



EDINBURGH
STEINER
SCHOOL

Edinburgh Steiner School Early Years Handbook

Updated 2018

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Welcome

We are delighted to welcome you and your child/children to the Edinburgh Steiner School Kindergarten.

Here your child will find a safe and caring environment in which to transition from the quiet heart of the home to the broad open arms of the school and life to come.

We are committed to embracing your family within our nurturing and supportive environment.

We warmly invite you to participate in a partnership that will support the developmental journey of your child during the first seven years of their life. This handbook is intended to offer specific information that will connect parents/carers to the work of the kindergarten.

The Kindergarten Handbook resource can be used as a means of supporting the experience your child will have in the Kindergarten. It is hoped that the information herein will provide a valuable background to help foster a strong parent/carer-teacher relationship.

Section 1: About the School

Introduction

In the early 1900s, the Austrian philosopher and educator Rudolf Steiner created a new form of education that would help pupils achieve clarity of thought, sensitivity of feeling and strength of will. After listening to his lectures, the workers at the Waldorf-Astoria factory in Stuttgart asked him to form a school for their children. In 1919, the first Steiner/Waldorf School was founded. Today, from the favelas in Sao Paulo to the villages of Nepal, there are well over 1000 schools and 1,800 Early Years centres in over 60 countries, serving children from birth to 18 years of age.

Teaching in a Steiner School is based on Rudolf Steiner's insight into life in general and the nature of the human being in particular. His philosophy is called Anthroposophy.

The educational aspects of this philosophy spring from an understanding of three seven-year cycles of development: from birth to seven; from seven to fourteen; and from fourteen to twenty-one. At each stage, the education is designed to work with the unfolding abilities and changing needs of the child. These stages connect with the development of the all-round human qualities of thinking, feeling and willing. In the first phase, the active or **will** aspect predominates, in the second, the affective or **feeling** aspect is dominant, and in the third, the cognitive or **thinking** aspect comes to the fore.

A central aim of Steiner education is to develop, harmonise and unite the faculties of thought, feeling and action in the child, so that the foundations may be laid for mental adaptability, initiative and moral strength in adult life. The child is seen to have physical, emotional and spiritual needs as well as intellectual ones. The teaching and curriculum together seek to nourish all these aspects.

Steiner Kindergartens adopt the same approach to Early Years education as most European countries where children start formal learning during their seventh year. Our approach of not forcing formal learning is born out of a desire to protect the faculties of feeling and willing which are so often marginalised in the rush to meet early intellectual attainment targets.

The carefully structured environment is designed to foster personal and social learning. During these years we teach by example, and learning is integrated rather than subject-based.

Our curriculum aims to adapt itself to the child. The children in our Kindergarten are given time to unfold at their own pace. Young children are gifted players and imitators. These creative faculties, which appear shortly after birth and recede at around the age of seven, are the child's personal pedagogues. The Steiner / Waldorf teacher cooperates and works with these powerful educational forces.

Each day an extended period of time is dedicated to creative free play. Studies demonstrate that good players show more empathy towards others and have less aggression; are able to see things from the perspective of the other, and exhibit fewer signs of fear, sadness and fatigue.

Play also strengthens the imagination. Through play, children are able to exercise and consolidate their ability to understand and to think, as well as to develop and strengthen their concentration. Creative play supports physical, emotional and social development and allows children to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery. It encourages children to become inventive and adaptable—essential skills that promote resilience.

We are a community of 'doers' and our work is a combination of practical and artistic activity. We garden, clean, cook and we bake our own bread together that we share and eat at meal times. Children love to help and, through this they develop a wide range of motor skills, such as dexterity and hand-eye coordination. The presence of a working adult creates an atmosphere that helps the children to become independently active. To see an adult working with their hands, doing something where skill, concentration and perseverance are all demanded, is a wonderful example to the ever-watchful child and exercises the sustained application of will power. All that the adults do, but also how they do it, how they handle their tools and materials, even their gestures and body language, are all registered and internalised by the child.

In the Kindergarten, children make real things from real materials that have a meaningful application in the world they know. In this way, the children acquire the basis for social and academic skills at their own pace. Education at this stage is about instilling in children a genuine feeling of worth and the belief that they can succeed. Steiner education addresses the whole child—head, heart and hands—and provides the best possible beginning for your child to grow to his or her full potential in a way that protects the wonder and delight of early childhood.

The classrooms are designed around the child, with beautiful colours and natural materials. We use high quality pigment paints and crayons and we bake with organic whole food, whenever possible.

The strong rhythm of the day, and the repetition that each week brings, carries with it an inbuilt discipline. This creates a safe and secure environment for the child that enables more effective learning and also reduces the need for additional discipline. Our aim is to build a bridge between home and school by creating a safe, warm and loving environment.

The Trustees

The legal, financial and employment matters of the school are the responsibility of the Trustees, who are usually present or former parents/carers. The school is constituted under The Memorandum and Articles of Association which established the school as a 'limited trust' in 1947. The school is therefore a company limited by guarantee and the Trustees are its directors. The school is also a registered charity and is subject to the provisions of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 including supervision by the Office of the Scottish Regulator (OSCR). To stand as a Trustee, any member of the trust can be nominated and elected at the Trust AGM. The Trust is open to anyone who has the welfare of the school at heart.

The College of Teachers

The Edinburgh Steiner School does not have a hierarchical structure and does not have a head teacher. The policy-making body of this school is called the College of Teachers or 'College' for short. All the important pedagogical decisions involving the school are finalised by College. Decisions are reached by consensus. College is responsible for admissions, maintaining standards in the curriculum and all other areas relating to learning and teaching. College is normally chaired by a member of the Management Group and is made up of teachers who have been at the school for at least a year and have shown their commitment and dedication to the philosophical principles of the school. This structure is adopted by many Steiner schools throughout the UK and abroad and has a number of benefits including support from the whole teaching body for all major decisions.

