



Bund der Freien  
Waldorfschulen

## 21 Questions about Waldorf schools

➤ Perspectives





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### **1 | Which children are admitted to Waldorf schools?**

Waldorf schools (also known as Rudolf Steiner schools) are basically open to all children – irrespective of religion, ethnic origin, world view, or income of the parents. After detailed informational parents' evenings, an individual admission interview is conducted at the school for each registered child. The admissions committee consisting of teachers puts together a class that is as balanced as possible. Since there are usually more applications than places, a school place is unfortunately not guaranteed. Pupils can also be transferred in from other schools in the upper grades.



## 2 | How are Waldorf schools different from other schools?

Waldorf schools aim to develop intellectual, creative, artistic, practical and social skills in children and adolescents in equal measure. From the first year of school, Waldorf pupils generally learn two foreign languages. Boys and girls knit, sew and tailor together in needlework classes, and later use saws, hammers and files together in woodwork classes. In every eighth and twelfth grade, the entire class rehearses a demanding theatre piece and all students choose a topic of their choice as a major annual project to work on, both in theory and practice. The subjects of horticulture and eurythmy, unknown in other schools, are fixed components of the curriculum.

## 3 | Who was Rudolf Steiner and what does he have to do with Waldorf education?

Rudolf Steiner was the founder of Waldorf education. Emil Molt, owner of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory at the time, founded the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart together with him in 1919. The content and method of Waldorf education build on Rudolf Steiner's insights into the principles of child and adolescent development. Today the Pedagogical Research Center at the Association of Independent Waldorf Schools is responsible for the constant updating and further development of the framework curriculum. In addition to education, Rudolf Steiner's spiritual scientific research—he called it anthroposophy—also found its way into biodynamic agriculture, anthroposophical medicine, and art.



**4 | Does a child have to be artistically gifted to be a good fit for attending a Waldorf school?**

No, the Waldorf school is a school for all kinds of young people. However, recent brain research has impressively proven that children and adolescents acquire many competencies through artistic practice that extend far beyond the immediate activity. Therefore, when Waldorf pupils paint, draw, sculpt or make music, the primary goal is to train differentiated perceptions and develop their creative potential; the particular talents of individual pupils are, of course, taken into account. Waldorf teachers strive to develop their students' intellect, creativity and independent personality in equal measure.

**5 | Isn't it the case that mainly children with learning difficulties go to a Waldorf school?**

No. Explicitly and definitely no. At Waldorf schools, children of all abilities learn just as they do at regular public schools, except that here, in addition to intellectual abilities, equal weight is given to social and artistic abilities. The individual support of children with special needs is an important pillar of Waldorf education, which is implemented either in schools with an inclusive concept or in special curative schools.



**6 | Is it true that at Waldorf schools no grades or scores are given and no pupil has to repeat a school year?**

Even though Waldorf schools refrain from issuing grades in the lower and middle school, student work is of course **honoured**; instead of standardised scores, teachers write individual assessments which devote equal attention to the pupils' personal development and learning progress as well as their classwork. Thus, it is not only the level of knowledge that counts, but the overall development over a given period of time. Beginning at the end of middle school, grades are also given, but in parallel with the individual assessments described above. Waldorf students learn in a stable class community from the first to the twelfth grade, regardless of the school-leaving certificate they are aiming for. No one is left behind along the way.

**7 | Without grades and without the possibility of having to repeat a school year: are the children then motivated to learn at all?**

Since Waldorf lessons are very activity-oriented and tailored to the respective developmental stage of the pupils, this **question rarely arises**. The children and adolescents develop self-initiative not because of external pressure to perform, but out of lively interest and personal enthusiasm for the diverse lesson content. The teachers design these lessons creatively and realistically, so that the contents are oriented to the children's personal world and convey their own varied experiences. Waldorf teachers prepare for this demanding pedagogical activity at their own seminars and colleges.



**8 | Isn't Waldorf education something like the illusion of an ideal world? Can the pupils cope with the "harsh reality" later on in their lives?**

Practical experience shows that Waldorf students in particular are especially valued by instructors of all kinds. In a school that addresses not only intellectual abilities, key skills such as the ability to work in a team, creativity, and the capacity to think in terms of processes are developed and encouraged from the very first day of school. Extensive graduate studies show that Waldorf students are highly successful in all fields of study and occupations.

**9 | What leaving certificates can be attained at a Waldorf school?**

All. Since the individual federal states each have their own school laws, there are differences, but the basic rule is that the usual state qualifications can be acquired at a German Waldorf school: *Hauptschulabschluss* (basic secondary school leaving certificate) and *Realschulabschluss* (intermediate school leaving certificate) as well as the *Abitur* (university education entrance qualification) and usually also the *Fachhochschulreife* (qualification for technical college). At the end of the twelfth school year (at some schools at the end of the eleventh grade), many Waldorf schools offer their own Waldorf School Leaving Certificate, which gives their students the opportunity to present their individually acquired competencies alongside the examination subjects of the state certificates. The thirteenth school year is usually used for targeted preparation for *Abitur/Fachhochschulreife*.



