understanding, 16th March:

- What are the key indicators of effective curriculum principles (intent), implementation and the means of evaluating impact on students' learning?
- How can the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum and its underlying principles be contextualised with regard to these indicators and within the debate of contemporary academic research?
- What is the current state of play in curriculum making in SW schools?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SW curriculum and what are the priority actions that can be taken to strengthen, and where necessary improve, the SW curriculum and its associated pedagogy?

The purpose of this report is not to support or judge, one way or another, the case for a Steiner Curriculum: rather it offers insights, by means of a rapid appraisal (see section 3: Methods) in order to inform future actions.

3. Methods

A senior curriculum researcher from the Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University undertook the consultation. The basis of the consultation was by means of a rapid appraisal (process) (RA), a social research method which aims to supply needed information in a timely and cost-effective manner (Kumar, 1995). It is an approach for developing a preliminary, qualitative understanding of a situation that utilises rapid data collection methods including key informant interviews (Beebe, 1995).

RA is useful in situations where time is constrained and where the nature, purpose, and ultimate use of the information produced is intended to inform future actions. The claim that RA techniques can provide more accurate information when used in appropriate circumstances hinges on the broad definition of accuracy, one which aims to achieve insights on the hopes and ambitions of individuals and institutions into the success of their enterprise. The framework for the consultation consisted of three key methods shown in table 1.

Table 1: Consultation Framework

Method	Data source and purpose
Document analysis	Key documents were analysed to establish a clear understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key aims and philosophies; • strategies; • curriculum content and competencies; • existing UK Steiner Waldorf education system.
Key informant interviews	Information gathered to establish an understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key aims and philosophies; • strategies; • existing and perceived barriers; • key participants; • desired outcomes.
Existing research and literature	Key literature was examined to provide a context and background, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Education (DfE) documents; • Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) documents; • published books and journal articles; • online resources including web sites.

Document analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents. As with other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. This method was used to enable rapid understanding of the Steiner curriculum and its aims (see Appendix 2). Key documents such as the ‘yellow book’² and published literature were consulted to inform thinking about performance standards, content, and learning competencies.

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with key members of SWSF (4 stakeholders). The SloE researcher employed an interview protocol (see Appendix 1) to guide discussions through a design meant to encourage flexibility and not to restrict a flowing conversation. The protocol contained

² The ‘Yellow Book’ (Avison, K., and M. Rawson (2016) *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner–Waldorf Curriculum*. Edinburgh: Floris Books) is a handbook used by Steiner teachers that offers a comprehensive overview of what is taught in Steiner-Waldorf schools, and why. As well as describing the content and methods of the Waldorf curriculum, this book provides a clear overview of the ideas behind the approach. It includes: a summary of the ideas underpinning this unique form of education; a survey of child development in relation to the curriculum; a description of key elements in the Waldorf approach; sections on evaluation and assessment; self-management; Early Years education; a horizontal curriculum for Classes 1 to 12; and a vertical curriculum for each subject.

questions which were identified as crucial to developing a critical insight into the individual’s thinking, concerns and views.

Themes identified in discussion

The themes raised in the key informant interviews have been synthesised and are expressed below as opposing viewpoints held in tension:

- Whether the development of teachers’ professionalism and core competence is a pre-requisite or a by-product of experience of teaching in Steiner schools;
- Whether Steiner teachers’ inherent freedom to deliver the curriculum as they wish is negotiable or not;
- Whether the development of Steiner teachers’ pedagogy should be experiential and immersive or addressed explicitly and systematically;
- Whether specialist Steiner teaching expertise (craft) is predominant over generic classroom skills or is subsidiary to them;
- Whether attention to the whole, as greater than the sum of the parts, is wholly positive or if it leads to disregard for detail and specificity.
- Whether Steiner principles should be applied rigorously in the delivery and planning of the curriculum and pedagogy or as a guiding and shaping influence on classroom practice;

The struggle to resolve these oppositions is represented in the SWOT analysis below:

Table 2: SWOT analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly-motivated teachers • Good Students (motivated) • Fellowship’s support for development • Supportive and involved parents 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unqualified teachers (QTS and/or Steiner) • Directionless students (unchallenged) • Limited resources • Misunderstanding Steiner principles
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For growth (supported) • Loyal parents (families) • Revision of curriculum • More staff 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change leading to weakened principles • Critical parents • Reduced reputation • Poor recruitment

Curriculum Assessment Tool (CAT)

The curriculum assessment tool (CAT) was developed as a heuristic by researchers at Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University (Bevins and Price, 2015) to give a broad-brush view of a curriculum, appropriate for a rapid appraisal, plotted across four dimensions:

- **cultural relevance** - is the material suitable for the life experiences of the teachers and students?

