

CVSE Nursery Curriculum

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**CALDER VALLEY STEINER EDUCATION
VALLEY KINDERGARTEN
CURRICULUM DOCUMENT**

§ Introduction. *Calder Valley Steiner Education* runs one of more than a thousand Kindergartens or Nurseries across more than sixty countries teaching children through the educational principles first established by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner Education (also known as Waldorf Education¹) and the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum grow out of Rudolf Steiner's insights into the nature of the human being, and specifically the growing child in their developing relationship to the world. The essential aim of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum is to establish good rhythm and balance in all aspects of the child's development. The curriculum, and the teaching methods which flow from it, take account of the growing child's physical and emotional (feeling) needs, as well as their intellectual needs, in such a way that their physical and psychological health are strengthened. Every aspect of the teaching, whatever the subject, aims to balance these needs at each stage of the child's development. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum provides the child with educational challenges at such a time that they can meet them in a way that their interest in the actual process of learning (whatever the subject) is continually renewed. It is the task of the Steiner Waldorf teacher to foster this positive relationship to learning across all subjects, thereby laying the foundations for life-long learning. The core text, "The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum" (2005, revised 2014) [in future referred to as ETCSWC] states that 'the Waldorf Curriculum has a fundamentally therapeutic task in that it enables and supports the healthy development of the whole person. Health in this sense means a dynamic balance of the forces within the child and that the individual can relate to other people and the world in a balanced way. It also means that the realization of each child's potential is fostered in an optimal way.' [p. 7.]

- This curriculum is intended to work alongside the EYFS framework. The Valley Nursery, as a registered Steiner Waldorf setting, also has some exemptions and modifications to the EYFS, and details of these available on the website. If you have any questions about these, please speak to the Nursery teacher.
- The aim of Calder Valley Steiner Education is to deliver high quality education in a nurturing environment based on Steiner Waldorf principles. CVSE currently provides an infant education following Steiner-Waldorf education principles in keeping with the EYFS and the specific exemptions it has. CVSE also adapts where necessary the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and teaching methods to local requirements of diversity, ethnicity and the Nursery's local setting and heritage.

§ Teaching Methods. The Steiner Waldorf teaching method.

- Ages 3-5. During these Nursery years, the child learns mainly through **play** and **imitation**.

Play. The children are provided with a variety of enabling environments (both indoors and outdoors) in which they undertake deconstructed play. Such “free play” is vital to a child's healthy development and to establishing the best possible grounding for formal learning. 'In the Early Years phase the task of education is to provide an environment in which good habits of behaviour, such as memory, reverence, orderliness, listening and enjoyment of the natural world can be established.' [ETCSWC, p. 16.] Steiner Waldorf EY education pays particular attention to the development and strengthening of the child's imaginative faculties. The Nursery environment is specifically adapted to encouraging imaginative play amongst the children, such as through the use of play equipment (cloths, wooden stands, rough cut logs) that can be adapted to the particular needs and imaginations of the children at the time. The children are both empowered to explore and express their imagination through play; and provided with a safe environment in which play can become a therapeutic tool. Through the medium of play, throughout their time at Nursery, the young child's innate sense of wonder is nurtured alongside a sense for trust and co-operation.

Imitation. The principle of imitation is central to the Steiner Waldorf approach to early years learning. It covers all aspects of the practice. Children absorb and imitate all aspects of their surroundings. (This is now a major aspect of brain research, including scientific research into empathy and the so-called “mirror-neuron system” in brain development. See notes below.²) They are affected both by the behaviour of those around them, as well as their physical surroundings. Care is taken to ensure that the conduct of all teachers and assistants is suitable for imitation by the children, in terms of gesture as well as language. Care is taken to ensure the environment of the Nursery is not overstimulating for the children, while also giving them a rich diversity of experiences to explore (a diversity of play equipment in a variety of natural materials; age appropriate books; natural crafts). Care is taken to ensure that the outdoor play, both on-site and through walks and play off-site, are safe and provide a suitable environment for the children to imitate.

