

EARLY YEARS NEWSLETTER

Kindergarten Gate

Upper School student Will Gearing, supported by our metalwork teacher Mr Lindsay, is in the process of designing and creating a centrepiece using copper and iron for either side of our main Kindergarten gate. We are excited about how it will look. All being well, work should start at the beginning of the summer term.

Dates for you diary

April

Monday 28th - Term restarts

May

Saturday 10th - Early Years Open Morning

June

Tuesday 17th - Kindergarten Parents evening 8pm

Friday 20th - Kindergarten Midsummer/St John's Festival

Congratulations

In Bernadette's kindergarten:

Glen and Lotte Ward on the birth of their daughter Amelia

In Marian's Kindergarten:

Katherine & Mike Small on the birth of their daughter Delphi Anja

Afternoon Club changes

After Easter Mark and Bernadette Afternoon club days will swap, so Bernadette will lead the Tuesday group and Mark the Wednesday group.

ABSENTEEISM -leave of absence from school for Kindergarten Children: It is a legal requirement that all children of compulsory school age (which is age 5 and above) attend school, or at least that parents ensure that they receive an efficient education. In our Kindergartens we also have much younger children of course. It is possible to apply for a leave of absence for particular family circumstances such as a grandparent's 80th birthday, a wedding, funeral or other family event that involves close family members. Holidays during term time are not permitted. In all cases, and for all ages, the absence must be authorised by the school. The way to apply for this is to email: first.aid@michaelhall.co.uk your request with 1. Details of the class your child is in 2. The reason for the request 3. The relevant dates.

This needs to be done well in advance, so the all the relevant teachers can be consulted before the decision is made as to whether or not it will be authorised. We would like to stress that irrespective of the law, taking a child out of the Kindergarten is rarely helpful. Our educational approach means that a child cannot 'catch-up' as may be the case elsewhere. The rhythm and the work in the Kindergarten is such that a break in attendance undoes some of the work which is being done and affects not only your child but also the group as a whole. We thank you for bearing these things in mind when planning any events during term-time.

Kindergarten Teachers

EASTER HARE

"May we here make a plea for the reinstatement of the Easter Hare? He is fast becoming an endangered species, owing to the increasing popularity of the 'Easter Bunny'. The rabbit, with its established communal life and reputation for timidity, presents a very different picture from that of the hare. The hare is a loner, creating the most transient of abodes. He is said to be a bold and courageous creature, and his upright stance is characteristic. His long ears suggest a wide and intelligent interest in the world, and in legend and folklore he is invested with the virtue of self-sacrifice. Because of these attributes it is he, and not the 'bunny' who makes a more suitable 'Messenger' who roams the earth to bring to those who actively seek it, the sign of new life in an Easter egg."

Extract from All Year Round

by Ann Druitt, Christine Fynes-Clinton, Marije Rowling.

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Overheard in Kindergarten. A boy asked "what can I be?" "You can be a carpenter," replied his teacher, the child then turned to his friend and said " what does a carpenter do?" Both paused for a few moments in thought then the other boy announced " He lays carpets of course" and off they went to play.



It doesn't seem that long ago when the daily downpour was common place. We had to learn to love the wet and the mud, as to struggle against it was frustrating and futile. The children of course didn't mind, for them it just created a whole host of new play opportunities to explore and experience.

The kestrels have returned and are nesting once again in the chestnut tree, their daily shrieking calls can be heard from afar. The beautiful wildlife hedge in front of the bread oven, recently laid by Matthew (maintenance dept.) is in bud and provides a welcoming entrance to the once overgrown space. Babies are been born too in our community and warmest wishes and congratulations go out to our colleague Lorna and partner Will on the birth of their son Bertie.



The spring term is always a lovely time in the Kindergarten. It is the midpoint in the year and the groups are all nicely balanced. The youngest children have settled in. The older children are established in their role as being models and examples for the younger children and are not yet bouncing off the walls in anticipation for class one as happens sometimes by the end of the summer term!