- **conceptual coherence** - are ideas developed in a sensible and supportive manner over a number of lessons, terms, years?
- **sufficiency of coverage** - is there enough knowledge and understanding (content) to equip students for their work yet not so much that they are overwhelmed in unnecessary detail?
- **sophistication of skills** - are the skills developed sufficiently conceptually demanding or are they simply manipulation / mechanical?

It can be applied to the whole curriculum or sections of the curriculum, by class or year, or a selection of items chosen to provide a stratified sample (e.g. selected main lessons in the Waldorf School curriculum structure). The outcomes of a CAT exercise for the Steiner curriculum is discussed in the conclusions.

4. The underlying principles of a Steiner curriculum

The principles that direct and guide the Steiner curriculum are contained in Rudolf Steiner's approximately 4,000 lectures and some 50 written works. Underlying his entire philosophy is the primacy of freedom (anthroposophy³) in which it is fundamental that the school should serve the child, not the state. Steiner Waldorf schools have, as their ultimate goal, the development of fully free human beings, but they operate from the principle that freedom does not exist simply by virtue of an arbitrary declaration of human rights. For Steiner Waldorf schools, freedom cannot be a method of education but must be the end result of it. Therefore, a detailed and ongoing study of child development is seen as central to the work of Steiner Waldorf schools. The curriculum has been developed to follow closely the way in which the interests and aptitudes of children change with growth (Ashley, 2009; 210).

Dahlin (2017) cites studies that suggest that although anthroposophy is the under-girding principle of the school, it does not lead to students becoming anthroposophists. It is clear however that Waldorf education is based on a non-denominational, spiritual view of humanity and the world, and Waldorf schools are therefore 'not non-faith' schools because in various ways they tend to draw upon that religious traditions of the whole mankind' (Dahlin, 2017, 137). The state-funded academies defend their curriculum as sharply-focused, that 'seeks to develop the head, the heart and the soul in a rounded way' (Steiner, 1995).

The child at the centre of the curriculum

The Steiner curriculum is directed by the need for age-appropriate learning that develops the whole child. Steiner articulated a clear seven-year period of childhood that was deeply connected to both humanity and the universe and believed that childhood was a deeply spiritual stage that emphasised connections and needed an unhurried approach to learning, and the innate natural disposition to connect with nature. Pupils start formal learning, in writing, reading and numeracy, in class one at the age of six. Education is structured in three cycles: Kindergarten (3 to <7 years); Lower/Middle School

³ *Anthroposophy* translated from Greek: 'wisdom of the human being' but Steiner has said that "this does not accurately reflect the meaning of the word, which should rather be interpreted as 'consciousness of our humanity.' Steiner schools do not teach anthroposophy; indeed, some would argue that it cannot be taught in any conventional sense

(Classes 1-8; mainstream Y2 - 9); and upper school (Classes 9-12). Each day opens with a *Main Lesson* which lasts approximately 2 hours and will focus for up to four weeks on one core subject drawn from the broad curriculum. The Class Teacher (or specialist teacher in the Upper School) endeavours to integrate a range of artistic activities, techniques, delivery methods, learning styles and resources to encourage the child's enthusiastic immersion in the subject. Within Steiner pedagogy there is a noted 'rhythm in learning' (Avison and Rawson 2016, 31). The day is 'structured in an organic way' which ensures a healthy mix of activities of that are balanced, for example, moving and then resting (viz. Eurythmy⁴).

Dahlin (2017) in a review of studies of effects on students learning, points to one overriding outcome - that Waldorf students appear more interested to learn and more socially engaged than mainstream students, but somewhat less knowledgeable when it comes to facts and scientific explanations. Findings also indicate high degrees of passion for lifelong learning, creativity and thinking outside the box, engagement with environmental issues, of social and emotional intelligence. Weaknesses were seen to be in a perceived lack of certain subject knowledge, or not being used to handling large amounts of course literature. Dahlin also reports cases, in the United States, of curriculum approaches attracting some criticism, which he attributes to an overzealous application of Steiner philosophical guidance.

Teachers as curriculum makers

SW teachers have a high degree of autonomy and a tremendous scope for individual initiative: '[A] subject can be taught in a hundred different ways. In the Waldorf School, teachers are given absolute freedom in their application of basic principles. Education is an altogether free art' (Steiner, 1995, p. 92). Relationships between teachers and students and between teachers and families and homes are well developed in SW schools (Avison, 2016). Students see staff as guiding them in matters that may be personally significant for them in terms of aspects such as artistic development, and they appreciate the time and effort staff put into offering them varied and meaningful opportunities in the arts. However, Rawson (2014) suggests many Waldorf teachers feel ill-equipped to research their practice whilst recognising how important this is. He asks whether current practice is still adequate for its pedagogical purpose or whether some consistent process of renewal accompanies this. Steiner insists that 'pedagogy should be an art, not a science' (Rawson, 2018: p20) in which the art of educating 'should be built upon a real sympathy with the child's nature, that it should be built up in the widest sense on knowledge of the growing child'. Dahlin (2017), however, argues that some of Steiner's ideas are difficult to put into practice and it is teachers' ability to do this that is critical to success of the Steiner curriculum. For experienced teachers the practice of teaching 'in a Steiner way' has passed from heart to mind to hand and has become autonomic. The difficulty faced by novice and beginning Steiner teachers in modelling this practice should not be overlooked.

