



European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

To: DG Education and Culture of the European Commission

Forest Row, 14th of December 2007

Subject: Response from the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) with regard to the paper entitled 'Commission Staff Working Paper Schools for the 21st Century', Brussels, 11.07.07, SEC (2007)1009, issued by DG Education and Culture of the European Commission.

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The European Council For Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) comprises 22 national Waldorf Associations, representing 650 schools in Europe.
Herewith our response to the 8 questions:

Q1: Schools could be organised on a more social model in which parents and teachers hold more responsibility for school policies and direction. Parenting is an important influence on a child's well-being and parents need support in dealing with the growing complexity of nurturing and bringing up a child. Schools should provide lifelong learning for all the community and extend the use of their facilities outside classroom hours.

Q2: The present emphasis on cognitive ability and measurable outcomes is detrimental to the full well-being of children. There needs to be much more attention paid to values, self-actualisation, citizenship, social and emotional learning, and mental and physical health. School starting age should either be set at a minimum of 6 years of age, when children are really ready to embark on formal learning. There is in enough research of child-development to justify this. Without a healthy foundation of good quality early childhood for all children, schools will struggle with the consequences. Early childhood learning should be given more importance and its practice aligned with childhood experience, not adult or economic expectations. The transition to formal learning should be a gradual one.

Q3: By encouraging creativity and innovative pathways of formal and informal learning. Giving

children the respect they deserve and thereby increasing their self- confidence. The arts play a central role here and can underlie a healthy acquisition of knowledge, an ability to be flexible and an appreciation of social interaction. The concept of multiple intelligences, however defined, should be taken seriously.

Q4: Teachers should be free from over-prescriptive curricula and be able to use their professional expertise in working with children as individuals in their own right. Testing regimes and the fear of failure they produce should be minimized and be used for diagnostic purposes, not competitive ones. Formative assessment rather than summative assessment should be the usual practice. History and Geography should not be considered to be subsidiary subjects but be taught in an age-appropriate way that captures the child's imagination and extends their empathetic competencies, enabling them to bridge the boundaries of ethnicity, nation and culture. Reliance on preset and politically prescribed curricula deadens enthusiasm for both teacher and child, leading to disinterest and disaffection. Lessons have to be relevant, lively and meaningful.

Q5: Recognition of pluralism and diversity in education systems rather than a state monopoly of content and method. The state's rightful role is to ensure equity of provision for a good quality education for all children and that each child's potentialities are met. Schools should be free to find their own ethos and way of ensuring the child's well-being and development in all aspects. Schools should have a wide social and cultural mix so understanding, tolerance and interest in others is actually practiced, rather than just preached. A cohesive society begins when we are young. The four pillars of education (Learning: The Treasure Within. UNESCO Publishing. 1996) need to be seriously taken into consideration as a pointer to future practice in Europe and implemented.

Q6: By reflecting these virtues in school governance and organisation. Children learn from example and how the adults conduct themselves also has pedagogical implications. It is not only classroom activities that count. Children should become more responsible for their own learning as they grow older and should be more heard in the school community. Their insights need to be respected and built upon.

Q7. Teacher education and continual professional development should be more experiential than just theoretical. Teachers should be encouraged to work as a team and to stay in the classroom rather than seeking promotion that could take them away from direct contact with the children. Inspiration to try new ways should be forthcoming and ongoing research in child-development a central consideration in the school community. Teachers' status needs to be improved and job satisfaction enhanced. Teaching is a learning profession and this requires investment and opportunity. School buildings should aesthetically mirror the importance set on children and their education in the planning and provision of their facilities.

Q8: By opening up their horizons and looking beyond the school gates. Taking the children into the world itself through practical activities and encouraging educators to broaden their own interests. Children and teachers need to be approached as individuals with their own capacities and potential for informed choice, democratic values and personal development.

Christopher Clouder on behalf of ECSWE