

Research addressing concerns regarding transition from Steiner education to State School.

The transition to state schools, when they are anticipated, is generally not problematical. The most common transitions are from Kindergarten to Infants or 1st Class Primary and from eighth class Steiner school to a state secondary school. Although there is no definitive research on these specific transitions in Ireland, there is much relevant research to reassure parents of the need for Steiner education in their child's lives and the benefits it provides in their future educational career as well as their adult life.

The research confirms that Steiner education supports the child to develop their creative and artistic skills, develop a strong sense of self, cultivate critical thinking and preserves student's enthusiasm for learning so they develop a better sense of self-confidence and self direction.

Transitions in the lower years, particularly between the first and fourth years, can potentially be more of a problem, because of the significant differences in the pacing of the various curriculums. A second class primary pupil from a traditional school may be further ahead in reading in comparison with a Steiner-schooled second class. (Steiner-Waldorf education emphasises the oral tradition, deferring the introduction of reading and writing until age 7). *'Before teaching sound and word recognition, Waldorf teachers concentrate on exercises to build up a child's love of language. The technique seems to work, even in state schools. Barbara Warren, a teacher at John Morse, a public school near Sacramento USA, says that two years after waldorf methods were introduced in her fourth-grade class of mostly minority children, the number of students who read at grade level doubled, rising from 45% to 85%. "I didn't start by making them read more," Warren says. "I started telling stories, and getting them to recite poetry and they learned by listening, not by reading". Although they may be behind in reading skills in other areas such as listening & oral skills, music, foreign languages, art & creativity Steiner-schooled children are often ahead.*

Anecdotal evidence from students from Raheen Wood Steiner School, Co Clare, Ireland, suggests that the majority of students that progressed to local state & private education (Scariff Secondary School, Woodford Secondary School, Tulla Secondary School, Villiers Private Day/Boarding school, Alfa – Active Learning for Adolescents) continued with their studies and either chose to sit junior & leaving cert state exams or chose to continue with the Steiner Curriculum offered by Alfa Project, Active Learning For Adolescents – www.alfaproject.org. Many have gone on to study at college or university in Ireland, UK, Germany etc., their Steiner education has not stunted their progression but the opposite, it has enhanced their opportunities and enabled them to be free thinkers and to question the world about them in a mature and coherent manner as well as make their own informed choices about their future.

Below is a selection of comparative reports/ studies relevant to the question:

1. The study by Jelinek and Sun (2003) in the US. Steiner children and public school children were tested in logical reasoning, and a science activity involving magnetism developed by the TIMMS international comparative study was used to compare the practical performance of Steiner and public school children. The pupils' narrative responses to the task were analysed in depth. Jelinek and Sun's findings on science education endorse the claim that **pupils taught less content and subjected to less examination pressure, as in Steiner schools, do better in the long run. Scientific reasoning of Steiner school students was found to be superior, and the gains were greatest in the upper schools.** Steiner educators would emphasise that much of the science teaching in Steiner schools is based on **training the pupils to observe and come to their own conclusions rather than proving someone else's theory. To the extent that they are successful in this, pupils brought up on Steiner principles would be encouraged to critically question all theories, including those of Rudolf Steiner himself.**
2. A 2008 report by the Cambridge-based *Primary Review* found that Steiner/Waldorf schools achieved superior academic results to English state schools. ^[68]
3. A study carried out in North America by Smith (1998) A total of 250 questionnaires were sent to schools, training centres, colleges and conferences. **Smith's survey shows large majorities affirming that Steiner education successfully enables students to develop a strong sense of self, good life skills, and strong academic and intellectual skills, and prepares them for meaningful work.**
4. Jelinek and Sun's (2003) study, suggests that **Steiner education is successful in its aim to educate human beings, being particularly successful in stimulating imaginative thought and creating eager, confident and curious students.**
5. The study by Rivers and Soutter (1996) provides some evidence which is supportive of the view that **Steiner education encourages ethical and social development.** Its findings highlight the integration of moral learning, the real life contextualisation of learning and the effectiveness of the school ethos and teacher/pupil relationships.
6. Research has been done in the US on standardised testing: U.S. Waldorf pupils' SAT scores have usually come above the national average, especially on verbal measures.
7. A study by Schieffer and Busse (2001) compared state wide achievement tests (in maths, reading, social studies, science and language) of fourth grade economically disadvantaged minority students from a public Steiner school and a neighbouring

public school in the United States . It found that, over the two years for which data on test scores were analysed, **socially disadvantaged students in the Steiner school did better than comparable students in the neighbouring school.** Although a small-scale study, its findings are in line with evidence from the study of a Steiner-inspired publicly funded school (in Milwaukee in the US) which found that **Black (African American) pupils in a deprived inner city environment taught at the school scored above grade level in reading (McDermott 1996, Byers et al 1996).**

