

Brighton Steiner School

Curriculum Information – by Class

A detailed look at the Steiner Curriculum as it unfolds through a child's years at the Brighton Steiner School.

Parent and Child Groups

The aim of the group is to provide a friendly introduction to Steiner education for parents and a welcoming space for the youngest children to play. The groups are small and intimate, allowing parents to share experiences and concerns with each other. The sessions give parents the opportunity to explore Steiner principles around creating boundaries, nutrition, health, play, singing and many more topics.

Playing with the children lets parents see how a little imagination and basic natural materials like conkers, shells, pine cones and fabric can become water, fields and glorious sunny beaches. Toys are made of wood and dolls are handmade from natural materials. The textures and smells of natural fabrics help stimulate the child's major senses much more than mass-produced plastic toys.

The rhythm of the sessions is the same every week. As the parent and toddler enter the room they are individually greeted and offered refreshments. The activity is usually based on something seasonal (snowflakes in winter, planting in spring, felting in summer and conker dragons in autumn). After completing the activity tidying up is accompanied by singing. Outside play is next, after which hands are washed, bread is made and eaten with some fruit and finally all come together to say goodbye until the next time.

Early Years

Within the Early Years Curriculum the emphasis is placed on the rounded development of a young child. The education springs from an in-depth philosophical understanding, and practical appreciation of what the developing individual requires to create a healthy pathway to adulthood.

The main manifestation of this approach is in a different timescale for the introduction of certain aspects of learning. Current mainstream education has placed a renewed emphasis on concentrated learning with measurable goals used to assess achievement. In a Steiner setting the focus, especially in the Early Years, is on rounded creative development of the whole child and their personal security and confidence.

The Steiner Curriculum works as a whole. The rhythms of learning themes and subject developments are constantly built upon and expanded through the entire educational journey. The pace of curriculum delivery is closely matched to each child's development and their ability to take on new experiences.

The completion of the educational goal remains the same in terms of academic understanding and learned subject matter. The difference is in the individual child's sense of self-understanding and awareness that their education has been a process they have actively engaged in.

The Playgroup and Kindergarten rooms are warm and homelike. They contain a kitchen

area, sofa and small sized chairs and tables. A seasonal nature table with treasures of nature and festival celebrations is refreshed periodically. In one corner is a little play home containing small kitchen utensils, a wooden iron and board and handmade cloth 'babies' asleep in a cradle. The toys around the room are simple natural ones such as wicker baskets filled with wood, fir cones and pebbles, soft coloured veils and play frames. The children create wonderful houses, magical castles and secret dens using these props and their own imagination.

The Early Years teachers work with rhythm, imitation and positive reinforcement. Creating a good, strong, daily rhythm helps children to feel safe and know what is expected of them, therefore very few verbal instructions are given. Rather they copy and imitate the teachers. The under-sevens are full of movement and do not want to sit still for long. Therefore an important aspect of the curriculum is creative play and engaging in social activity.

The typical rhythm of an Early Years morning is:

Draw pictures with beeswax crayons or play in the sand pit

A 'Ringtime' of songs and rhymes

Creative play and the activity of the day

Monday – Painting

Tuesday – Craft

Wednesday – Baking

Thursday – Nature Walk

Friday – Eurythmy

Snack Time

Children share a simple organic wholegrain snack each day, prepared in their own kitchen with their participation.

Monday – Rice

Tuesday – Porridge oats

Wednesday – Millet

Thursday – Rye bread

Friday – Barley and vegetable soup

Garden Time

Story Time

Goodbye until the next time

Classes 1 and 2

In Classes 1 and 2 the day is filled with a variety of activities. Each child is greeted warmly by the class teacher at the door. This opportunity to make eye contact and shake hands on the threshold re-establishes the relationship between pupil and teacher and anchors the classroom as a place of learning. Then a verse is spoken by the whole group, followed by singing, speech exercises, poetry recitation, movement, rhythmic games, and playing the recorder.

The Main Lessons will be centred on writing and number work. Writing is taught before reading. The letters are introduced imaginatively, first in pictures and then associated with a story. The children use colours and are taught to write beautifully. Joined-up handwriting is practiced in Class 2.

In Class 1 the children are introduced to numbers and their qualities. They have fun counting with fingers and acorns or small stones. They do plenty of mental arithmetic and learn the multiplication tables. The four arithmetical processes are taught up to

100 in Class 1 and 1000 in Class 2.