There are a number of mandated groups of College with responsibility for such things as Maintenance, Staff Development, Festivals and Estates.

College meets each Thursday evening during term time to deal with the many practical details of school life, to study together and to share the rewards and any challenges of their work. There is a staff meeting one afternoon each week for all teachers, when both pedagogical and administrative topics are discussed. The tasks involved in the running of the school are shared by the teaching body as a whole.

The Management Group

Day to day running of the School is mandated to the Management Group. Up to three members of College serve in rotation as the Management Group. It is the task of this group to prepare the College Agenda and see that decisions taken by College are implemented. The Management Group also deals with day-to-day matters and holds an overview of the various groups within the School. Management members have different portfolio responsibilities. Surgery times are usually available each week when any member of the School community can book an appointment to see a member of Management. Surgery times are normally listed in the Tuesday Notice.

Management Team

This consists of the Management Group, plus the School Coordinator and Kindergarten Coordinator, who serves as a link to outside agencies such as the Care inspectorate. This group manages the relationship between administration, staffing and the curriculum. The School Coordinator does not currently 'rotate' and is considered for the time being 'permanent.' The Coordinator manages the Admissions Secretary and School Office, and oversees communication in the School. The Management Team meets for up to eight lesson periods per week.

Section 2: About the Kindergarten

“When involved in play, children's concentration and application to the task are much greater than in academically-directed activities contrived by the teacher.” Sue Palmer, Author of *Toxic Childhood*

Edinburgh Steiner School was founded in 1939. It is a co-educational school from Kindergarten to Class 12 (age 3 to 18) and has places for about 350 pupils. The Kindergarten is purpose-built and was designed by Wilfred Bohm in 1989. Its shape reminds us of a sitting hen which shelters her chicks (the Classes) under her wings.

It is a building of architectural interest which is often included in the annual Edinburgh Open Doors day. It houses four rooms, each self-contained with a kitchen and two toilets. The rooms are decorated in soft pastel colours. This is to acknowledge that in these early years the child's consciousness should not be prematurely awakened by external stimuli.

The garden is a unique space where we endeavour to care for and protect nature as much as the children. Occasionally we hold a Work Day for parents/carers to come and help maintain this valuable resource.

Today it is widely recognised that the first seven years of life are of the utmost importance for the development of the healthy adult. **Play** is also gaining recognition as being the true work of childhood. We are committed to creating an environment that supports imaginative play.

Rooms are equipped with baskets of wood, fir cones, shells, stones, blankets and coloured cloths which provide an open invitation for imaginative play. The natural objects in the room encourage creativity and flexibility as they are transformed by children into houses, cars, money, food or any of the experiences of their everyday lives. It is our wish to provide an environment that is safe, secure and worthy of imitation; an environment that helps support the children's task of building healthy bodies.

Partnerships with Parents/Carers

We believe that watching children growing up is an honour and helping in their development is a privilege. We are grateful for the confidence you show by entrusting your child to us.

We live in a materialistic age that does not naturally support families and young children. We would like to help you as a parent/carer to enable your child to fulfil their potential.

We see your role in the Kindergarten as being in partnership with your child's teacher. A strong and supportive social environment, provided by teachers and parents/carers working together, and by a healthy school community, will support the educational work.

Parents/carers have the right to encounter a caring environment in the Kindergarten, a place where their children can be safe and develop at their own pace. They are also entitled to expect excellence in the education it provides.

The teachers are happy to meet parent/carers to talk about their children's development. Please talk to your child's teacher to find out how they prefer to be contacted and when.

In the cloakroom of each classroom there is a notice board that contains a copy of the Improvement Plan and also the most recent Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate reports, as well as a box for suggestions and comments.

Parents/carers are welcome to bring suggestions, comments and ideas. These can be given to your child's teacher, put in the suggestion box or given to the Management Group via the School Office.

It is important to know that your support and cooperation can be called upon. Steiner education is a choice that will demand your active participation to ensure a satisfactory outcome. We would like to work with you to bring about this outcome.

With the choice of Steiner education you will be encouraged to minimise your children's exposure to television and computers, or even to omit it. You will also be expected to make space in your life to think about child development and how to best support it. You will be encouraged to establish rhythm in your home, with family meals and structured bedtime routines. Choosing outdoor activities and nutritious food will also optimise the beneficial effect of our pedagogy.

Together we can promote and be advocates of healthy child development in a time often negligent of, or hazardous to, children.

It is expected that parents/carers will help provide uninterrupted and punctual attendance at school. The rhythm of daily, weekly and seasonal cycles is important to the wellbeing of the child. Parents/carers are asked to arrange their holidays to coincide with the school holidays and avoid interruptions to their children's education whenever

possible. Parents/carers should inform the teacher of any changes in home life that may affect the child's behaviour, for example absences, serious illness in the family, the need for medication, or other such information. Parents/carers must notify the School of a change in their child's medical circumstances by completing or updating the medical/emergency contact information form available from the School Office.

Parents/Carers' Evenings

Parents/carers' evenings are usually held twice a year, in the Autumn and Summer Terms. During the Spring Term we offer individual consultations or home visits.

These evenings take the form of a talk/discussion on aspects of your child's education, with topics such as: creative play; eurythmy; movement and the development of the young child; puppetry and storytelling; or any other aspect of Steiner education.

Sometimes they also offer an opportunity to experience the education with hands-on activities like painting, baking and seasonal crafts.

These evenings provide an opportunity to talk to other parents/carers and the teacher. We strongly recommend that you attend them and we look forward to seeing you there.

We like to visit each child at home soon after they start. The home visits are designed to broaden the teacher's experience of your child. They are informal visits and do not require any special preparation. The teacher is looking to bridge the experiences of home and Kindergarten for the child.