As winter turns to spring we begin to feel the subtle, barely perceptible change around the first week of February (Candlemas). In ancient times folklore recognised that this particular week was the time when the sap literally begins to rise. This rising of the sap is often tangible to witness in the children's play during that week because children under the age of seven are still so very connected to nature's forces. It is as if they are waking up from a long winter's sleep, and I have often heard it said by teachers that their groups were particularly loud/ boisterous during that week! I see it every year in my kindergarten without fail. On our nature tables sits Mother Earth and all her little root children slowly beginning to wake up also.

The growth forces that come with this fresh spring energy are beginning to take hold and we see the first signs of new life in the snowdrops and crocuses appearing. Our hearts quicken in the knowledge that warm spring days are on their way.

As we move on through March and April this spring awakening is the essence of our Easter festivals in the kindergarten. The way in which it is celebrated is symbolised through recognising and celebrating all this new life. Nature thus depicts the image of the resurrection, the true Easter festival. Children enter happily into the new life that is all around them and the colours and warmth that it brings. Often teachers will bring the story of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly at this time of year to depict the changing image of nature and this image of the resurrection. Planting seeds and watching them grow in mini Easter gardens for the table is another way of bringing this image of new life into the home. By honouring nature in this way at this time we can also say that we are meeting multiculturalism in our children in its truest form and accessing a language that every child can understand without using any words.



A caterpillar climbed to the top of a tree.

"I think I'll take a nap" said he.

So- under a leaf he began to creep,

To spin his cocoon, and he fell asleep.

All winter he slept in his cocoon bed

Till spring came along one day and said,

"Wake up, wake up, little sleepyhead.

"Wake up it's time to get out of bed".

So- he opened his eyes that sunshiny day.



Easter is not a fixed festival, it changes every year as it is connected to a particular constellation of stars and always falls on the first Sunday after the full moon after the spring equinox. Unlike Christmas which is fixed, and is about physical birth, and thus far more connected to the earthly realm. Easter's movable date therefore has literally to remind us (humanity) of an event so significant that it is indeed bound up with evolving beyond earthly conditions to spiritual unity and at-one-ness. Of course we don't tell the children this!

Saskia Harding



Bernadette with some of the teachers and assistants

A Visit to China

If someone had told me that I would be one day taking a trip to China, I would not have believed it, but there I was during the half term break visiting the small Lezhi Steiner school on the outskirts of Beijing, with my husband Simon Gillman, MH gardening teacher. I spent 5 days in 3 kindergartens and in spite of the language barrier I found the Kindergarten teachers and helpers friendly and open. In fact I felt a real closeness to them. The children too were equally friendly and interested in me. I was very taken by the delightful songs and finger games that were part of the daily routine.

I was very glad to be able to give them some support and good tips from my experience as a kindergarten teacher here at Michael Hall. I also felt privileged to

glean some of their good practices. I was impressed to observe how the kindergarten children readily helped in the various domestic chores but quite surprised that they didn't help with the food preparation, for that they had one member of staff spending the whole morning preparing the most delicious and nutritious meals.

Another surprise for me was whilst on the walks away from the kindergarten building in the neighbouring residential area, there wasn't the level of supervision that we have here in England; children could disappear for a while away from the teacher, without anyone panicking. Quite refreshing!

Something that the Chinese Kindergarten's share with the continental ones were the little beds where the children would have their one to two hours afternoon nap. .

Children in China go to bed later, as they spend time with their working parents at night, between 6 – 8pm.

Steiner education is flourishing and spreading fast in China. Within the last 7 years 300 kindergartens have been established, parents in China have real concerns about the state education their children are receiving and are craving help in their parenting. It certainly is more complicated with the 'one child policy'. As I was preparing for this trip a new family was admitted to my kindergarten and they have just arrived from Beijing.

I am very happy to welcome Yong and Yiyong and their daughter Claire in to our school and I wish them well in their journey with us.

My links with the kindergarten are growing and at Easter, I will be going again to visit the teachers and the children of Lezhi Steiner school, which I'm very much looking forward too.

Bernadette Gauvin

And to India

Over the Christmas holidays I had a wonderful opportunity to travel to India where I taught at a conference on "Humanising Education". The participants were teachers and parents from traditional and Waldorf schools from across India.