The children have experience of the difference between straight lines and curves and observe the forms in which they can be found – the square, the triangle, the circle and things around them. They learn much through movement, modeling and stepping as well as the writing of numbers and sums. Freehand drawing of forms, which will lead to geometry, is practiced with big crayons; rulers and sharp pencils will come later.

Each Main Lesson ends with a traditional story told (not read) by the class teacher and it will be recalled by the children on the following day. In Class 2 the fables and legends of the saints are included.

There is a painting lesson once a week and specialist teachers come in for French and German, Eurythmy (creative movement) and handwork. Much gentle encouragement is given to mastering tasks such as the fastening of shoes and coats, taking care of possessions and participating with the other children.

Class 3

The Class 3 curriculum is designed to meet the changing needs of the 8 to 9 year old child who is seen as ‘crossing the Rubicon’ or going through an important transitional stage in their path towards adulthood. At the ninth year the child becomes, sometimes quite suddenly, aware of him or her self as a separate identity. This can be accompanied by fears of being alone, of death, of loss and even feelings of inadequacy or depression.

The Steiner Curriculum takes this delicate threshold stage into consideration and provides subject matter that is reassuring but also challenging. Children are encouraged to step back to consider and study the world anew from a different perspective. They are helped to exercise their new powers of objectivity and their ability to make judgments in addition to experiencing a greater sense of self-sufficiency.

English focuses on basic spelling rules and grammar and elements of language composition. In mathematics, much practice is given to mental arithmetic and learning the times tables from 1 up to 12 by heart. The four number processes are expanded upon and there is a first look at economics. The transition from the barter system to a monetary economy is studied and handling of money calculations, linking back to the four number processes.

Measurement is another theme, in which children examine body measurement – using feet, spans, thumbs etc.; standardised measurements – imperial and metric; and time measurement – the 24-hour clock, seasons, months, weeks, years, days.

A very popular topic is farming. Pupils learn about the historical development of farming, how it links to the seasons, the practicalities of sowing, tending, harvesting and storing crops and the importance of working with nature. A farm visit provides an opportunity to see animal husbandry and the basics of food production in progress.

For the Building Main Lesson, building methods throughout history are studied, and modern building basics (foundations, brickwork, carpentry, roofing etc.). The class will also take on a practical project to provide a real experience of building, for instance a small wooden house in the school playground or the construction of a yurt.

Other Main Lesson topics include Old Testament stories such as the Creation; the Fall of Man and the expulsion from paradise; and the relationship between the Old Testament

God and Man.

In music, the basic notations are taught through reading and composing exercises.

Class 4

The curriculum for Class 4 reflects the mid-point of the child's journey through the Lower School. The child is in a true sense at the halfway point towards adulthood, and the curriculum reflects this in many ways.

There is a gradual shift this year. There is still the imaginative and fantasy-led narrative in the form of history studies of ancient cultures and myths, such as the Norse and Teutonic myths and legends, but now the relationships of these mythical figures are explored to understand how situations and events produce certain outcomes. This theme of growing self-awareness is further continued in the Man and Animal Main Lesson, where the relationship between the two is explored to gain a living understanding of how mankind occupies the world in relationship to other living creatures.

Continuing this process of detailed discovery in the exploration of grammar, a dissection of language's living components is made and the structures of the written word are learnt. Likewise the basic introductions to mathematics that were accepted in previous years are developed into fractions and complex divisions and multiplications. This contraction into detail is celebrated and expanded through the growth of local geography and history. The synthesis of these broad subjects permits the child to find a balance with growing complexity against the expanding backdrop of the world. In this way the curriculum meets the developmental needs of the individual as well as furnishing a deeper understanding and growth through learning.

These new vistas of detailed appreciation are maintained in all areas of the pupils' activity, so that the subject lessons complement the work accomplished during Main Lessons. For example, in handwork the children are introduced to the complexities of four-needle knitting and the dexterities involved in cross-stitch.

By the conclusion of the year the children will have experienced the full foundation of their learning and will be prepared to take on the complexities of the growing curriculum as it moves forward towards adulthood.

Class 5

The curriculum for Class 5 has a main theme of Ancient Civilizations. The narrative thread for this theme often begins with the fall of Atlantis and the exodus led by Manu in his boat pulled along by a giant fish. Manu and his followers initially settle in the Gobi desert. From this original settlement groups set off to establish new civilizations in India, followed by Persia, then Babylonia, Egypt and finally Greece. This is supplemented by a course in the language, writing and thought of Ancient Greece, taught by a specialist teacher.