The individual consultations offer parents/carers an opportunity to talk in more depth with your child's teacher. During these meetings, the teacher will talk to you about your child's development. This is an opportunity not only to ask questions and express views but for parents/carers and teachers to decide the best way they can work together in the interests of the child.

Age Groups

The children are admitted from three and a half years of age and welcomed into a group of children with a mixture of ages. Providing they are ready, children make the transition to Class 1 in the year after their sixth birthday.

Staff

Our teachers are all qualified Steiner/Waldorf Kindergarten teachers and are registered practitioners with the Scottish Social Services Council. Our teachers also have other specialist training. They continue their professional development through attendance at conferences and courses on early childhood and child development, as well at workshops for other subjects including first aid, health and safety, equal opportunities, child protection and additional needs.

The Kindergarten is a respected centre for early years education and we often welcome early years representative from institutions both at home and abroad.

We also have trainees who do their practical assignment with us from the Edinburgh Steiner Teacher Education Course and The London Waldorf Teacher Training Seminar which runs in both London and York.

Transition to Class 1

The children who stay in the Kindergarten until entry to Class 1 (after their sixth birthday) become familiar with the school's life and rhythms by participating in the wider school community. The opportunity to be present at festivals, performances, the Christmas Market, the Friday Market and other school events and commemorations all contribute to making this transition a joyful and anticipated experience.

In their last term at Kindergarten, the older children will form a 'transition group.' This group will meet once every week during the summer term and will work together to develop a strong social bond.

Transition to Primary School

Our parents/carers tend to leave their children in the Kindergarten for an additional year if sending them to mainstream education. We offer schools the opportunity to visit the Kindergarten and meet the child before they leave, making this transition easier for both sides. We also give the parents/carers a report to pass on to their child's new school if they wish. The report will help the child's teacher to know him or her better before they start school.

The Early Years

Education in the early years at the Edinburgh Steiner School has four separate components:

- Parent & Baby Group
- Parent & Child
- Playgroup
- Kindergarten

Child's Play is Essential

"If we watch a young child at play we can see that it is through constant sensory / physical interaction with the environment that she comes to know herself, the world and what flows between them.

"Movement and play stimulate healthy brain development.

"Children grasp emotional content through play."

Sharifa Oppenheimer, *Heaven on Earth*

Parent & Baby Group

The Parent & Baby Group runs one morning a week.

At this very young and tender stage of family life we see parents/carers and baby as a unit, and thrive to nourish them both in our weekly session.

In a quiet and homely environment we follow a gentle rhythm, where we start with a simple craft or other seasonal activity, share a wholesome home-made snack, and finish with time singing together or saying nursery rhymes. These activities, which involve both adults and babies, help to promote the bond between them.

When the babies have reached walking age they can move on to one of our Toddler Groups that run just next door, so that parents/carers and child can continue their journey and develop further in familiar surroundings.

Parent & Child Group

Our Parent & Child Group aims to provide a meeting place where children and adults can be happy playing, eating and doing crafts together. Each session is structured, following a certain rhythm.

Each session lasts for around two hours and begins with bread or biscuit baking or with a simple, seasonal, craft activity. There is a shared snack that the children help to prepare with great enthusiasm. All are then invited to participate in simple finger rhymes and circle games. A short walk around the School gardens may follow before returning for a story, songs and some fruit, rounding off with a goodbye song.

Grandparents, carers, parents, and friends are all welcome to accompany the children. We welcome up to nine toddlers at each session. For more information on the days and times, fees and places available, please telephone the School Office on 0131 337 3410.

Section 3: Kindergarten Life

Play

Play is at the heart of childhood. The Kindergarten is a haven for this where children can play imaginatively and creatively to freely develop within their own world.

In Kindergarten, there is a balance between free play and the sharing of activities. Through festivals and special occasions the experience of wonder is nurtured, as is the children's joy and enthusiasm for simple tasks.

Imitation and Example

Kindergarten life is busy. Children and teachers together are always engaged in meaningful work with daily tasks of preparing food, caring for the classroom and the garden, mending, crafting and cleaning. These movement-based activities offer real opportunities for the young child to learn skills and engage through imitation. In this way, the active or will aspect is exercised and the young child absorbs all that Kindergarten life offers.

As Lynne Oldfield in *Free to Learn* says: "the teacher becomes a source of knowledge and understanding of the world, of vocabulary, clear speech, control of movement, imagination, listening skills, phonological awareness—all through the clear and conscious example that he/she presents. These skills lay a solid foundation for literacy and numeracy at a later stage."

During the morning, we engage in purposeful movement worthy of imitation. Certain moments in the day of a Steiner Kindergarten regularly involve imitation and these moments will be repeated on a regular basis. There is thus a rhythmical, repetitive element in the Kindergarten experience.

Rhythm and Repetition

Rhythm and repetition, together with example and imitation, are the basis of early learning.

A rhythmical life full of a healthy breathing quality can be very therapeutic. It also creates strong habits, making instruction and direction unnecessary.

The seasons of the year are an important rhythmic element in the Kindergarten. All the activities—circle time, story, crafts, domestic work—will have a connection with what is happening outside in nature. The celebration of festivals is also an important rhythmical part of Kindergarten life.

A strong and lively rhythm helps give the children a deep sense of security.

“We are all born to a world of rhythms. These unconscious, cosmic rhythms can support us: the seven days of the week, the rising and setting of the sun, the phases of the moon, the changing of the seasons. We don’t have to do anything to create these rhythms. They are a gift to us as we work to create rhythms for our children. When we provide supporting rhythms at home and at school, we help our children connect in a stronger way with rhythms of nature.”

