



April 4th 2020

Dear Parents,

Many of you may not know of the existence of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF). We are the umbrella body and UK representative of Steiner education in the UK, of which all Steiner schools are members. The organisation recently underwent a re-structure following the retirement of Kevin and Jane Avison. The new team is dedicated to helping schools grow and develop with improved governance, clarity of leadership and support for the continuing professional development of teachers whilst remaining focussed on the essential and precious qualities of Steiner Waldorf education. Our vision is for Steiner education to become an important voice in the wider UK educational debate, demonstrating the significance and impact of our principles and approach.

We wanted to introduce ourselves to you and we have attached some information about each of us. We also wanted to let you know how the community of Steiner Waldorf schools and SWSF have been working together to find the best way to approach and manage the situation we are facing with the coronavirus and the Government lockdown.

Whilst it has been a challenge for everyone to face this sudden hurdle with its immense uncertainty it has been a joy to work with the schools, who have made incredible efforts to adapt, change and take on new ways of thinking – all focused on how best to serve your children and you, their parents. We know you will already be aware of the immense dedication of your children's teachers but we too have been moved and inspired by their focus and willingness to take on new thinking and challenges. It has been transformational.

Since the shut-down SWSF has been running webinars bringing teachers, administrators and school leaders together to discuss, share information and work out how best to respond. We have been joined by senior pedagogues including those already with experience from our Asian schools on how best to respond. We have had lawyers and financial experts to help us work out the logistics. The work has covered all and everything from what to provide children in the way of educational and pastoral support to how we ensure the schools remain solvent.

It has been truly impressive to see teachers get to grips with Zoom meetings, Google Classrooms and the like. We will even be running the annual Easter Conference for Teachers on-line which is possibly a world first for Steiner Waldorf educators!

However, we know you are facing huge challenges at home. This has been of great concern to teachers and the focus of much discussion in our Zoom meetings. We will be able to send next week guidance to you from Trevor Mephram, pedagogical advisor to the SWSF Executive Group, who has brought together the collective thinking of the teachers.

In the end however, the defining challenge at this time may be the survival of our schools and ensuring that, when the crisis is over, all our children have a Steiner Waldorf school to which they can return. Already our schools seek to charge as little as possible – often considerably less than half the average mainstream private school. All staff are paid significantly lower than in other



schools and much work is done on a voluntary basis. We know many of you are already facing hardship at this time and school leaders, trustees and bursars are doing all they can to ensure the finances of the schools remain intact. But we do need to appeal to you to recognise that your school is a precious community and ask that you do pay your fees where you possibly can, and where you genuinely cannot that you let schools know as soon as you are able.

Schools are making difficult but necessary decisions to furlough staff so that they can take full advantage of the financial support provided by Government however, at this time, the detail of the scheme is very uncertain. As yet there is no mechanism for applying for the scheme, re-imbursment is likely to take many months and currently it is due to continue only to 31st May. In the meantime staff wages and essential bills must still be paid. Where schools have loans or a mortgage they will seek to benefit from payment holidays and any other support from Government **but cash flow is likely to be a major challenge for all of our schools**. If therefore you are able to pay fees upfront, including for the Autumn term 2020 and beyond please consider doing so. If you could make a donation or you have family – possibly grandparents – who could donate, please ask them and ask the school to gift aid your donation. If you genuinely cannot pay your full fees consider possibly paying half, or at least some of them now and the remainder when you are in a better financial position after the crisis is over.

If the furlough scheme works to provide schools with sufficient sums to meet running costs, schools will likely provide a re-imbursment equal to a discount but it is unlikely this will be known until later in the year. We know that schools do want to give families discounts but have been advised that with so much uncertainty it would be unwise to do so until the picture is clear - and that may not be until the Autumn term. We ask that you are patient with this.

Never before has it been more important to pull together, to work as one community and to support each other. We will, of course, come through this challenge but we want there still to be schools to return to when the crisis is over and schools can finally re-open.

We wish you well over the coming months, particularly that you remain well and safe above all else. We hope also that you can enjoy the Easter break. We will write again with news at the start of the summer term.

With warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fran Russell'.

Fran Russell

Executive Director, SWSF

Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland

Office: SWSF, 35 Park Rd, Marylebone, London NW1 6XT

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