Through studying these ancient civilisations in sequence, the children experience the qualitative changes in the development of humanity that took place through these different cultural epochs. This process of human development has a direct resonance with the child's developing consciousness.

A second important theme for Class 5 is botany. This forms part of an age-specific sequence that allows the children to understand how they themselves are related to the kingdoms of nature.

The sequence begins in Class 4 with the study of the human form, followed by the study of animal forms. In Class 5 the children study their relationship to the plant kingdom. Finally in Class 6, the focus moves to the study of the mineral world in the form of geology and mineralogy.

The Class 5 Botany Main Lesson might begin with the children exploring the various different forms that the dandelion plant takes during the course of the year: a small rosette of leaves in spring, a bright yellow flower in summer, a white 'clock' of seeds in autumn and an empty withered stem in winter. Having taken in the whole plant, the children go on to look at the five main parts of a plant: root, stem, leaves, flowers and fruit.

This is followed by a journey through the worlds of algae, mosses, fungi, ferns and conifers, which collectively can be used to represent the way in which primitive plant forms have evolved over millions of years. This developmental sequence can be related to child development with algae corresponding to a newborn baby, mosses to a toddler, ferns to a Class 1 child and conifers to a Class 5 child.

This first Main Lesson is followed later in the year by others which involve study of the different botanical families and an introduction to the life processes that take place in plants. There will also be a more detailed look at flowering plants and the process of pollination.

Other subjects covered in Class 5 include the geography of the British Isles, freehand geometry, grammar and the punctuation of reported speech.

In mathematics the main presentation is on decimal fractions.

There is also a strong focus on athletics in Class 5, which coincides with the study of the Greek Olympics and the children's participation in an inter-schools Olympic event.

Class 6

During Class 6 the Steiner Curriculum seeks to stimulate the child's growing curiosity about the world they live in.

While studying the natural sciences (geography, geology, botany and physics) the teacher directs attention to the laws of natural phenomena. In physics, for example, we look at gravity, magnetism, heat, light and sound. In geography we investigate the configurations of the earth's layers and landmasses, focusing on Europe, her peoples and cultures. The Geology Main Lesson concentrates on discovering the substance and materials of land and looks into the varied climates and vegetation round the globe.

Through the study of history the children encounter the natural law of cause and effect. Their growing capacity to think causally is deepened by sequencing of the subject matter so that the past can be seen as a meaningful process leading up to present times. In this journey it becomes evident that the human race has played a profoundly influential role in shaping history. We begin with the study of Alexander the Great, move on to the rise and fall of the Roman Empire and culminate in the Middle Ages and Islam.

The craft curriculum interweaves with the historical subjects through the creation of mosaics based on Roman relics. We also explore the Geography Main Lesson through the clay modeling of Europe and her countries and expand geology through the modeling of rock and land formations. Botany is researched through the observation of plants and natural forms in still-life drawing and in painting the vegetation found in different climatic regions.

In mathematics the children are encouraged to develop their increasing interest in accuracy. High standards are set for the presentation of geometric drawings and constructed shapes. Artistic abilities are developed by using colour and pattern to enhance shapes while simultaneously becoming familiar with the practice of fundamental mathematical laws.

Practical business mathematics is studied so the children begin to understand how the world of business and finance works. The concepts of interest, percentages, discounts, exchange, V.A.T. and profit and loss are learned and applied practically as the children plan, produce and sell a product through their own business venture.

The English curriculum builds on the study of grammar made in the previous year. The focus moves to direct and indirect speech and verb tenses. The foundations of good essay writing are forged and then applied across the curriculum when describing physics experiments, writing synopses of historical accounts and so forth.

The children's imaginations are fueled by the writing of poetry, stories and through the recitation of poetic ballads and prose whose roots stem from the world of nature and historic events.

Class 7

The main theme for Class 7 is the Renaissance. Pupils study the transition from Medieval history to the Renaissance. In keeping with the Steiner principle of teaching reflecting the child's development, these topics mirror the child's own transition as understanding about the world dawns. They are moving from their own Dark Ages to their Age of Enlightenment. Pupils learn how the geocentric world view of Ptolemy gave way to the heliocentric view of Copernicus, with recognition that in fact the earth moves around the sun.

At this stage, the child's potential for depth of feeling is increased and the music and art of the Renaissance meet that in the curriculum. Class 7 is a year of feeling, and feeling in balance. To complement this, in their art classes pupils produce beautiful views of Venice and other pieces reflecting the mood and style of the Renaissance, and are capable of producing very mature work. The Renaissance Main Lesson is a wonderful chance to look at drawing, painting and modeling through the High Renaissance artists Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo, respectively.