Barbara Patterson and Pamela Bradley *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge*

Example of the daily rhythm

8.45-9.20	daily activity, e.g. bread baking
9.20-10.10	creative play
10.15-10.45	tidy up, toilet, rest, circle time
11.05-11.30	snack time
11.40-12.30	outdoor play
12.30-12.55	preparation for story time/story time/goodbye

Example of the weekly rhythm

Monday

Painting: Children experience light radiating through the colour, the paint brush gliding on the page. The emphasis is in the experience and the doing rather than the result.

Tuesday

Bread baking: With this activity the children are involved in the preparation of their daily snack; they have an opportunity to model with the warm dough and they also discover process—the grinding of the grain, mixing and kneading. They also have a meaningful experience of science and technology (the grinders, measuring, weighing).

Wednesday

Cooking: In the winter, the children will be involved with soup making and in the summer, autumn and spring with the cooking of crumbles, fruit salads and pizzas.

Thursday

Beeswax crayon drawing/Eurythmy: The child can experience the more forming quality of drawing using crayons. Kindergarten Classes offer eurythmy once a week. Eurythmy is a form of expressive movement that helps with balance, co-ordination and concentration.

Friday

Gardening or cleaning: By participating through imitation of the adults sweeping, dusting, polishing, beating the cushions and scrubbing the stairs or the floors, the child comes to learn about caring for and respecting their environment.

During creative play time, there is also an opportunity to do crafts and handwork, all related to the seasons and the celebration of festivals.

Yearly Rhythm

A seasonal garden or story garden which changes through the year gives the children direct contact with seasonal changes and helps them to make a connection with the passing of time, through the year's cycle.

Seasonal activities like gardening, planting bulbs and harvesting herbs and vegetables for soup-making have a clear rhythmical and reassuringly repetitive quality, returning each year and creating much loved traditions.

The celebration of the festivals is an important part of Kindergarten life and parents/carers are warmly invited to fully participate in helping us foster a mood of wonder and reverence.

Rhythm has the potential to support good health and preserve the strength of children's life forces thus giving the children a healthy body in which to house their will forces.

Rhythm has an ordering potential that gradually guides the child's movement and contains his or her energy thus ordering impulsive behaviour.

Festivals

Festivals, together with the seasons, form the rhythm of the year. They are also an opportunity for young children to experience the embrace of the wider school, with whom they share many of the festivals. It gives a chance to experience the feel of belonging to the broader community in which they are cared for.

Festivals arise from very ancient times when seasons were significant in people's daily lives. The participation of parents/carers is essential to the successful creation of a festive mood.

“Celebrating the festivals at home can also delight your children. When they see you preparing for a certain holiday and taking out familiar decorations, children are filled with memories of the celebration from last year. These holiday celebrations give them confidence that wonderful, special times all come round again.”

Barbara Paterson and Pamela Bradley, *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge*

Edinburgh Steiner School is an an international and multicultural community and we often have children who commemorate other festivals related to different religions and cultures. We endeavour to include multicultural/faith festivals in our school life whenever possible. The festivals in Kindergarten celebrate the 'universal human' and we hope that all our families will connect with some elements of the festivals in their own way.

The yearly rhythm of the festivals and the way we commemorate them brings a wonderful opportunity for reverence. Care is taken to prepare the table, food, flowers and decorations for each of these special occasions.

The teachers and the children often clean the room, wash and iron veils and tablecloths, prepare flowers, verses and special stories. In this way, with careful work, there is an atmosphere of wonder that brings reverence.

The Cycle of the Year

Autumn is the time after harvest, a time of great abundance in nature. We try to bring some of this plentifulness and generosity to our autumn festivals.

In a temperate climate such as ours, most winter festivals celebrate the return of the light to the cycle of the year.

In spring, we celebrate the return of life. It is a time full of natural joy and delight. It is during the spring that we celebrate the festival of Easter.

In the summer time, our senses are bathed in light and we reach out into the world, losing ourselves in the light and warmth of the natural world.

Autumn Festivals

Michaelmas

St Michael is the Archangel of light who guides us on our way and gives us courage to tackle difficult tasks. At this time of the year, the children also have the picture of Mother Earth who receives the fruits of the earth and enfolds the sleeping seeds into her until new life awakens in the spring.

The children are invited to bring fruit and vegetables, conkers, beautiful leaves and seeds that they have found in nature as a present for Mother Earth. We will transform the offerings of fruits and vegetables into soups, crumbles, jams and jellies.

The festival colour is red and, as a feeling of unity, we ask the children to wear something red.

Lantern Festival, Martinmas

Martin was a soldier who, seeing a beggar one cold, dark night, cut his cloak in half and gave one half to the beggar. The legend tells of how Martin later had a dream in which he recognised the beggar as Christ. On the Earth, the warmth of the human heart and, in the heavens, the light of the stars and moon brighten the early evenings. We make lanterns which might be decorated with heavenly motifs of the sun, moon and stars.

We traditionally celebrate Martinmas in November with a lantern walk around the School grounds. This usually takes place in the late afternoon and we ask the children to dress warmly. A simple and safe lantern for younger siblings and parents/carers can be brought from home. The walk is usually followed by hot cocoa and biscuits. All are welcome.

Christmas Market

Although the Christmas Market in late November is not a festival, we have included it here because it is such a wonderful opportunity to experience the School's wider community.

The annual Christmas Market is a vital fund-raising and social event in the School calendar. Each year the parents/carers of Class 4 take on its overall organisation but the whole school community is involved in the production of goods, crafts and treats to sell in the market.

During the Christmas Market, which takes place on a Saturday before Advent, the whole school is transformed. There are many beautiful and unusual things for sale—dolls of all sizes, pottery, woodwork, dried flowers, baked goods, preserves, and much more.

Food is served in several cafes, craft activities are organised for the children and for the younger children there are puppet shows, music and a special grotto. It is a busy day which regularly raises money to be spent on vital resources which the School would not otherwise be able to afford.