⁴ *Eurythmy* – beautiful, expressive movement – is a form of movement that attempts to make visible the tone and feeling of music and speech. It helps to develop concentration, self-discipline, spatial and aesthetic awareness and a sensitivity to others. Eurythmy lessons follow the themes of the curriculum, exploring rhyme, meter, story, and geometric forms.

The case for reviewing the SW curriculum

There is a growing sense, indicative in a number of blogs and commentaries, that there is a need to review a curriculum whose guiding principles were set out in the early 20th century. While some elements are highly advanced but reflect more a continental than an Anglo-American approach to teaching and curriculum making, other elements would need to be substantially reviewed and renewed. The need to 'localise' and update a curriculum that was originally created for a pre-war Germany is a claim made by Boland (2016), who makes a case for an SW curriculum 2.0. This, he argues requires a SW curriculum that has a better place-based pedagogy that can better reflect the needs of learners to locate themselves in the environment. This localisation is also seen to mediate the mythic nature of Waldorf (Wiechert, 2014).

However, the case for a degree of openness to external influences on the SW curriculum can be balanced in the sense that mainstream schools have many things to learn from SW schools (Smith, 2015). A report by Woods, Ashley and Woods (2005) was commissioned by the DfE for the purpose of exploring this. The main purpose was to find possible good practices established in these schools; practices that could be usefully transferred to mainstream schools. The researchers attempted to widen the meaning of good practice to include more than a strictly evidence-based notion now in common use in order that the holistic character of Waldorf education could be captured. Data consisted of surveys and interviews with teachers, and documentation from the schools. The study describes Waldorf education as strongly focused on individual development but at the same time giving all students a broad general curriculum education. It pointed to the absence of test competition and ranking among students and that each student was given opportunities and challenges to learn within many fields of knowledge.

Some of the things identified that mainstream schools could learn according to the authors were: how to combine class and subject teaching for young children; how to develop listening through an emphasis on oral work ; how to develop a good pace in lessons through an emphasis on rhythm; the importance of child development in guiding the curriculum and examinations; and how to approach the arts and creativity. Ashley (2009) further claims that the main thing that can be learnt from Waldorf schools is how to create stability, as opposed to the fragmentation of both the curriculum and the psychological support of students that characterises mainstream schools.

More recently, the call to modernise is made by those who are alarmed by the deficiencies identified by Ofsted in a number of Steiner schools⁵. The danger arises when the weaknesses of school management are conflated with a perceived weakness of the Steiner curriculum itself. What are the shared measures, or localised practices, that Steiner Waldorf schools need to make to counter being painted with the same brush, while making a strong and bold claim to having an excellent curriculum?

These distinctive and underlying principles of the SW curriculum will now be considered in relation to the generic principles of a 'good curriculum' and in relation to the indications sought by regulatory Ofsted requirements.

⁵ Viz. Letter from Amanda Spielman to Secretary of State regarding Steiner School inspections https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/775693/Amanda_Spielman_HMCI_letter_to_Secretary_of_State_010219.pdf

5. Curriculum indications

In this section the findings of the rapid appraisal are set out and discussed in relation to the literature and to the statutory requirements of Ofsted. There is no Ofsted prescribed curriculum; instead in her 2018 festival of education speech Amanda Spielman stressed her desire to hold a 'dialogue' with schools so that Ofsted can understand how curricula have been shaped to suit the needs of the students. To this end, the congruence of a Steiner curriculum with the recognised and acknowledged characteristics of an ideal curriculum can be made, in order that the overall impression of the quality of curriculum can be gained.

As a minimum, a curriculum should provide a basis for planning a course, studying it empirically and considering the grounds of its justification (Stenhouse 1975: 5). Ofsted have also come up with a working definition for the term 'curriculum' as a framework in relation to the proposed Education Inspection Framework (EIF)⁶:

- Setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and understanding to be gained at each stage (intent);
- Translating that framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an institutional context (implementation);
- Evaluating what knowledge and understanding pupils have gained against expectations (impact/Achievement).

Intent, implementation and impact are the key words that inspectors have been asked to explore when evaluating the quality of school's curriculum. Intent is realised in a unique curriculum design related to the local context of the school and a variety of students' needs and where a consensus on the curriculum approach and subscription to its principles exists. As a starting point a general tenet of high-quality curricula is the degree of coherence inherent in the design and delivery of the curriculum.