The three “Rs”. Three of the principal pillars of the Steiner Waldorf Nursery by which the Nursery teacher organises each session into a coherent whole for the on-going development of the child are: the establishment of good **rhythm** throughout the day, week and year; **repetition**, by which the child has the chance to learn through imitation; and **reverence**, by which the child establishes for themselves a secure and trust-filled place in the world.

Progression and assessment. Teachers make assessments and judgments of a child's needs and progress in line with the EYFS framework. Teachers and assistants are particularly attentive to children's individual needs and enable them to progress from where they are now to their next stage of development. This will always be done in a variety of ways to meet children's

different needs, such as through modelling how to hold scissors or hold a crayon. Teachers and assistants will observe where a child is in their development, and provide the opportunities and materials for them to progress.

Special Educational Needs. Because of its gentle, child-centred approach, Steiner Waldorf education is suited to many children with special educational challenges. Steiner Waldorf Schools and Nurseries have been delivering all ability teaching since their inception; alongside which they have developed many complementary ways of helping individual children, both within the whole class and through special lessons. Although a small setting, we seek to make provision for children of all abilities within the setting's educational ethos and curriculum. See the CVSE SEN policy for more details.

The Approach to Language and Literacy in the Nursery

Children in the Valley Nursery experience a play-based curriculum from age 3-5 years. Within this curriculum, Language and Literacy skills are holistic and integrated so that the children's language, literacy and communication experiences are embedded into daily life. The Nursery teacher and assistants offer a respectful support to the child's creative and imaginative development. This meaningful approach to Language and Literacy prepares the child for a more formal academic process after they have left the Nursery.

Throughout the Nursery session, there are opportunities for developing the love of language and pre-reading skills that are a necessary pre-requisite for literacy. True literacy is much more than the ability to de-code print and comprehend sentences, as it also includes a life-long enthusiasm for language, story and the printed word.

Some of the Principles underpinning Steiner Waldorf early childhood literacy practice:

- The adults regard themselves as providing examples for the children to imitate, therefore modelling good clear speech and appropriate conversational habits of talking and listening.
- Skills in listening and comprehension are fostered daily with storytelling repeated in order to strengthen memory, widen vocabulary and build imaginative pictures.
- The development of narrative intelligence provides cultural capital that is powerful in its impact on children's future learning and opportunities. Daily access to poetry, story and good quality picture books are fundamental foundations for pre-literacy skills and an essential aspect of the Nursery session.
- Differentiation is at the heart of planning in the Nursery: teachers consider the needs of the children in their group, for example bringing increasingly sophisticated stories to groups of older children.
- Daily 'circle time' or 'ring time', led by the teacher, in which poems, verses and songs, in

combination with movement, are learned through imitation and repetition. Rhyme, rhythm and alliteration are included in these sessions, extending vocabulary, phonological awareness and strengthening capacities of memory and imagination.

- Time each day for self-initiated play. The children are free to devise, construct and develop their own games which require explanation, discussion, negotiation, evaluation and review. Play will often involve an understanding of narrative, environment, character and rules. Play supports children's cognition of the symbolic representation of concepts or objects and is an important pre-literacy skill.
- Artistic activities are included daily, while chosen to support the development of a healthy aesthetic sense. These activities, including painting, drawing and craftwork of many kinds are stimulation for oral and lay the foundations for written literacy and will include the use of instructions, sequencing, the understanding of process and development of powers of concentration.
- Similarly, the domestic activities of food preparation, serving and clearing away, care of the room and of the garden are also natural and meaningful prompts to expanding oral literacy.
- Examples of the use of the written and printed word will be part of everyday Nursery life. There are pictures, posters and notice boards in the cloakroom and entrance, emergency signage, letters and fliers for parents, registers in daily use, controls on cookers and heaters and name labels. The children will see adults using reading and writing as a natural part of life. Through their imitative capacities, children will copy these adult activities in their play.
- There is a wide variety of well-chosen picture books available for the children. Adults will demonstrate how books are used, cared for and to be respected. Children know where the books live on the shelf, and are able to fetch them and put them away during free play, as well as during specific book periods during the session.
- Children with English as an additional language learn fast in this environment, and help is given to the parents by sharing books, stories, songs etc. with home.