The parent/guardian body is ever-changing, but skills for the making of traditional items for the Market are passed on and new ideas are incorporated as people come and go. Families new to the School are always welcome to join the groups making goods for the Market. It is a good way to meet other families with children in different Classes up and down the School.

Kindergarten parents/carers along with Class Convenors* organise the events happening in the Kindergarten building. In the past, events have included a 'gnome grotto', 'King Winter's Palace', 'Gingerbread Lady', storytelling, singalong and 'The Pocket Lady'. These are just a few examples of past activities. New ideas are always welcome!

* Every year, and in every class throughout the school, one or two parents/carers volunteer to act as Class Convenors. The Convenors form an important social link between the teacher and the families of the pupils in the Class. They are responsible for contacting and welcoming new parents and assisting with the organisation of Class activities such as fundraising.

Winter festivals

Advent

Advent is the period including the four Sundays before Christmas. Advent is a time of preparation and we celebrate its beginning with an Advent Garden. We prepare a spiral of greenery and dim the lights ready for the children to come with their families. There is soft music in the background and the mood is set with a story. Each child carries an apple with a candle in its centre and walks along the spiral pattern to a large candle in the centre, guided by an 'angel.' After lighting their own candle, each child walks out of the spiral placing the apple along the way. Gradually the whole garden glows more and more strongly and a mood of deep reverence is created. This gives a true picture of the spirit of Advent.

“Advent is a time of preparation; for children in particular, it is a time of joyful anticipation looking towards its fulfilment at Christmas.”

Brigitte Barz, *Festivals with Children*

With the experience of the Advent Garden and then through the daily lighting of an Advent wreath, the children feel the gradual strengthening of the light as Christmas approaches and the inner mood of joy and anticipation grows.

At home, the children can be involved in creating beautiful decorations for the festival to come or preparing little gifts for others. Special memories can arise for the family in the happy preparation for Christmas.

Meanwhile, in the Kindergarten, we busy ourselves with the making of gifts for families and friends.

St Nicholas

During Advent, we celebrate St Nicholas' Day. If we are lucky he may visit the Kindergarten in the night and leave something for the children! This festival may also be celebrated at home and many parents/carers leave nuts, a mandarin and some honey cakes inside their children's shoes to be discovered in the morning.

Christmas

The days around the winter solstice—now the time when we celebrate Christmas—had great importance in many pre-Christian religions. During this time, the victory of light over darkness was always celebrated, for example in the Egyptian, Teutonic, Jewish, Celtic, Roman and Mithraic religions.

Although the Christmas festival happens during the school holidays and is not celebrated in the Kindergarten, we do experience the nativity story with the children which is shared in verse, song and story. Each Class will share a Christmas celebration with families at the end of term.

It can be hard nowadays with so many materialistic pressures around this special time of year to connect with a picture of anticipation and deep reverence. We encourage parents/carers and children to search for what is not material in the Christmas festival. The making of gifts, lighting of candles, preparation and sharing of festive food, singing and reuniting with family and friends are all aspects of Christmas that will live in the children's memory and bring enduring spiritual rather than material qualities for this celebration in years to come.

"The image of light being born in the midst of outer darkness will nourish our child's soul for a lifetime."

Shariffa Oppenheimer, *Heaven on Earth*

Spring festivals

Having spent many winter months in the garden, watching the fruits and flowers disappear for their winter's rest, there is much excitement as the first signs of spring emerge and the garden 'wakes up'. We welcome back the snowdrops, crocus and daffodils after their long winter sleep and thank Mother Earth for caring for them through the winter. The spring term begins with Epiphany and the journey of the Three Kings, then moves to Candlemas and the warming and waking up of the earth, building up to the main festival of Easter.

Easter

The exact date of Easter is determined by the timing of the Spring Equinox and as such changes each year. The word Easter comes from the Anglo-Saxon name Eostrae, a pre-Christian goddess symbolising rebirth, fertility and Spring.

Preparation for Easter takes place through many varied activities that can include sowing seeds and planting bulbs, baking bread, decorating eggs, hearing of the Easter Hare who hides eggs for us, creating decorations for the Easter Garden or making a festival table.

Festivals, Family and "The ancient symbols of hare and egg, both known as signs of the return of life after Winter, carry today the Christian association with the Resurrection of Christ. When we exchange Easter eggs as gifts we are re-enacting an ancient wisdom—that which appears to be still and dead in fact contains new life."

Diana Carey and Judy Large, *Food*

Summer festivals

Whitsun

In the Kindergarten, Whitsun, as with all the other festivals, brings not only a spiritual quality of the festival but also a strong seasonal element. Whitsun happens at the end of spring and is the day of Pentecost. Whitsun—meaning ‘white sun’—comes from a tradition still practised in remote crofts and farms of painting/whitewashing buildings, spring cleaning and receiving new white clothes to wear to church. There is a freshness in the air, flowers are strong and vital and we see in nature all around us life and vigour.

We spring clean the room, wash veils and dolls’ clothes, beat the dust out of cushions and polish chairs and floors. We open doors and windows and receive the light and freshness of the season into our classrooms. We then prepare gifts of food to share with the other classes. White bread is baked, often in the shape of a daisy, the small flower that looks up to the heavens with gold in its centre. The symbol of the white dove is present in the festival and reminds us of the universal wish for world peace.

On the day of the festival we iron a white tablecloth and set the feast table. Often we celebrate the many languages that are shared in the Kindergarten and our festival verse can be told in as many as four or five different languages! This is a beautiful festival, fresh and bright, that celebrates the individual within their community. It truly is a festival for our times and we ask the children to wear something white and bring white and yellow flowers to really feel ourselves together in a group.

St John’s, Midsummer

This festival in the Kindergarten can take many forms. The element that remains the same each year is that we celebrate St John’s Day outside, surrounded by nature, in (we hope!) the warm sunshine of midsummer. Sometimes we have outside games in the garden or we sing summer songs around a bonfire. In the past, we have had outings with all our families, a barbecue on the beach or a walk. You will be informed before the festival how we intend to celebrate and we are always open to new suggestions.