'A curriculum, like the recipe for a dish, is first imagined as a possibility, then the subject of experiment. The recipe offered publicly is in a sense a report on the experiment. Similarly, a curriculum should be grounded in practice. It is an attempt to describe the work observed in classrooms that it is adequately communicated to teachers and others. Finally, within limits, a recipe can vary according to taste. So can a curriculum.' (Stenhouse 1975: 4-5)

The idea of the curriculum as process rather than product resonates with Steiner's proposition that what the teacher needs is insight into 'what the child really is and is becoming step by step through the stages of childhood' (Steiner, 2004: p7). This is echoed in Stenhouse's ideas on the curriculum: 'knowledge cannot be reduced to behaviours. In particular, it cannot be expressed in terms of pre-specified performances, for it is a function of knowledge ... that it does not determine behaviour but liberates it' (Stenhouse, 1984, p. 77). In this sense it could be argued that the Steiner curriculum is a 'weak reading' of the need for judgement in teaching, and that it is all the better for it (Biesta, 2015). The role of the teacher in this is paramount, in which the teacher is guided by the purpose of the curriculum but is able to broker, convene and negotiate its material realisation in order to meet the developmental needs of students:

⁶ Viz. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmci-commentary-curriculum-and-the-new-education-inspection-framework>

The question of purpose is in my view the most central and most fundamental educational question since it is only when we have a sense of what it is we want to achieve through our educational efforts—and ‘achieve’ needs to be understood in a broad sense, not in terms of total control—that it becomes possible to make meaningful decisions about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of our educational efforts, that is, decisions about contents and processes (Biesta, 2012, p.38).

Education is ‘never that children or students learn, but that they learn something, that they learn this for particular purposes, and that they learn this from someone’ (Biesta, 2012, p. 38). In other words, an effective Steiner teacher understands the purpose of learning and is a curriculum maker (Pountney and Said, 2018; Pountney and McPhail, 2017; 2019). Thus, in this sense, a curriculum is a particular form of specification about the practice of teaching. It is not a package of materials or a syllabus of ground to be covered. ‘It is a way of translating any educational idea into a hypothesis testable in practice. It invites critical testing rather than acceptance’ (Stenhouse 1975: 142).

It is evident that the challenge to Stenhouse’s (and Steiner’s) approach comes from an externally applied need for uniformity, including the checks and balances of examination systems, teaching quality, and the need for professional learning. It has become where process is reduced to sets of skills and in which the actions have become the ends, and the process ends up a product. Whether or not students are able to apply the skills to make sense of the world around them is often somehow overlooked (Grundy 1987: 77). How can Steiner teachers keep this in balance?

Direct / indirect influences on the curriculum

The question becomes, is Steiner philosophy a guiding or shaping principle or does it directly influence and impact on the formation and delivery of the curriculum? And how does attention to teacher education enable this? Approaches to using some of Steiner’s ideas include interpreting them in a systematic, rather than a literal way, in order to iteratively relate the whole to the parts. Here, Steiner’s ideas can be used as heuristic concepts or suggestions for experimental attitudes to knowledge. For example, the ‘rhythm in learning’ recognised in Steiner’s pedagogy is translated into how the school day is ‘structured in an organic way’ which ensures a healthy mix of activities that are balanced, for example, moving and then resting. (Avison and Rawson 2016, 31). This example is easily accommodated and articulated within the logic and structure of a Steiner curriculum. There are others, such as the mapping of the curriculum to the three cycles of development that appear more opaque in their justification. Given that a potential outcome is to create a ‘misstep’, or disjunction perhaps, between the Steiner curriculum and the English National Curriculum, this becomes significant in terms of curriculum transitions.

A curriculum of transitions

The three cycles of Steiner education described above include two important transition points: kindergarten (KG) to Class 1 (6-7yrs.); and Class 8 to upper school Class 9 (13-14 yrs.). This can be characterised as a one-year ‘delay’ in starting formal schooling as well as various aspects of the curriculum being addressed at different timings to mainstream education. There are implications for children going through the Steiner education system, but importantly it also has a bearing on children either joining Steiner schools, or leaving them to go to mainstream schools, especially at these transition points. The implications are as follows:

- State school pupils coming into Steiner Class 1 or 2 will be able to read and write, whereas Class 1 pupils will only begin to learn their letters and numbers. Likewise, pupils taken out of Steiner schools will be appreciably behind mainstream pupils.
- At Class 5/6 stage (beginning of secondary) pupils leaving a Steiner school will not have reached the formal goals that mainstream pupils will, however much knowledge they have of a greater range of practical, artistic and cultural education. This has been a problem in counties where there is still a grammar school entrance test.
- The same is true of Steiner schools which stop at Class 8 (age 14). Pupils wishing to leave for mainstream will go straight into GCSE preparation classes with insufficient background in study skills or the required science/maths/literary techniques skills.
- The Steiner Upper Schools in the UK offer a variety of pathways, which means that it is difficult to retain a cohesive curriculum. A few schools have retained GCSEs and A levels; a few are doing the Steiner School Certificate (aka the New Zealand Certificate); and there is a new qualification, ACTS, which has only recently been accredited and has not been fully trialled yet. The schools continuing with GCSEs find that the Steiner U.S. curriculum is severely compromised in terms of its relevance to a UK context.