In summary

The curriculum is delivered through a planned, balanced combination of activities to engage the children in areas which they would not easily discover for themselves without adult intervention, as well as a safe, peaceful environment in which to practice them within a group and independently. This early years strategy, with its slower introduction of formal reading and writing, generates a very ready assimilation of these skills from the post-Nursery age. Before the start of formal learning, the children have already developed good listening habits, memory, picture building and can work independently and with individuality. There is a continuing emphasis on fine motor skills, working sequentially, visual and auditory discrimination through games and varied artistic activities – designed for maximum effectiveness.

The Approach to Numeracy and Number in the Nursery

The approach to numeracy in the Steiner Waldorf Nursery includes many similarities and parallels to the approach adopted for literacy. The principal emphasis is on oral numeracy, counting as well as other sequences, and how number is applied in everyday situations. The Nursery day includes ample opportunities for numeracy to be applied to practical situations, as well as being presented in a 'fun' way through actions, rhymes, songs and stories. Examples of numeracy in the Nursery include:

- Rhymes and songs during ring time. These may include both counting and addition, as well as counting down (such as when birds fly from a branch).
- Rhymes and songs with a numeracy dimension are often accompanied by gestures. These help embody the fundamental principles of numeracy, aiding long-term learning. They also help present numeracy in a way that is fun for the children.
- Rhymes and songs with a numeracy dimension are also often accompanied by the use of fingers for counting in various ways. This helps the children develop dexterity.
- Stories may include a numeracy dimension, e.g. The Enormous Turnip, where a cumulative number of people and animals are required to pull up the turnip.
- During walks, the teacher and assistant will always count the number of children when leaving, and count them as they go to ensure all children are present. The children experience the importance of this, and how number relates to them and their classmates.
- Meal and snack times give many opportunities for the children to apply practical numeracy. The right number of cups is required during snack time, and for the main meal, putting out plates, bowls and cutlery offers further opportunities for children to help while experiencing the importance of numbers.
- At meal and snack times, absence of certain children that day gives opportunities for number work including subtraction.

Technology and Understanding the World

Children recognise that a range of simple or mechanical everyday technology is used in places such as homes and schools. They select and use technology for particular purposes.

Examples of such technology available in the Kinedergarten include: scales for weighing; oven for baking; construction of dens and houses using planks, furniture and fabrics; carpet sweeper; opportunity to cook over an open fire; use of water butt; use of wheel-barrow; properties of sand.

Children also experience on-site technology such as smoke alarms and the fire alarm, the wireless doorbell, digital camera, mobile phone for use in emergencies.

Children experience a wide range of technologies and services during their walks. These might include the following: maintenance of roads, bridleways, footpaths, and occasionally canals and railway lines (representing means of transport and communication); post boxes (representing the postal service); telegraph poles and transmitters (telecommunications); pylons (electricity services and National Grid); refuse lorries (refuse collection and disposal and Local Council services generally); recycling collections; ambulance or police car (emergency services generally); reservoirs and sewerage works (water supply and treatment). Always beginning with the observation of the object or event within their own local context, the children may be led to a knowledge of its wider significance, and of those people who work to provide it. This will always be done in a sensitive and age-appropriate way.

Children are aware of, and help with local flood alleviation work, for example sweeping leaves and clearing storm drains, helping with local green dam (building) projects, and clearing invasive plants (e.g. Himalayan Balsam).

Regarding the use of computers in the Nursery, the teacher will make a judgment based on the view that, 'The ultimate aim [of Steiner-Waldorf education] is to equip the students to be able to make judgments for themselves how best to use the computer as a tool in the service of real perceived needs.' [ETCSWC, p. 164.] Computers are not currently used in the Nursery. There is a mobile phone for emergencies, and a digital camera. When using these and other technological devices in front of the children, staff are asked to use them in a responsible way so that, as children imitate them, the children learn good responsible use themselves.