8. Both Cox and Rolands' (2000) research data supporting the proposition that **Steiner education is beneficial for the development of creative and artistic abilities.** Cox and Rolands tested sixty children in the UK between the ages of 5 and 7, matched for intellectual ability – 20 each from a Steiner, Montessori and (private) traditional school. Three drawings completed by each child were assessed by two raters and the consequent ratings subjected to rigorous statistical analysis. Cox and Rolands (2000: 485) conclude that **“the approach to art education in Steiner schools is conducive not only to more highly rated imaginative drawings in terms of general drawing ability and use of colour but also to more accurate and detailed observational drawings”.**
9. Ogletree (2000) investigated the creative ability of 1,165 third to sixth grade students, matched on the basis of their socio-economic status, from six Steiner and six state schools --479 English, 193 Scottish, and 493 German students. The findings obtained from administration of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking Ability, generally Steiner school students obtained significantly higher creativity scores than their state school peers. Particular credit for this was given to the maturational-readiness and nurturing curriculum of the Waldorf Schools, de-emphasis on academic performance in early grades; use of art in instruction; and other teaching and curriculum considerations.
10. Hutchingson and Hutchingson's (1993) Canadian study of gifted students, in which mainstream students were introduced to a Steiner curriculum, found that non-gifted Steiner students showed characteristics of the creative behaviour of gifted pupils. This finding suggests that **Steiner schooling encourages a greater creativity throughout the whole of the Steiner school's student population.**

Higher Education

Studies comparing students' performance on college-entrance examinations in Germany found that as a group, Waldorf graduates passed the exam at double to triple the rate of students graduating from the state education system, and that students who had attended Waldorf schools for their entire education passed at a much higher rate (40% vs. 26%) than those who only had part of their education at a Waldorf school.

An Australian study comparing the academic performance of students at university level found that students who had been at Waldorf schools significantly outperformed their peers from non-Waldorf schools in both the humanities and the sciences.

Conclusions

'Firstly, the research studies reviewed give a cumulative sense of a positive relationship between Steiner schools and learning, achievement and pupil's educational and social development. There is evidence that Steiner school pupils score relatively well on mainstream tests, and that they do relatively well in terms of development of creative, social and other capabilities important in the holistic growth of the person'.

Research studies by The Department of Education and Skills Report RR645 United Kingdom, 'Steiner Schools in England'

Websites searched:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_education

<http://www.thebee.se/comments/studies/OgletreeStudy.html>

<http://www.waldorfanswers.com/Studies.htm>

<http://www.collingwood.vic.edu.au/steiner-faq.php?t1=teaching&link=3#regular>

<http://www.waldorf.nu/efrswsp/afterschool.htm>

www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB645.pdf

Reports / Studies obtained:

1. The Comparative Status of the Creative Thinking Ability of Waldorf Educated students - A survey published in 1996 (England, Scotland & Germany)
2. Steiner Schools in England – research document by the Department of Education & Skills published in 2005 (United Kingdom)
3. Profile of Waldorf School Graduates – Standing Out without Standing Alone Douglas Gerwin & David Mitchell 2005 (USA & Canada)
4. Survey of Waldorf Graduates Phase 2 by Douglas Gerwin & David Mitchell 2007 (USA & Canada)
5. Leaving the garden - preparing Waldorf students for the Educational World Beyond by Chapman Hood Frazier & Deborah Carrington-Frazier (United States)
6. Research into Young People's Experience of The ALFA Project: a summary by Julie Wells and Clifford Skoog 2008 (Ireland)
7. Careers of former Rudolf Steiner/Waldorf school students Questions and answers for Steiner/Waldorf school parents. What will become of my child? prepared by THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF RUDOLF STEINER/WALDORF SCHOOL PARENTS in 1996

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Links

Through the years, a number of academic and other forms of theoretical and empirical studies on Waldorf education, Waldorf schools and Waldorf pupils have been conducted and published by universities, by school authorities in a number of countries, by the schools themselves and by others, describing, investigating and discussing Waldorf education. A large selection can be found here - <http://www.waldorfanswers.com/Studies.htm>