The definition of age-appropriateness within Steiner education is one reason for this variance, and this is exacerbated by strict adherence to the Steiner principles leading to possible resistance. For example, a traditional Steiner view might oppose the idea of Class 6/7/8 pupils being taught analytic skills as this could be seen as bringing conceptual thinking too early and be 'indigestible' by 12-14-year-olds. The same is true of the other transition point - from KG to Class 1 – where some Steiner teachers might regard 'fast-tracking' Class 1 children into reading and writing as contrary to Steiner ideals, although the need to move at a slightly faster pace is increasingly acknowledged.

All Steiner settings & Steiner inspired childminders who are registered with the SWSF have applied, under the Established Principles Route (2012), for exemptions and modifications to the EYFS learning and development requirements which conflicted with the Steiner approach. This applies to the age range birth – 5 years old.

A curriculum that promotes good character

The proposal for a revised EIF calls for an emphasis on good character and resilience among pupils. To make judgements in the personal development category, inspectors will look at the range, quality and take-up of extra-curricular activities, the promotion of British Values, the development of pupils' character, the quality of debate and discussions that pupils have and the pupils' understanding of how equality and diversity are promoted and celebrated. SW schools emphasise character education and weave the teaching of moral values into the curriculum. With regard to education for citizenship a Swedish evaluation of Waldorf schools (Dahlin, 2015) found students to have greater indications of tolerance and empathy for social issues faced by others and less tolerance of racism. Other studies have shown SW students to be resilient, confident and independent. Overall, these indications suggest that there are many opportunities to investigate the spiritual, moral, social and cultural questions within a SW curriculum. The curriculum is one in which students are able to accumulate cultural capital, defined in the Ofsted handbook as *'the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.'* SW students will thrive in environments that emphasise the importance of learners' discovery of their interests and talents.

A coherent curriculum

The notion of a coherent curriculum goes beyond the basic operations needed to select, sequence and pace content into schemes of work and lesson plans. It also exceeds the simplistic notion that a good curriculum is the vertical curriculum as well as a horizontal one. Conceptual coherence requires the propensity to deal with the curriculum as a complex idea, simply realised as a spiral in which learning is deepened as well as revisited. The framework provided by the Waldorf 'yellow book', and such references as Stockmeyer⁷, provide an overarching overview of the curriculum, as well as a detailed recipe book for the delivery of the curriculum. The idea of a holistic SW curriculum is strong but what is not clear is how this enables children to develop a deep body of knowledge.

A number of Steiner school curriculum documents and plans were made available to the researcher (see Appendix 3). Taking one of these, the Greenwich Steiner School (kindergarten, lower and middle school, with a planned upper school), the curriculum document reflects the developmental theory and philosophy on which it is based. It refers to 'building blocks' of the curriculum as the Main Lessons, which commence in Class 1 and continue right through to Middle School Class 8. It explains how the day begins with the Main Lesson period - an extended lesson which last 2 hours and how the content of the lesson is drawn from one of the main cultural subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography etc). These subjects are taught in thematic block periods of 3 or 4 weeks in a horizontal sequence across the year. There is also a vertical sequence from year to year within a subject area so there is an ascending spiral of knowledge. The document also acknowledges the needs for a smooth transition. Importantly it states 'The pupils will continue with the Waldorf curriculum but will also be working with aspects of the National Curriculum where it is not in direct conflict with our view of child development. Specifically, this will happen in Maths, English, Science and ICT.' (p6).

A flexible curriculum

The inspectorate recognises the importance of schools' autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have thought carefully, and built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, and are able to show that it has been implemented effectively, then inspectors will assess the school's curriculum favourably. Therefore non-standard, or alternative approaches to the curriculum are welcomed, especially ones that are well-articulated and coherent.

The SW EY curriculum is a 'modified' one in that it is classed as 'non-standard'. The articulation of the case for exemption from the EYFS emphasises the case for education and care as holistic and substantiates the claim that EY children learn at their own pace through modelling by adults and without direct instruction. The basis of this exemption from EYFS assessment against early learning goals is that they conflict with Steiner teachers' method of assessment and are contrary to the wishes of parents, who prefer and choose the SW ethos and practice. The onus, therefore, is on Steiner class teachers to provide a thorough report to other schools in the case of a student transferring.

