

UPPER SCHOOL HALF TIME REPORT

Dear Parents and Students of Classes 7 - 9.

As we are halfway through the school year we feel it's a good time to update you on the progress and intentions of our Upper School.

By choosing a Steiner education, you have chosen an alternative to the mainstream approach not only to education in general but also to how we approach GCSE courses and exams. We have been funded on the expectation that we will offer an alternative which stays true to the principles of Steiner Waldorf education but delivers on preparing the students for life beyond our school community. Below we have aimed to outline how we intend to do this.

To remind you of our vision for the Upper School which is stated at the opening of our prospectus, our intention is to offer:

- A **balanced** experience which enables the students to study a broad variety of subjects in a way that allows for reflection, breathing and an awareness of the interrelatedness of topics
- An education that **engages** our students and invites them to play an active role in their learning journey
- An awareness of **self** and **community** and the relationship between the two
- The capacity in our students to think **independently and creatively**

How are we aiming to achieve these goals whilst balancing the demands of delivering on the GCSEs?

The balance we aim to strike is between the creative, academic and active and therefore our curriculum offers a broad range of experiences for our students. Through our morning modules for Classes 8 & 9 students have the opportunity to engage in Drama, Art and Design, Woodwork, Metalwork and a range of movement activities. Recently we have also incorporated a Science focus into the morning sessions for Class 9.

Through their main lesson blocks they are able to immerse themselves in a given subject over the course of 3 - 4 weeks both academically and creatively and through their weekly lessons in Maths, French, History / Geography, English and Science they are able to explore new themes and hone skills that will prepare them for success in their GCSEs.

Through this balanced approach we aim to offer the students an educational journey that will foster the skills, aptitudes, attitudes and capacities that will put them in good stead for many years to come; not just in their chosen pathways of work but also in their relationships with others, themselves and the world around them.

The traditional approach to GCSEs is to follow a prescriptive scheme of work which begins in

the secondary years and culminates in the exams at the end of Class 10 (Year 11). Whilst we are mindful of this and incorporate this into the work with the students, we don't want to be purely confined by the parameters of the GCSE syllabus and feel that there is a more vibrant and invigorating pathway which will lead to the same destination.

With a cross curricular approach to schooling we aim to instil confidence and interest in all subjects and build skills that will serve them both now and in the future.

For all of our subjects we take our lead from one of the core elements of Steiner philosophy: "From the whole to the parts." What this means in practice is that rather than going *from the skills to the subject* we go from the *subject to the skills*. This makes for a more implicit experience for the students; building up understanding and capacity in a subtle rather than explicit way.

This can be challenging for some students (and parents) as they are not always made aware of the specific skills they are building. This inevitably leads to students of this age comparing the experiences they're getting with those of their peers at other schools:

"My friend is busy learning about economic and social measures of development, GNI per head, average life expectancy, link between the demographic transition model and the human development index. We're just learning about countries!"

Our intention is to give the students an *experience* rather than just *information* in the belief that it is this experience that will be the enduring factor in the building up of their knowledge, skills and understanding.

In a recent student survey 83% of our Class 9 students felt that they were making good progress at school and were enjoying their learning experience. Although we are pleased with this, we are also mindful of the 17% and what we can do to improve their school experience. Through dialogue with the students and parents we hope to come to an understanding of this. For parents to stay in touch with school life we encourage you to attend both the whole class parents' evenings held three times a year and the individual teacher meetings held twice a year.

Also, with the new end of term reports and the end of year report we aim to keep parents informed on the progress of their child(ren). We aim to give students regular feedback through a combination of main lesson reports, feedback in their books and verbal feedback.

We aim to respond to the feedback we receive from teachers and students. To this end we have added some additional science, making this a more regular part of the morning sessions and by bringing in a lab assistant to support the science teachers and the students. We have also reviewed work habits with the students, especially around homework and assessment.

We are aware that social media and the abundance of screen entertainment are bringing this generation a unique set of challenges. We are reviewing the way in which we inform the students and each other, both parents and teachers, about what is happening in the world of social media. This needs constant vigilance and close collaboration between the school, home and the students themselves. We will soon be sharing our plan for effective education around cyber issues.

Class Teachers and Guardians, as part of a wider upper school team, keep their finger on the pulse of the well-being of the classes. We have a student council who feed their ideas for school improvement to Alan as principal, as well as to their Class Teacher or Guardian. When we are looking to appoint new staff, we ask for the students' feedback. We will soon be allocating each student with a Progress Tutor who will be able to keep in touch with both the students' experiences and their progress and attainment across the subjects.

Student testimonials from a recent interview with four Class 9 students.

The positives:

"There is a great connection between pupils and students. You can be yourself around the teachers, they're more understanding. The people here are nicer than at my last school."

"The Upper School has a family feel."

"We still get to do fun stuff like arts and crafts."

"The work is manageable and we don't feel like we're constantly under pressure."

"Having no uniform is great!"

"Teachers often nag us, but we know it's because they care."

Room for improvement:

"We don't go outside as much as we used to."

"We would like a common room."

"We would like increased involvement in the running of the school and to expand the student council to tackle more important issues. It would be great if the governors could get involved in the student council. Also if we take on more responsibility this would give the teachers more freedom to focus on their tasks."

"Communication between teachers, students and parents could be better."

"We would like more Music and English lessons."

In our weekly Upper School teachers meetings we discuss student well-being and progress and our Upper School Steering Group also meets on a weekly basis and supports the work of the teachers by dealing with wider strategic issues.

At the end of Class 9 and again in Class 10 the students will undergo work experience. In Class 9 this will be embarked on by the whole class and in Class 10 they will seek out individual opportunities in a wide range of work environments. Through their work with their Progress Tutor they will be able to explore opportunities for careers choices and in Class 10 will take part in a more formal careers advice process. Each class will also enjoy a whole class trip. In order to be prepared for GCSEs Class 9 and 10 will have mock exams and at the end of Class 10 they will sit the exams and prepare their portfolio of work which will be a record of work they can take with them on their journey beyond our school. The portfolio could be taken to further education established in addition to their GCSE results and kept as a qualitative record of their achievements with us.

We have built up a relationship with Exeter College for those who wish to go on to study further education courses and will be forging links with other further education colleges in the area. For those who wish to continue with a Steiner Education, South Devon Steiner School are offering Class 11 and 12 provision which culminates in the CSE (Certificate of Steiner Education) which is a nationally recognised qualification which can be used to access

any university course.

We hope this has shed some light on the current Upper School provision at SAE and would welcome your questions and feedback.

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Yours,

Aegir Morgan