Leaving Festival

To mark the end of the year and to say goodbye to the older children embarking on the next stage of their learning journey, we join with family and friends to celebrate the transitions ahead. The new Class One teacher is involved in the festival and welcomes the children as they leave Kindergarten and enter the Lower School. Children that leave to go to pastures new are also warmly acknowledged. All the children participate in the Leaving Festival and every parent/guardian is invited to attend this celebration on the last day of the summer term.

Birthdays

In the Kindergarten, birthdays are considered to be very special and are celebrated as individual festivals in their own right. Parents/carers are invited to share in the celebrations. Each teacher will celebrate the child's birthday in a different way, with four, five, and six year old celebrations taking a different form. Please ask your child's teacher how they would like to share this very special event with you and your child. Children are asked to bring in their favourite fruit to share with their friends on their celebration day.

Fourth Birthday: The celebration of a fourth birthday is always very simple so as not to overwhelm the child. Some of the teachers will bake the birthday cake with the children, others will ask the parents/carers to bring a simple cake with fruit instead of icing. A beautiful tablecloth is ironed and the table for the snack is laid carefully with special decorations. There will be candles and a birthday crown waiting for the child. A birthday verse will be sung or special story told.

Fifth Birthday: Each teacher prepares a special puppet play that tells of the child's journey to their family from the heights of Heaven. The parents/carers are invited to come to see the puppet play with their child and this often happens either at the beginning or end of the morning. Again, as with the fourth birthday celebration, the table is laid beautifully and there will be candles, flowers and a birthday crown awaiting the child.

Sixth Birthday: In the Kindergarten, we celebrate a six year old's birthday with the child actively participating in the birthday story. We invite parents/carers to share in this celebration of their child's first six years on the earth. In advance of the birthday, we ask parents/carers to give us a brief written description of the child's biography to date. Often details include major milestones and achievements, arrival of siblings, significant relationships or holidays enjoyed as a family. Sometimes there will be important events or changes in the child's life that need sensitively embracing and we work very closely with the parents/carers to give a warm and tangible picture of the child coming to the earth and flourishing surrounded by their loving family and helpers. As with previous birthdays, we lay a beautiful snack table and ask the parents/carers to bring fruit instead to be shared with their friends and teachers.

“The child's best-loved yearly festival is, of course, her own birthday. We can kindle the magic and wonder of the occasion by remembering the first moment we looked into this brand new face and caught a glimmering of her soul.”

Shariffa Oppenheimer, *Heaven on Earth*

Section 4: The Kindergarten Day

Bringing and Collecting Children

The Kindergarten morning begins at 8.40am and ends at 12.55pm.

The teachers meet first thing in the morning to say a verse together and it is only after that moment that we are available to welcome your child into their classroom. This is usually from 8.40am onwards. We ask that all children are accompanied by an adult to the cloakroom to change into their indoor shoes and hang up their coat.

Children can then be brought to the door of the Kindergarten room by the parent/guardian for a smooth transition into the room. We feel it is important to greet each child at the beginning of the day and also to say 'goodbye' carefully to each child before they transition back to their parent/guardian, carer or to our Afternoon Care sessions.

Children must be collected by a parent/guardian or a named person with parent/guardian consent (preferably written) at 12.55pm. In the case of a delay, please contact the School Office.

We ask parents/carers to wait outside their child's cloakroom and we will send them to you when they are ready in their coats and shoes. If children are staying for Afternoon Care, they will be greeted by the Afternoon Care staff at 12.55pm.

If you need to speak to your child's teacher at the beginning or end of the morning, please hand the teacher a note or wait until the last child has been collected after 12.55pm. Appointments can then be made or a brief discussion entered into if appropriate. Your child's teacher might also communicate a picture of the child's day at this time, especially around settling-in periods.

Punctuality

When children arrive late to Kindergarten, they can find settling in to the established group or activity difficult. The rhythm of the day is disrupted for all the children, thus integrating into the activities is more challenging. Parents/carers are therefore requested to make every effort to ensure their children arrive at Kindergarten on time. Challenges can also arise when parents/carers or carers are late to collect their children. It can be upsetting for young children to be left behind after their friends have already gone home or if there is uncertainty about who will collect them. The teachers can be creative and sensitive if delays are inevitable, but we really appreciate your consciousness with timekeeping.

Before and after Kindergarten, when parents/carers are still present, children remain the responsibility of their parents/carers.

Dress Code

We are part of the wider school and ask you to be aware of some general rules that apply to all pupils, including the Kindergarten.

Pictures, cartoons and slogans on clothing are not allowed. Patterns are permissible. We ask parents/carers at all times to dress their children in practical warm clothes that are appropriate to the seasons and to the wear and tear of Kindergarten life. Wherever possible, please dress your children in natural fibres. Warm and waterproof coats and wellington boots and supportive shoes are necessary for outdoor work and play.

As for all children in the Lower School, jewellery and makeup is not permitted, including nail varnish. Stud earrings may be worn if your child has pierced ears.

We recommend that children wear hats both in winter and summer and that sturdy and effective waterproof coats and trousers remain in the Kindergarten as we enjoy the garden in all weather. Gloves are important in the winter as is a warm hat, and a sunhat essential in the summer. Please bring a spare set of clothes and underwear, including socks, to stay in your child's bag at Kindergarten.

We ask that all clothes and shoes be clearly marked with your child's name.