With regard to the SW curriculum at lower and middle school stages the curriculum is taught as cross-curricular or topics-based and requires class teachers, as curriculum makers to pay attention to the disciplines in order that they can ensure coherence (Pountney and McPhail, 2019). The indicators of a

⁷ Karl Stockmeyer's book *Rudolf Steiner's Curriculum for Steiner-Waldorf Schools*

flexible curriculum in this context is the degree to which there is a focus on subject disciplines even when topics are taught in a cross-curricular way, alongside the need to consider depth and breadth of curriculum content.

A broad and enriched curriculum

A broad, well-balanced knowledge-rich curriculum is emphasised in the new EIF. Ofsted's research into the curriculum has shown that some schools narrow the curriculum available to pupils, particularly in key stages 2 and 3. This has a disproportionately negative effect on the most disadvantaged pupils. It is appropriate that, in key stage 1, teachers focus on ensuring that pupils are able to read, write and master mathematical knowledge, ideas and operations. From key stage 2 onwards and in secondary education, however, inspectors will expect to see a broad, rich curriculum.

Ofsted reports⁸ have noted the strengths in the artistic approach to learning, judging teaching to be more effective in art, crafts, design technology and music. Pupils make strong progress in these subjects and the SW curriculum is greatly enhanced by enrichment activities and pupils gain a good knowledge of the environment.

Teachers in SW schools see the arts as vital for learners' development, echoing the generally accepted belief that the arts provide learning opportunities that are vital for a rounded education. The aim in Steiner education is to approach all subjects with artistry. The learning 'spaces' the arts create are perceived as different from more traditional, academic subjects. The relationship between extra-curricular and curricular arts has historically provided varied and enriching experiences for students. Festivals, both seasonal and those adapted from the culture that is local to the school, play an important part in the life of the child. These festivals serve to awaken the child's natural reverence, and recognition of the mood that is appropriate for such occasions and a respect for the spiritual essence that exists in everyone. Festivals also provide an opportunity for participation and celebration by the whole school community.

A curriculum that prepares learners for success

As part of making the judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. Ofsted's understanding (or definition) of this knowledge and cultural capital matches that found in the aims of the national curriculum. It is the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.

A curriculum that is well-led

A curriculum that is well-led has the inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation and the for understanding and using the findings in order that actions can be taken that lead to improved quality of the curriculum. Leaders of the curriculum will be judged largely in the same way as they were under the previous framework. Inspectors will make decisions about whether or not leaders have:

⁸ Iona School, Nottingham Ofsted Report, 2018

- An ambitious and inclusive vision;
- A concern for the continuing professional development of staff, with a focus on training rather than on performance management;
- Engaged with their community, particularly learners and staff;

The school's curriculum is rooted in the solid consensus of the school's leaders about the body of knowledge and skills that pupils need in order to take advantage of the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. In this way, it can powerfully address social disadvantage if:

- it is clear what end points the curriculum is building towards, and what pupils will need to be able to know and do at those end points;
- the school's curriculum is planned and sequenced so that new knowledge and skills build on what has been taught before, and build towards those defined end points;
- the curriculum reflects the school's local context by addressing typical gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills;
- the curriculum remains as broad as possible for as long as possible, and pupils are able to study a strong academic core of subjects;
- there is high academic ambition for all pupils, and the school does not offer disadvantage;

6. Conclusions: towards a bold curriculum

Returning to the guiding questions, the outcomes of this rapid review will now be discussed. A consideration of the broad areas of the CAT outcomes will be made as appropriate.

What are the key indicators of effective curriculum principles (intent), implementation and the means of evaluating impact on students' learning?

The indicators of effective curriculum principles have been identified, drawing directly from Ofsted literature that sets out the forthcoming review of the EIF. The emphasis on the prospective framework in this review is consonant with a rapid appraisal methodology that seeks to inform future action. The means of developing this further by means of a Curriculum Assessment Tool has been explained and the efficacy of this as a heuristic or as a means of curricular analysis has been described. The possibility of a Steiner version of this tool remains a possibility.

How can the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum and its underlying principles be contextualised with regard to these indicators and within the debate of contemporary academic research?

The importance of an alignment with current developments in the English national curriculum is important for the ongoing development of the SW curriculum. The form of this alignment will vary, progressively from kindergarten stage (exempted), though the middle school (aligned with the aims of the NC) to upper school, at which point the SW curriculum is at its closest connected point to mainstream curriculum. This progression, if made and articulated clearly provides a destination point that is congruent with the NC and will serve to allay any fears of a disjunction that might affect SW learners and their future lives.

What is the current state of play in curriculum making in SW schools?

There is good indication from this RA review that there is effective and robust examination of the curriculum taking place within the community of schools, led by a small group of schools and individuals, encouraged by the SWSF. These exemplars (see Appendix 2) indicate internal coherence and consistency and an openness to approach external coherence. It is unclear what the practice of curriculum making is across the SW school community, or the pedagogy associated with it.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the SW curriculum and what are the priority actions that can be taken to strengthen, and where necessary improve, the SW curriculum and its associated pedagogy?

