

The “early learning goals and educational programmes” of the EYFS framework requirements: areas of conflict with the Steiner system

Obvious areas of conflict

Below are listed (in blue) the areas where it is obvious that the requirements of the EYFS put it in direct opposition to the Steiner Waldorf early years approach. All wording is taken directly from the EYFS framework document.

Communication, Language and Literacy

Educational programme

2.9 Children’s learning and competence in ... beginning to read and write must be supported and extended. They must be provided with opportunity and encouragement to use their skills¹ in a range of situations and for a range of purposes, and be supported in developing the confidence and disposition to do so.

Early learning goals

2.10 By the end of the EYFS, children should:

- Enjoy... using... written... language, and readily turn to it in their play and learning.
- Hear and say sounds in words in the order in which they occur.
- Link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet.
- Use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words.
- Explore and experiment with... texts
- Read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently.
- Know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom.
- Show an understanding of... how information can be found in non-fiction texts to answer questions about where, who, why and how

¹ No problem where this refers to other skills, but where it refers to reading and writing this is in conflict with the Steiner Early Years philosophy

- Attempt writing for different purposes, using features of different forms such as lists, stories and instructions
- Write their own names and other things such as labels and captions, and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation
- Use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy

Educational programme

2.11 Children must be supported in developing their understanding of... Numeracy² in a broad range of contexts in which they can explore, enjoy, learn, practise and talk about their developing understanding. They must be provided with opportunities to practise and extend their skills in these areas and to gain confidence and competence in their use.

Early learning goals

2.12 By the end of the EYFS, children should:

- Recognise numerals 1 to 9
- In practical activities and discussion, begin to use the vocabulary involved in adding and subtracting
- Begin to relate addition to combining two groups of objects and subtraction to 'taking away'

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

Early learning goals

2.14 By the end of the EYFS, children should:

- Find out about and identify the uses of everyday technology and use information and communication technology and programmable toys to support their learning

Creative Development

² Assuming this to refer to manipulation of numbers as abstract concepts, this works against the Steiner Early Years philosophy

Educational programme

2.17 They must be provided with opportunities to explore and share their thoughts, ideas and feelings, for example, through a variety of... mathematics, and design and technology

All of the above points are clearly in conflict with the Early Years educational ethos of Wynstones. In keeping with Steiner Waldorf philosophies, children in kindergarten are not presented with abstract concepts or symbols such as letters and numbers, nor – for much the same reasons - are they presented with information and communication technology or programmable toys.

Conflict of overall approach

The other learning objectives contained in the framework are not in *direct* conflict with the Steiner ethos, in that the kindergarten methods encourage the development of the same skills and attitudes. The *requirement* for delivery, however, again creates conflict between the EYFS and the Steiner Waldorf principles as applied in the Wynstones kindergarten. While the kindergarten provision *encourages* development of the child in line with the other requirements of the EYFS, for the teacher to *direct* the child towards these developmental goals would change the nature both of the child's relationship with the teacher and of the learning environment, both of which are essential to proper curriculum delivery. In other words, the Steiner system is already *largely* complying with these parts of the EYFS, but to seek either to *completely* comply or to *prove* compliance would create an internal conflict.

Assessment

The assessment profile which teachers are required to build up on each child, in the words of Appendix 1 to the statutory framework, "captures the early learning goals as a set of 13 assessment scales". Since many of the early learning goals are not appropriate to the Steiner setting, and since it would be inappropriate in that setting to direct the child towards those goals, it follows that it would be inappropriate to assess the children in that setting against those goals. To do so would counterproductively change the nature of the teacher's relationship to the child. Furthermore, the requirements for assessment seem to be based on a developmental view at odds with the Steiner view, which (i) "seeks to describe where children typically are at the various ages³", not where they 'should be' and (ii) believes that before the age of 6-7 years "it is not the intellectual skills which need to be stimulated, but the child's whole being⁴". The EYFS's view of the pre-school child seems to be (i) that the child 'should be' ready for stimulation which is solely intellectual, and (ii) that if the child is not ready for such stimulation, he or she can somehow be *made* ready by the application of such stimulation. To the Steiner teacher, the application of such stimulation before the child is ready is counter-productive and potentially harmful.

³ From 'The Educational Tasks & Content of the Steiner Curriculum' (ed. Rawson & Richter, 2000)

ftv⁴ *ibid*

Play

Finally, the EYFS requires that “All the areas must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities.” The Steiner philosophy does not recognise the concept of ‘adult-led play’, and particularly not as a vehicle for education. Play is not ‘planned and purposeful’; it comes from within, is spontaneous, and is of value in and of itself. If an adult plans and prepares an activity, however enjoyable, for the purpose of advancing the child’s learning, this is not play but a lesson. The Steiner view is that the time for lessons does not begin until the child leaves kindergarten at the age of 6-7 years.

Steiner is very clear. Sounds, colours, shapes and forms of wide variety are there for the young child to experience in free imagination and play; not directed towards meaning or purpose. If not, both imagination and emotional development are stunted. Modern studies show the important of these to later cognitive development.

Conclusion

It seems clear, therefore, that the educational aspect of the Early Years Foundation Stage cannot in any way be incorporated into the Steiner system without one or both being seriously compromised. This being the case, Wynstones School should be entitled to an exemption from all the learning and development requirements of the EYFS.

A comprehensive outline of the EY curriculum followed by Wynstones is available on request.