Other Main Lesson themes for Class 7 include astronomy, the age of the explorers, chemistry and creative writing. Nutrition and hygiene form the basis of an understanding of physiology and this exploring of the way things work is extended to the inanimate realm with the study of mechanics and mechanical engineering.

Class 8

Class 8 sees the conclusion of the middle school cycle, where the pupil makes

preparations for Upper School life and enters into the final stages of their formal education. The emphasis of the curriculum here is a gathering and rounding off of subject matters, together with the formalisation of new skills to assist the individual in a more cognitive pursuit of learning. With the advent of the Upper School comes the approaching GCSE syllabus, where the student is called upon to make an analytical appreciation of their successes.

The Main Lesson cycles are still assisting the individual's development towards adulthood and through the gates of adolescence, with the introduction of great themes of history and economic political events. The pupils celebrate mankind's extremes at a time where their own realities are broadening out, and personal conflicts in thought and emotion, together with great physical change have to be accommodated. The Steiner Curriculum permits the pupil to find the space for their own development while producing continued learning.

The world plain opens out through the introduction of economic history and revolutions, in which the pupil gains an awareness of the conflicts through development in which man needs to find balance, for example the British Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Detail is explored in mathematics through the development of algebraic formulas and equations, with the incorporation of graphs and statistics.

In geography the circuit of mankind's accomplishments is celebrated through in-depth appreciation of the Americas and beyond, where the globe has now been circumnavigated and a bright new vista opens out before society. In chemistry and meteorology the details of processes are observed, again providing a balance to that which is actually occurring for the pupil in their own personal development.

The final stage of the class journey and the celebration of its experience with the class teacher takes the form of a class play, arising out of the main lesson cycles on language and literature and is seen as the synthesis of the educational pathway that the pupils have explored, guided through the teaching of their class teacher over the last seven years. In a true sense the cycle of the middle years is complete, starting from the dawn of mankind's awakening, in the world of fairy tale and legend in Class 1, with the foundation introduction to numbers, letters and form; to the end point where the student stands at the dawn of modern mankind, equipped with the learning tools to go forward into complicated thought processes and take hold of the scientific age.

The last days in Class 8 are a reflection of the time and space traveled for the adults that have accompanied the children, an emotional time of farewells and well-wishing. For the pupils, as with anyone preparing for a new journey, there is excitement that a new life in the Upper School is beginning.

Classes 9 and 10

The Upper School Steiner Curriculum is specifically designed to support the critical years of adolescence. It provides the opportunity for students to develop a broad knowledge base through philosophical, practical, technical and scientific inquiry, as well as preparing for GCSE and OCN examinations.

The Steiner Upper School Curriculum covers English, mathematics, art, literature, history, geography, anthropology, biology, physics, chemistry, French, German, drama, music, Eurythmy (creative movement) and craft. The curriculum and the teachers supporting it seek to equip the individual with powers of discernment and a critical mind whilst developing the student's ability to judge and initiate creative decision-

making faculties.

In addition to following the Steiner Curriculum, students are prepared for a maximum of 5 GCSEs. At present English, mathematics, art, French and German are offered. However, it is recognised that the narrowness of the GCSE syllabus does limit, rather than develop, judgment and creativity. The school therefore offers the minimum number of GCSEs required by further education colleges, which the large majority of students go on to attend.

In order to provide a recognised external validation of students' work that better fits the Steiner Curriculum, Steiner schools have recently developed links with the Open College Network. The Brighton Steiner School now offers Open College Network qualifications (OCNs) in Science and Humanities (which covers physics, chemistry, biology, geography, politics and history), Movement and Drama (which covers the drama curriculum, Eurhythmy and games), Crafts (woodwork, metalwork and handwork) and ICT. The OCN certificates, which are accepted by all further education colleges, are based on internal and external assessment of coursework. They are graded from 1 to 5 with a level 3 being equal to a grade C GCSE and a level 1 being equal to an NVQ.

In the Upper School, the class is led by the class guardian, who acts in a facilitator role to support the transition from school to being active in the world. The guardian guides students in their personal, social and intellectual development in an open environment which nurtures mutual respect, responsibility and co-operation. The Steiner Curriculum and teaching methods are all aids to the student's increasing self-awareness, confidence, sense of belonging and understanding of the necessary balance between freedom and responsibility. Lifeskills classes and work experience further help students unlock and realise their own personal potential.