Drawing on the recognised strengths of the culture, curriculum and learning and teaching in SW schools, the SW community needs to take heart from the statement that Ofsted inspectors will *'judge schools that take radically different approaches to the curriculum fairly. They will assess a school's curriculum favourably when leaders have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing and implemented it effectively.'*

SW schools participate in a distinctive curriculum, that is principled and values-led. To become bolder and more ambitious the direct benefits of a SW curriculum and associated pedagogy need to be articulated more clearly and shared within the SW community and externally. This will involve ongoing work to evaluate, revitalise, and innovate the curriculum. Ofsted will be looking for schools that are offering a well thought-out, knowledge-informed curriculum, while at the same time promoting mastery of skills, alongside allowing pupils opportunities to learn and to grow. A strong and bold vision for the SW curriculum will enable SW teachers and schools to be mindful of these requirements while being confident and determined in their own curriculum making.

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Appendix 1: Interview protocol

The following interview protocol was designed to act as a prompt rather than a rigid interview schedule in order to maintain flexibility during discussions so as not to restrict the conversational flow. The protocol was not designed to be exhaustive but merely a prompt tool containing key themes/issues to be discussed. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and analysed thematically to elicit meanings.

- What are your experiences of teaching the Steiner Waldorf curriculum?
- What are your experiences of planning and designing the Steiner Waldorf curriculum?
- How do the principles of Steiner Waldorf affect, influence or shape how you make the curriculum?
- Are there any aspects of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum that make curriculum making more difficult for you?
- Who leads the curriculum?
- How is curriculum leadership supported and developed?

Four key informants were interviewed:

Table 3: Key informants and roles

Name	Role	Code
Constantin Court	SWSF Trustee, vice-chair ((Inspections/Compliance/Research)	KI1
Janni Nicol	SWSF Executive Officer, Early Years Advisor	KI2
Tessa Carias	SWSF Executive Officer, School Advisor Curriculum	KI3
Adrian Dow	Headteacher Greenwich Steiner School	KI4

Appendix 2: Steiner Waldorf curriculum documents

A number of exemplar curriculum documents were made available to the researcher. These were appraised as to their internal (alignment with Steiner principles) and to their external (alignment with NC and other indications) of coherence and consistency.

Table 4: Curriculum documents made available (selection)

School / document	Coherence and consistency
Distinctive characteristics of Steiner Education for consideration in inspections	Doc. setting out information for inspectors: giving historical perspective on Steiner education; the principles underpinning the quality of the curriculum; distinctive features of the curriculum; exemption from the EYFS; the cross-curricular nature of main lessons, and relationship with subject lessons and practical lessons. It highlights that SW schools expect to be judged acc. to the school's own ed. Aims. The benefits of a SW ed. for learners is highlighted.
Greenwich Steiner School curriculum guide	This sets out the curriculum from kindergarten through to class 8 (note the school is planning an upper school). The document is consistent with interview with head teacher Adrian Dow. (Curriculum subjects: Eurythmy, French, games German, Handwork humanities, science)
Kindergarten curriculum framework (draft)	Sets out the curriculum mapped to the EYFS early learning goals, allowing an overview of where there is congruence and elaborating this as: The unique Child; Positive Relationships; and Enabling Environments.
Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Settings	Explains the kindergarten day; environment (indoor space; materials and toys; outdoor space). Sets out pedagogical principles, including the integrated curriculum, the importance of play, doing, rhythm, mood, and respect for the natural environment. Identifies experimentation with writing and numbers, and use of 'warm' technology as key pedagogical principles. Explains the role of the Kg teacher, including teaching method, lesson planning and monitoring, the curriculum for 5 and 6 yr. old. It also explains the EYFS exemptions.
Various curriculum subject documents for classes 1-8	Expressed as: A Unique Child (observing what a child is learning); Positive relationships (what adults could do); Enabling environments: (what adults could provide). Subjects incl.: Handwork; Humanities; Science; German; Games; French; Eurythmy
Michael Hall Steiner school brochure/guide	Intro. to the lower school setting out: an overview of each year group and the child's development; Sample timetable for each class; developmental stages; and FAQs
Exeter Academy Curriculum content for English and maths	Maps the English and mathematics curriculum for each class: subjects and domains; Abilities; Links to the national curriculum subject requirements by year group; Main lesson links and notes

Appendix 3: Curriculum Assessment Tool (CAT)

CAT is a tool for examining the curriculum developed by researchers at Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University (Bevins and Price, 2015). It is offered here as a starting point and to give a broad-brush view of a curriculum plotted across four dimensions:

- **cultural relevance** - is the material suitable for the life experiences of the teachers and students?
- **conceptual coherence** - are ideas developed in a sensible and supportive manner over a number of lessons, terms, years?
- **sufficiency of coverage** - is there enough knowledge and understanding (content) to equip students for their work yet not so much that they are overwhelmed in unnecessary detail?
- **sophistication of skills** - are the skills developed sufficiently conceptually demanding or are they simply manipulation / mechanical?