What to Bring to Kindergarten

All year:

- Slippers, plimsoles or soft indoor shoes (please make sure the soles have a good grip)
- Waterproof clothing
- Wellington boots
- Warm cardigan or sweater
- Spare set of clothes and underwear

Winter:

- Warm outdoor clothes
- Warm hat
- Pair of waterproof gloves

Summer:

- Sunhat
- Sunscreen (labelled with your child's name)

Food

We endeavour to supply food which is wholesome and nutritious every day. We bake organic wholemeal bread and serve it with honey or sunflower spread, cook organic brown rice, make soup or fruit crumbles on cooking day with vegetables and fruit brought by the children from their homes. Sugar is kept at an absolute minimum.

It is very nice when the children bring a vegetable or a piece of fruit to share with their friends at snack time and it can help create a tangible bridge between home and Kindergarten life for the young child.

If your child has special dietary needs, please inform the teacher. If your child has any food allergies please let the teacher know in writing. The school has a policy and protocol on serious food allergies which can be found on the school website (www.edinburghsteinerschool.org.uk) or picked up from the School Office. Our Kindergarten operates a nut free environment.

Toys

Toys from home should not be brought to Kindergarten without the permission of the teacher. We endeavour to provide an environment that allows free imagination to develop and we consider some toys to be more supportive of this than others. All the play materials in the Kindergarten are consciously selected by the teacher for their 'open-ended' possibilities. We have found that some special toys from home can serve to dismantle creative play and disturb the flow of social interaction within group play. Home toys are often very precious and they can easily be left behind and lost at kindergarten which causes distress to the child. Please leave home toys at home!

New Parents/Carers and settling in new Children

In our Kindergarten, parents/carers are welcome to stay within the Kindergarten setting for a settling in period. This can be anything from one hour to a few days, depending on the needs of the child. This is an important transition for the child and needs to be managed carefully. Please consult directly with your child's teacher prior to the agreed start date.

Afternoon Care

The School offers Afternoon Care for the children who need to stay later than 12.55pm. If new parents/carers would like to make use of these afternoon sessions, we ask that they enroll their children into Afternoon Care only when they are settled into their morning routine in Kindergarten.

Places are limited so this facility must be booked in advance and is charged separately.

Afternoon Care begins with time in the garden followed by a relaxed packed lunch from home, tidying up, a restful activity or story and outdoor play.

Pick-up time from Afternoon Care is flexible, with varying charges depending on how long your child stays. Please contact the School Office for further details and a booking form.

Class Convenors

Each Class will choose one or two parents/carers to be the Class Convenors. Their job is to liaise between parents/carers and teachers, give support to new families and help the teacher when required. Convenors might also organise social events for the class and be involved in fund-raising, including the Christmas Market.

Parents' Library

Our Kindergarten parents operate a library which is held at pick up time on selected days. The mobile library provides books for both children and their parents to borrow and enjoy. Please ask your child's teacher for more information and the latest times.

Illness

Illnesses in young children can manifest, escalate and pass quickly, over the course of a few hours. If a child is ill then the best place for them is always at home. Please do not bring your child to Kindergarten if they appear or are feeling unwell. It is essential to inform the teacher if your child has been unwell. The teachers are responsible for all the children and their own health and we ask you to respect this.

Your child is not allowed to attend school if they are carrying a contagious infection/illness such as rubella, chickenpox, impetigo, headlice, sickness or diarrhoea. Where appropriate, please seek advice from your doctor to be sure that your child is no longer contagious before bringing him or her back to the Kindergarten.

Allow 36 hours to pass after a high temperature, or 48 hours after diarrhoea or vomiting, before coming back to Kindergarten. If your child has a rash or spots, please seek medical advice before coming back to Kindergarten. If in doubt, please check with the teacher.

If your child has headlice, please inform the teacher as soon as possible and keep the child at home until all the lice and eggs have been removed.

Accidents

Minor accidents are dealt with in the Kindergarten and homeopathic remedies may be given with the permission of the parents/carers. All accidents and incidents are recorded in a book and the parents/carers are informed and asked to sign the entry in the Accident Book. All Kindergarten teachers are trained first-aiders and the school has many first-aiders on site. In the case of emergency, you will be informed immediately and advised whether you are required to attend to your child at school or elsewhere. Please make sure that you update the school if your emergency contact number or mobile telephone number changes.

Section 5: Admission Policies and Procedures

Trial Periods

At the initial meeting, it is clearly stated that every child is on a term's Trial Period. It is also made clear that communication between the parents/carers and teacher is vital.

If, either before or during the trial period, it becomes clear that the child has additional social, emotional, physical or educational requirements, parents/carers are told that they will receive a letter outlining the school's conditions of acceptance. When necessary, it is stated that the child's place in the setting will be under continual review. If the school is not able to fully meet the child's needs then they may be asked to leave before the Trial Period has ended. It is noted, when appropriate, that should the child pass the Trial Period, it is not automatic that he or she will continue on to Class 1. In such cases, regular contact with the parents/carers will occur, keeping them informed of the progress of their child.

If the Kindergarten teacher has concerns about a child's needs during (and after) the Trial Period then it is in the best interests of the child that these are addressed quickly. The following procedure will therefore be followed:

1. Concerns are raised at the Kindergarten teachers' meeting so that the child's needs may be reviewed in depth and the opinion of colleagues sought.
2. Concerns about the child and how the parents/carers can best support the teacher, are then shared with the parents/carers.
3. If it is felt that support by the parents/carers has not been satisfactory; or if we cannot meet the child's specific needs, College will be informed.
4. After the meeting, a letter will be sent outlining the points raised. College will be informed of the outcome and a final decision will be made about whether the school can provide the best support for the child.

Admission to Class 1

- Once a week, during the summer term the oldest children in Kindergarten will attend a separate group called the Transition Group, lead by one of the Kindergarten teachers. During their time together, the Transition Group children will create a social bond and, as much as possible, prepare for the next stage in their school life.
- All children in the Transition Group will see the Learning Support Teacher who will assess their development and readiness for Class One.
- Admission to Class One will depend on the child's readiness and developmental stage. Each admission will be considered individually.