PSHE (Physical, Social and Health Education)

Personal, Social and Health Education is an integral part of children's everyday Nursery experience. Useful skills such as vegetable preparation, bread making, and whittling are acquired through imitation in the Nursery. Healthy eating, cleanliness, sharing are also practiced and encouraged. PSHE is also an essential element of the multicultural ethos of the Nursery, alongside the area of inclusion. (See the CVSE K. British-Values-Policy and the CVSE K. Inclusion Policy).

Celebration of Festivals. Besides religious texts, stories, myths, fables and fairytales, an appreciation and respect for different cultures will be fostered through the celebration of a diverse mix of festivals. This is done for children of all ages, and the aim is to enable the children to experience the meaning behind the festival in a living, non-judgemental way. The celebration of a festival will always have many dimensions to it, so that the developing child's intellectual, emotional and physical can all be engaged in a multi-sensory way. This will often involve stories describing the origins of the festival, craft activities, music and dance (which might include learning a song in a new language), cooking food relating to the festival, as well as a seasonal aspect. The Nursery teacher will have an almost infinite variety of **world festivals** to choose

from. A teacher might consider including as part of a Ring Time topic themes, stories and activities connected with some of the following (a very selective list!):

- Various lantern festivals from across the world (e.g. Chinese, Hindu or other tradition).
- Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.
- Thanksgiving.
- Ramadan.
- Various flower festivals (e.g. Japanese traditions).
- Chinese New Year.
- Various Kite festivals
- Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights.
- Baisakhi, the Sikh and Hindu New Year.
- Various festivals connected with the moon and sun.
- Festivals such as the Chinese New Year or Diwali give opportunities to build cultural awareness through sharing different foods, music, dance.

Visual Art

Painting and drawing are activities integral to the rhythm of the Nursery week. The use of natural pigment primary colour water-colours on wet paper is the preferred medium for painting. Wax crayons are generally used for drawing. Basic painting and drawing techniques are introduced, along with care and respect for the materials. Children of Nursery will age often express themselves more openly through visual media than through other means such as language. The teacher's observations of these drawings can lead to a deeper understanding of the child's needs at this stage of development. (See, for example, Chrishilde Blume (2019) *Young Children's Drawings as a Mirror of Development*.)

Music

Singing and instrumental work (notably pentatonic lyre) are presented to the children for imitation as a regular part of the Nursery week (e.g. singing grace before mealtimes; singing as part of Ring Time, lyre music before story or a puppet play). Seasonal songs and rhymes also help children through the rhythms and essential aspects of the seasons.

Handwork

This element of the Steiner-Waldorf curriculum is important for the development of co-ordination for both hands, concentration, practical number work in a creative context, and the fostering of an appreciation of the work behind common manufactured objects. Children have opportunities to make simple objects in a variety of media, e.g. through finger knitting, or simple sewing projects such as making pin cushions, felt gnomes or dolls. Care of materials and good and safe use of tools such as scissors and needles is encouraged.

Movement – indoor and outdoor physical activity

Physical movement is a core aspect of the Steiner-Waldorf approach. It is an integral part of the Nursery day. Illustrative movements are modelled during Ring Time. During outdoor play time, children have opportunities to imitate model meaningful activities such as sweeping, building with wooden planks and logs, or working with water or sand.

Monitoring Compliance and Effectiveness

- This document will be reviewed annually
- This document will be discussed and reviewed at EY Teachers' Meetings

§ Related Policies

- CVSE K. British-Values-Policy
- CVSE K. Inclusion Policy
- CVSE K. SENCO policy

¹ The word Waldorf comes from the name of the first such school set up in 1919 in the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. At the request of Emil Molt, the managing director, Rudolf Steiner helped found a school to educate the children of the factory's workforce. Both "Steiner" and "Waldorf" are terms which have continued to be used interchangeably.

² See for example:

Iacoboni, M. (2008) *Mirroring People – the science of empathy and who we connect with others*. New York: Picador.

Rees, S. (2016) *A Study of Imitation, Social Learning and Group Affiliation in the Steiner Kindergarten*. Unpublished dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the Degree of Master of Science in the Graduate School of Education.

Rizzolatti, G. and Craighero L. (2004). The Mirror-Neuron System. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*. 27, 169-92.