



St Paul's Steiner School

Curriculum for the older child in Kindergarten (5-6-year olds)

At St Paul's Steiner School, children benefit from an extended childhood. They can embed basic skills (physical, emotional, social and cognitive), and develop lifelong learning habits that enable them to become enthusiastic, imaginative, resilient, creative and eager to learn students. Children join kindergarten from three years of age and stay until they are six years old, rising seven. We follow the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (with some exemptions granted by the DfE along with all Steiner Waldorf settings) for children up to the age of five. We continue with these guidelines for the older children, extending them with further activities and expectations.

How children learn in kindergarten

'In the first seven years, the young child learns to be at home in the physical body, developing an orientation in space and acquiring the initial, fundamental developmental capacities of uprightiness, speech and thought. The content of the child's whole environment is the learning context; the child 'imitates' the people and the agencies that are in his/her environment. This imitating gesture serves to imprint on the child's will the content and the quality of what is learnt. In the kindergarten, experiential learning, discovery through creative play and intensive social interaction with peers and teachers constitute the main education themes. Awareness of the complexities of language and number is acquired through informal play and social interaction. These are not taught didactically. In the seventh year, the child's forces finish forming the physical body and become active in developing the facility for independent, representational, pictorial thinking. Class 1 is the first introduction to a formal schooling process.' (from Chapter 6, The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum)

The mixed age group of three to six-year-olds provides a unique space where older children can 'step-up' in all areas of kindergarten life. They can use their initiative, extend and individualise activities, take responsibility, lead and develop independence.

Older children may be asked to prepare the table for snack, count the number of chairs, match bowls and cups, including adding or taking away numbers. Children measure and weigh ingredients for baking, develop and use mathematical language such as heavy and light, more or less. Children experience weight, height and gravity especially when engaging in large construction play, both indoors and outside. Older children are asked to help younger children get ready for the garden and serve food at snack-times. Conversation around the meal table often leads to 'how many children are there?', 'how many girls/boys are there?' and the ages of the children present. Older children may be asked to do a short part of ringtime by themselves, or a fingergame, to show the younger children.

Children acquire a rich vocabulary through learning stories, songs and verses by heart. Older children may be asked to help the teacher retell a story by re-enacting it or helping with puppet shows. They are also given space and time to make up their own stories and puppet shows to further develop their own story telling and sequencing. Children learn to recognise their name and those of others by observing name labels and often want to practise writing for birthday and other cards, making signs for games or asking for an adult to write words for them to copy.

Children are supported to build up stamina: the ability to pay attention for longer periods of time, persistence, and the ability to complete a task they have begun. In the last year of kindergarten, the children work on individual projects with an adult, above their weekly handwork projects, which support this development of focus, authority and expansion of skills. These older children-specific activities are more formalized and intended to extend the learning to strengthen the will forces,

widening and deepening children's experiences in a planned manner which is related both to the individual children's needs and interests, and the needs and interest of the whole group.

Such projects incorporate a wide variety of skills and equipment: finger knitting and plaiting, carding sheep fleece, making felt, cutting, sewing, sawing, sanding, drilling; use of carders/ needles/ scissors/ sandpaper/ saws/knives and hand drills. Children work at their own pace and often offer to help each other. These projects and the skills developed help facilitate a gentle inner transition to a more formal learning stage, which we believe takes place in the child's seventh year.

At St Paul's the 5-6 year olds spend one session per week away from their usual group with the gardening teacher who provides age-appropriate challenge, gardening work and games. At the beginning of the year the children are in their own class groups and as the year progresses other 5-6 year old guests are invited to join each group to facilitate social relationships between the classes.

A parents' evening is held at the beginning of the year for parents of the 5-6 year olds, to share a picture of child development of the 5-6 year old, plus to outline the curriculum which is designed to meet their needs at this stage of their development and learning.

The Summer Term – transition activities

The older children stay each week for a whole afternoon (sunshine group), together with their neighbouring kindergarten's 5-6 year olds. During this session, they are given opportunities to engage in extended physical activities such as more challenging skipping games, plus other games suited to children this age, and listening to age-appropriate, longer, more complex stories. They will also have more challenging meaningful craft activities to work on, for example making a doll or a hobby horse.

Towards the end of the year, 5-6 year olds from all four groups come together to walk to the local park for a 'sunshine picnic.'

In the last term of the kindergarten yearly cycle many of the stories and puppet shows told to the whole group are ones that meet the inner mood and development of the older children. The last day of the school year includes a special ceremony for these children, to acknowledge their leaving kindergarten and moving to class 1.

Assessment and transition to Class 1

During the previous year (age 4-5) an assessment takes place in the spring term, the results of which inform planning in that summer term and in their final year, with the aim of helping the children fulfil their potential in their physical development, in order to support their future learning. The child's development and progress are supported and monitored in this final year. These assessments and the children's reports also allow the Class 1 teacher to have as full a picture of the child as possible. It is assumed that all children within the academic year will move to Class 1 in the September before they are 7.

During the summer term, all rising Class 1 children are presented to the school teachers in a series of meetings. When their class teacher has been appointed, he or she will meet with the kindergarten teachers to discuss each child more fully. Wherever possible the class teacher will meet with parents and children in an informal setting before school starts formally in September.

During the beginning of the first term, the Class 1 is led into the school assembly to be introduced to the school.