How to use this tool for the Steiner curriculum

1. Identify a section of the curriculum you wish to analyse. This can be a Class (e.g. Class 8), a main lesson (e.g. Age of Exploration) or a discipline (e.g. History) or a selection of items chosen to provide a stratified sample (e.g. verses used across a term).
2. Looking at the individual components you have identified assign each one into the correct box in the tables that follow. This will involve making judgements and two assessors might want to work independently at first and come to a shared decision after reviewing their assessments.

Cultural relevance			
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material is not relevant to, or respectful of, local culture and experiences. • It looks like it has been simply copied from elsewhere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material is culturally neutral. It appears stripped of local flavour and presents as a global solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material recognises and celebrates local circumstances, expectations and culture. • Topics are clearly linked to local experiences.
Exemplar	Use of southern hemisphere plants and animals in an UK ecology main lesson.	Curriculum described in purely 'scientific' terms, e.g. description of a topic on transition metals that does not specify any particular examples in a country that is the world's leading exporter of copper.	Development of much of the plant biology through a curriculum around lavender in South East England - a major exporter of lavender

Conceptual Coherence			
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics are heavily weighted towards memorisation of facts with little reference to underlying, unifying themes or ideas. • Topics are repeated random or developed without proper underpinning knowledge being in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some progression of development is visible within subjects and within years. Some attempt to link ideas across years although this can be in terms of titles rather than underlying ideas. • No connection between different disciplines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear progression of development is visible over terms, years and the whole school experience. • Different areas of the curriculum collaborate to ensure they support each other. • Students are encouraged to make links with previous work through unifying ideas.
Exemplar	Electrical symbols, circuit diagrams and calculations using Ohm's Law are covered two or three times but with limited reference to underlying models of charge flow.	A review of the elements forms part of the curriculum across a number of years. The increase in sophistication with each year largely depends on an increase in the number elements covered.	Ecological inquiries feature increasingly complex, quantitative measures of species density and abiotic factors. These are linked to a growing understanding of energy flow through the ecosystem. The mathematical concepts and skills required are developed in synchronisation with the mathematics curriculum.

Sufficiency of coverage			
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of key ideas and little development of difficult concepts. • Much of the science is couched in common sense terms avoiding key content. • The choice of material appears random. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A balance of content and conceptual material. • Some topics are covered at a fairly shallow level while others are explored in some depth. The choice of which to 'introduce' and which to 'develop' is made explicit or appears to follow a clear rationale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The science present is too detailed across too wide a field. • Much of the content requires extensive memorisation and encourages a didactic teaching approach 'to get through it all'. • Notably absent is space for thinking and synthesis.
Exemplar	Students explore the issues around electricity generation and the effects on the population living near power	Students are exposed to ideas about evolution in primary school through looking at the	Students are required to memorise vitamin and mineral contents of foods but have no

	stations. However, much of the material is economic and societal rather than scientific.	adaptations of a variety of plant species. These are developed in future years through work on survival of the fittest and population dynamics.	exposure to the idea that vitamins and minerals are required in very small amounts compared with protein, carbohydrates or fat.
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Sophistication of skills			
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills identified are largely mechanical and manipulative. The clear intent is that students will be instructed in the procedures and when to deploy them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills are more varied and included planning inquiries etc. Inquiries tend to be heavily scaffolded and directed. Purpose of skill deployment is supplied by the teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills range from simple mechanical tasks to management of multiple lines of inquiry. The purpose of the inquiry is provided by the student along with the eventual use of any knowledge generated.
Exemplar	Measure the gas given off when zinc dissolves in sulphur acid...	Plan an investigation to compare the porosity of two pieces of fabric.	Fresh fruit shipped from growing areas to the major export ports are showing a high level of damage. Identify issues that might affect this, explore them and produce a recommendation to the growers and hauliers to reduce wastage.

Interpreting the tool results

Although the tables provide descriptors for each dimension at three 'levels' these are designed to provide a stimulus to discussion and reflection rather than an attempt to convert necessarily complex and messy qualitative perceptions into simple quantitative data. They are *not* scores and not all dimensions are equally weighted.

However, taken overall, the assessment should highlight areas of concern and sources of strength. Note also that there is no 'perfect' end of the table - in some circumstances an intelligent curriculum developer might want to be on the far right of the table and others on the far left or in the middle.

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*Towards a review of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum : report of the Rapid Appraisal (RA)
Consultation Exercise undertaken in March 2019*

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