

Children's Wellbeing and Schools' Bill Evidence to the Committee from Waldorf UK

Background

1. Waldorf UK represents the Steiner Academy Hereford and 16 independent Steiner Waldorf schools. We make this submission in support of Steiner Academy Hereford which has already provided its own written evidence (attached for ease of reference).
2. Waldorf education is a 'head heart hands' approach aimed at developing a child's emotional, physical, and academic potential equally. Academic and vocational subjects are balanced, utilising artistic and physical activities as part of the daily learning process. Art, music, craft, drama and games are therefore integrated into lessons.

Steiner Academy Hereford (SAH)

3. SAH has been a consistently "good" school over many years. It ranks among the top three schools in Herefordshire for GCSE results and recently achieved the top place in England in the Fairer Schools Index 2025, which adjusts rankings for socio-economic variables. It is very popular with parents and is oversubscribed.

Clause 41 – National Curriculum – Exemptions and Modifications

4. SAH delivers a Waldorf curriculum which aligns with the national curriculum in subjects and intention but differs in some respects. Most significantly, formal learning begins at age 6, slightly later than the National Curriculum but at a similar age to other successful education systems around the world.
5. To maintain its success the school may need exemptions from or modifications to the National Curriculum Programmes of Study, available under Section 91 of the Education Act 2002 to be included in the Bill. We request that a consultation is conducted regarding the precise criteria to be available under that process. As outlined by SAH in its evidence, there is an exemptions and modifications process in place under the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for settings with "established principles". We suggest similar criteria be made available for the process under S91 Education Act 2002.

Clause 45 – Statutory Pay and Conditions – Possible Exemptions

6. Whilst we welcome and support the Government's steps to improve the pay and conditions for teachers, we also support the request from SAH that an exemption option be made available for schools who, like SAH, are working with a diverse curriculum and need, for example, to appoint additional teachers. The Waldorf curriculum includes a number of subjects additional to the National Curriculum standard offer, which require a higher staff to pupil ratio. The ratios and number of teachers required cannot be achieved within the existing funding arrangements under the Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

Further relevant background

7. In 2018/19, following the disbanding of their previous inspectorate, all independent Steiner Waldorf schools were inspected by Ofsted over an 8-month period. Three-quarters of the schools failed those inspections leading to some school closures. At the time there was widespread negative media coverage and considerable controversy. Today all but two of our schools inspected by Ofsted are ranked "good". Reports comment frequently on the breadth and ambition of the curriculum, the warmth of the school environment and the happiness of the children.
8. The inspection crisis was a shock to schools and triggered a comprehensive review of where they were failing and prompted significant self-reflection on why things had gone so wrong. That review, and the actions taken as a result, has led to a programme of transformational change across how schools are run, and the quality of the education provided. Five years on this work is still in progress but we have the strategies and implementation plans that are working. These include:
 - Leadership overhaul to create greater accountability and better run schools.
 - Comprehensive ongoing safeguarding training creating a strong safeguarding culture.
 - Enhanced CPD to improve teaching quality.
 - New Waldorf teacher training which now includes QTS, validated by a UK university.
 - Comprehensive curriculum review creating greater clarity and ambition, including the creation of a bespoke digital planning tool to support consistency and monitoring.
 - New, evidence-based approaches to English, Maths, behaviour management, and SEND support.

29 January 2025.

Fran Russell

Executive Director.

For more information about Waldorf UK please visit [our website.](#)
