

Management and Governance Changes to the Edinburgh Steiner School

Our school's management structure is in need of change.

As you may know, our school is managed through a combination of an employed school coordinator and a group of teachers who volunteer to be part of the management team. The thinking behind this set-up is that the school's ethos and unique approach to education is best protected and nurtured by management from within. That is through teachers who live and breathe Waldorf education.

Although the external perception may be that this structure is working, over the past few years the management team as well as our board of trustees have come to realise that this structure is unrealistic for the present demands of today's world.

The combination of an ever-increasing workload with regards to regulations, financial pressures, HR compliance and other generic business issues have led to a point where the current structure is unsustainable. Both operationally as well as strategically we have not found the space to steer the school as well as it and its pupils deserve.

Coming out of this realisation we are also acutely aware that the business needs often trump the need for more reflective practice to ensure we protect what makes our school so special: working out of the educational principles laid out by Rudolf Steiner.

About 18 months ago, we formed a working group to look at how the management at the school is structured, how it evolved into what it is today and what is needed for the future. In March 2022 we had an all-staff service day and invited colleagues' thoughts on what was needed to make the school's management and governance fit for purpose. And following this workday we invited any staff members with an interest to join a working group to build on this work. Since then we have had a group come together made up of staff from a wide range of areas - management, teachers, trustees and parents. Our group has been facilitated by Florence Garabedian, to whom we offer very grateful thanks.

We have spent over a year now coming up with a new structure which can serve everybody in the school better.

A structure which ensures that the principles that stand behind Steiner Waldorf education are upheld and put into practice, remaining at the centre of what we do; a structure that serves the pupils and teachers better; and a structure which allows management and trustees to meet the demands of the present environment in which we operate.

In particular, we identified two key principles which came out of the all-staff meeting and which have formed our guiding light over the past year: accountability and transparency. We swiftly realised that to deliver on these principles there was a need to establish clear points

of management authority in the school and an openness and clarity about the discharge of that authority and the responsibilities that derive from it.

The resulting changes have been endorsed and welcomed by both the College of Teachers and the Board of Trustees.

They will take time to implement and will have resource implications which we will need to plan for. We are therefore anticipating the new structure to be fully implemented by the 2024/25 school year.

The College of Teachers will remain in charge of how Waldorf education is practised at our school and the body where the special care we pride ourselves on giving to each pupil is upheld.

We will not ask members of the College of Teachers to step forward to join the school's management any longer. This was one of our guiding principles when we set out our work, as the people who have undertaken this work have very clearly communicated that it was no longer feasible to operate in this manner and that it was detracting from the focus that College needs to place on holding and nurturing the educational ethos of the school.

Also, we will be changing the post of School Coordinator, which as of now is the only post charged with working full-time on general management of the school. Instead, we are looking at creating three leadership roles to replace the current framework.

As the real value in what we offer at the Edinburgh Steiner School stems from the relationships we have with one another and with the institution at large, we are pleased to have our current School Coordinator remain with us as the manager in charge of operations (one of the three leadership roles and a role which maintains a lot of the current responsibilities of the post holder).

Next, we have created the role of Education Manager. The purpose of this role is to strengthen our pedagogical work by providing the school's management with more capacity and capability to support pupils and teachers through a dedicated focus on developing and maintaining high quality pedagogy based on Steiner principles throughout the school.

And the third addition to the leadership of the school will be the appointment of a Head of School. Throughout recent years, we have felt that there was a large element missing in the management and governance structure of the school which often ended up with trustees needing to step into more operational elements of the school or to the management group struggling to resolve challenging issues because they lacked the authority.

We have also arrived at a clear consensus that with the challenges we are currently facing we need to create capacity for an overarching lead of the school. This position will provide the necessary oversight of the work coming from operations, education, finance, marketing, estates, early years and the College of Teachers. And in turn it will help support the Board of Trustees to perform their role more effectively and safeguard the sustainability of our

school.

We are clear that these new roles must work with the grain of the ethos and culture of the school rather than against it and we can learn from experiences in other schools where a clash of cultures following the appointment of management staff did not benefit those schools.

We are therefore looking to appoint someone from within the school to help us manage the above-mentioned transition. This role is aimed at providing the necessary groundwork to recruit a Head and thereafter a full-time Education Manager as well as help our current School Coordinator with the transition from the current management group to the new leadership and management structure.

The timetable we have set out for these changes is the following:

1. To recruit the interim manager by August 2023.
2. To start the recruitment process for a Head of School by September 2023 (with the new postholder to be in place for the start of the 2024/25 school year).
3. To recruit a full-time Education Manager in September 2024 (the post holder to be in place by the end of 2024 at the latest).
4. For the interim transition manager to finish late 2024/early 2025.

We are aware that this is a major shift in the way that our school has operated over the past 80+ years. Our school is well-grounded and has become an Edinburgh fixture over many decades, however, the price of not changing and meeting the demands of our modern, often challenging, environment is one we cannot afford to ignore. It is vital we act proactively and refresh the governance of our school before we find it becomes unsustainable in the light of modern-day pressures, as has happened elsewhere to a number of well established yet vulnerable Steiner institutions in the UK.

The changes we are implementing will happen over many months and although we have worked out a framework which covers all current management aspects under this new structure, we want the new team to shape and mould it along the way, working with staff and evolving the new framework with the school community.

We are confident that by safeguarding our wonderful educational system and adapting our structures to meet the needs expressed by the current management team, by teachers and by trustees, we will enable our school to thrive and rejuvenate itself amidst an ever-changing environment.

Leadership, Management and Governance Group

(Hester Machin, Nick Brett, Peter Sheen, Tess McNatt, Tobias Emonts-Holley, Mike Palmer)