On the first day of the conference in Navi Mumbai I gave a talk on the principals of Waldorf education which was received very well and after that I held three workshops a day for five days on the following themes:

1. Imitation, repetition, rhythm
2. Developmental stages in the first seven years
3. Puppetry.

At the end of the conference I travelled to Hyderabad where I repeated the five day course again for another set of participants of a conference. At the closing ceremony everybody did a little presentation and we performed a ring-time



on the stage with the twelve students who attended my workshops.

This experience was not only very exciting but good fun as well - I have never done anything like this before. All the participants were very warm hearted people who were extremely keen to hear about all the aspects we touched on and were very active, quick and intuitive learners.

I also met some interesting colleagues from other parts of the world who ran different workshops about other subjects of the Waldorf curriculum. It was fascinating to observe that within each of these curriculum groups, i.e., lower school and such like, that they also included the same elements as the kindergarten and how one stage of the curriculum builds on the other.

On my last day I visited Inodai Waldorf School, a new initiative in Mumbai, where I did some teaching observations followed by a discussion with the teachers.

I am very grateful to the people who made this experience possible, and I am happy I was able to contribute to their work in striving to deepen their insights into Steiner education.

Zsuzsa Baker

IASWECE The International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education

The association was originally founded by Dr. Helmut von Kuegelgen and a circle of Waldorf kindergarten educators in 1969 in Stuttgart, Germany as the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens. For over 35 years, it served as the association for both the Waldorf kindergartens in Germany and the Waldorf kindergarten movement worldwide, fostering the development of Waldorf/Steiner kindergartens and training centres in Europe, North and South America, Australia, Africa, and Asia. The Association also hosted international conferences for Waldorf educators and others concerned about the healthy development of the child, published resources and newsletters, and formed collaborative working groups around burning issues relating to the care and education of the child from birth to school entrance age.

As Waldorf early childhood education established itself broadly throughout the world, these growing international activities required their own independent organisation, and in October 2005, the new International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) was founded at a meeting of the "Kuratorium" of the original Kindergarten Association held in Chatou, France. The original association, known now as the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens- Germany, is one of twenty-one founding member associations of the new association. IASWECE was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in January, 2006 in Stockholm, Sweden.

Resilient parent, a parent's reflections.

When we heard the talk by Dr Gruenewald was going to be on resiliency in parenthood, my husband and I knew we had to go. We had to have front row spots on how we could have an ounce more energy and patience in our lives. We couldn't wait to hear a few easy steps to be better parents, to be more tolerant and compassionate people by doing something challenging and yet simple with our children. You know, like wear more pink or eat more root vegetables. Of course, like all things we want to change, it starts from within and as we sat there with a room full of overtired parents who were all up past their own bedtimes, we were taken through our own journey. Dr Gruenewald was able to show us the power of thought, breath and thankfulness and how all these things led to resiliency. With simple steps that weren't too daunting we could choose to invest in the way we see the world, and through that resiliency could be fostered.

Rachel Ford Blanchard

At Michael Hall we were very privileged to have two workshops led by Dr Gruenewald, the proceeds (£70) of which he has donated to IASWECE. For those of you who missed them and would like to find out more about resiliency, Peter hosts regular workshops in London entitled Adaptive Resilience, there he introduces highly effective and practical techniques that help you to, amongst many things, develop resiliency and reduce the negative impact of stress. If you would like to find out when the next workshop is taking place you can email:

epi@londonintegratedhealth.co.uk for more information

Looking after Lorna's Kindergarten.

I stepped into Lorna's shoes at a time of expectancy.. waiting for babies to be born, for spring to come, for wobbly teeth to finally fall out. And so we; the children, their parents and myself all began to wait anew together.

Two lovely babies have been born. A girl and a boy, spring is in the air, teeth have fallen out (and will go on doing so). Our days are busy, there is plenty of work to be done in our garden, and the children have so many things to show me. The rhythm of the kindergarten life carries us all on through, whether we are waiting, arriving or departing. We have all picked up the threads already well woven by Lorna and we continue to weave together. Who knows what patterns may emerge?

Marian Killick