Leave of Absence

If your child needs to miss a day or part of a day at school for some event which cannot be arranged outside school hours, a written note should be sent in advance to the teacher and the School Office. If your child needs to be off school for more than a day for any reason other than health or bereavement, a leave of absence must be obtained in writing from the College of Teachers at least two weeks prior to the date for which it is requested.

Leaving Notice

Following a successful Trial Period, parents/carers are required to give one full terms notice if they wish to withdraw their child from Kindergarten. The notice should be addressed to the School Bursar. If such notice is not given then the fees for the term following the date of withdrawal will still be payable. Please note that if a child is withdrawn during a term, the fees for that term is still due.

Communication

At the beginning of each term, an events sheet listing the planned activities for the term is sent to all parents/carers. This includes dates for parents/carers' evenings.

The school newsletter—the Tuesday Notice—is distributed during term time via email or a paper copy (if requested) via the youngest child in each family. In the Tuesday Notice, you will find details of school events and community life. You may contact the School Office to submit items for the Tuesday Notice before 10.30am on the previous Friday.

Direct communication between parents/carers and the teacher is very important for developing a supportive partnership around each child and maintaining the ethos of the Kindergarten. Should you have any concerns about your child, you are welcome and encouraged to speak with the teacher, either by telephone or in person. You can also discuss your concerns with the Class Convenor(s).

If your concern goes beyond the realm of the Kindergarten teacher/convenor, or you are not able to raise the matter with them, you should then contact a member of the school's Management Group. You can do this in writing, meeting directly, or leave a letter via an anonymous box at the entrance to Woodlands. Alternatively you may request a College appointment at which two College members are usually present.

Appointments

Clear communication between parents/carers and the teacher is essential in developing a supportive partnership around each child. The teachers are always happy to answer questions, discuss concerns or receive suggestions about the children's experience of Kindergarten. Teachers can be telephoned at home in the evening at certain times. Please ask your teacher for her availability. Afternoon appointments can also be scheduled. We try to avoid lengthy communication at drop off time as the teacher is there for the children and conversation with parents/carers is a distraction for both the children and the teacher. If you have something urgent to share with the teacher, such as illness or if your child is going home with another person, a quick word or a written note is sufficient.

Financial Matters

The Bursar should be contacted about all financial matters. The School Office is open from 8.15am to 4.30pm during term time. For additional enquiries around funding, please make an appointment with the School Office as indicated.

Change of Address

Please ensure that the School Office has current contact information for parents/carers and other carers responsible for your child. We require home, work and emergency contact telephone numbers. A form is available for this purpose.

Parents/Carers Responsibility

The School needs to be aware of changes in the status between parents/carers and who is responsible on a day-to-day basis for the children registered in the school. We therefore ask that you inform the teacher of any changes in the home situation of the child.

Attendance and Absence

Please contact the School Office (0131 337 3410) if your child is unable to attend Kindergarten or if you will be late for any reason. You can leave a message on the answer phone before school hours.

Child Protection

The school's policies on child protection follow the guidelines issued by the City of Edinburgh Council and those published by SCIS (Scottish Council for Independent Schools). These guidelines are available and may be viewed in the School Office, along with other school policies.

The school has a child protection co-ordinator and deputies and they advise staff and those with concerns on appropriate courses of action. Parents/carers with a concern for

the welfare of any pupil can contact any member of staff about the concern. It is important to arrange an appointment rather than trying to discuss the matter on the telephone or via email.

All allegations brought to the school's attention are taken seriously and dealt with confidentially.

Confidentiality Policy

The policy of the school is to work in partnership with parents/carers in order to promote the welfare of the children. The school aims to build up relationships of trust with the children. Children and parents/carers should feel able to raise with the school any concerns about safety and welfare in the knowledge that these will be dealt with sensitively.

Equal Opportunities Statement

The Edinburgh Steiner Kindergarten recognises and has regard for the child's religious background, ethnic origins, and cultural and linguistic background, so that each child is valued as an individual without racial or gender prejudice.

Further Reading

The School website at www.edinburghsteinerschool.org.uk offers very useful information and links to other sites about Steiner Education.

Early Years Education

The Education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy by Steiner, R. & Adams, G. and M. (translators) 1909 (Rudolf Steiner Press)

Lifeways: Working with family questions, a parents' anthology by Davy, G. & Voors, B. 1983 (Hawthorn Press)

Steiner Education in theory and practice by Childs, G. 1991 (Floris Books)

Free to Learn: Introducing Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education by Oldfield, L. 2001 (Hawthorn Press, Stroud)

The Well Balanced Child: Movement and early learning by Goddard, S. & Rowling, M. 2004 (Hawthorn Press, Stroud)

Toxic Childhood: How the modern world is damaging our children and what we can do about it by Palmer, S. 2007 (Orion, London)

You are your Child's First Teacher by Baldwin, R. 1989 (Celestial Arts, Berkeley Calif.)

Festivals, Family and Food by Carey, D. & Large, J. 2001 (Hawthorn Press, Bath)

All Year Round by Druitt, A., Fynes, C. & Rowling, M. 1995 (Hawthorn Press, Gloucester)

Beyond the Rainbow Bridge by Patterson, B. & Bradley, P. & Riordan J. 2000 (Perfect Paperback)

Heaven on Earth: A Handbook for Parents of Young Children by Oppenheimer, S. & Gross, S. 2006 (Steiner Books)

Toxic Childhood: How The Modern World Is Damaging Our Children And What We Can Do About It by Palmer, S. 2006 (Orion Books)

Work and Play in Early Childhood by Jaffke, F. 1997 (Floris Books)

Stockists

Provided they are in print these and other books can be bought or ordered from

- The Mulberry Bush, 77 Morningside Road, Edinburgh EH10 4AY (0131 447 5145)
- The Parents' Library provides an additional resource for further reading