## **10 | Is the Waldorf School actually expensive?**

It is a principle of Waldorf schools not to reject any child for financial reasons. However, since the subsidies to independent schools in all federal states are lower than those received by public schools, Waldorf schools have to charge tuition fees to parents—even though they have proven to be more efficiently run than public schools. In order to make it possible for all children to attend school, however, the teachers and parents form solidarity groups, structured somewhat differently at each school, that strive to balance out the different financial possibilities of the various families.

## **11 | The Waldorf schools call themselves “free schools”. Does that mean that the children there are educated in an anti-authoritarian way?**

The term “free schools” does not mean that there are no rules there, but that they are so-called “schools in free sponsorship” and enjoy extensive autonomy in shaping their pedagogical programme. Waldorf teachers build a relationship with their pupils in the lower grades that is characterised by “loving authority”. Children seek their boundaries. Only when they experience boundaries from adults do they feel secure enough to experience and explore their own personality. As the grades progress, the teacher-pupil relationship increasingly transforms into a more comprehensive learning partnership.



## **12 | Why do children have one and the same class teacher in the first eight years of school, if possible?**

It is now well-researched scientific finding that a trust-  
ing relationship is the most important basis for learning. In this way, children can develop well and healthily in a community that is characterised by consistency and rhythm. In order to be a reliable support for them, a Waldorf class teacher accompanies his or her class for six to eight years, if possible, and teaches at least the first two hours of a school day every morning. In alternating "blocks" the class teacher holds lessons on material of different subject areas for several weeks at a time. In the process, they get to know the pupils intimately and can respond individually to their strengths and weaknesses.

## **13 | What is meant by a "block lesson"?**

During the first two hours of each school day, the class works intensively on one subject area at a time for several consecutive weeks. For example, pupils have two hours of math, geography, German, history, or another major subject every morning for three weeks. After a few weeks, the content of the block changes to a different subject. Pupils have the opportunity of connecting with each block intensively. Basic skills, such as arithmetic and writing, are reinforced in ongoing practice sessions that extend beyond the period classes. Following the block lessons, subject teachers take over classes in sports, foreign languages, eurythmy, religion, music, and handcraft and artistic subjects.





#### **14 | Can a teacher actually be qualified in all subjects?**

Class teachers actually cover a wide range of subjects at a Waldorf school. They are specifically prepared for this by special training, which they undergo in a full course of study or postgraduate courses following scientific or pedagogical training at one of the seminars in the Federation of Independent Waldorf Schools or at a university with Waldorf qualifications. Class, subject, and upper school teachers are required to complete training that is at least equivalent to teacher training for public schools. In the lower and middle school, the focus of all learning is not only on imparting pure subject knowledge, but also on enabling the students to have a lively, experience-saturated relationship with the learning content. In this way, learning can be enjoyable for an entire lifetime.

#### **15 | Doesn't the necessary preparation for graduation come up short when there are so many internships, theatre plays, and craft projects?**

It is true that these activities, together with the learning workload, mean a double burden for the students in some school years. However, experience shows that test performance does not suffer as a result. The average final scores in standard exams conducted in the higher grades at Waldorf schools are at least on a par with those of graduates of public schools.



**16 | How are adolescents in the upper grades prepared for the world of professional or vocational work?**

In the upper grades, academically or technically trained teachers work with adolescents in all subjects. The practical skills that the students have acquired throughout their schooling are supplemented from the eighth grade onward by various practical internships: in agricultural and forestry internships, field measurement (surveying) internship, industrial and social internships, adolescents receive a distinctly real-life training basis. The real purpose of these internships is not to find a particular career, but above all to practice important social skills. Some Waldorf schools also prepare students for a trade certificate parallel to their school leaving certificate, others document all practical and cognitive learning experiences in the upper school (from grade 9) in a so-called Waldorf graduation portfolio, which can be presented when applying for a job.

**17 | Are the children taught a specific ideology at the Waldorf school?**

The anthroposophy developed by Rudolf Steiner is an aid to knowledge for the teachers, but at no time is it the subject of class lessons. Since the Waldorf school is an interdenominational school, it is initially the parents who decide which religious instruction their child should attend. Later, the adolescents decide this question for themselves.



## 18 | What is the subject of eurythmy all about?

Eurythmy (literally: good, beautiful rhythm) is an art of movement taught in all classes at Waldorf schools. In contrast to gymnastic, pantomimic or dance movements, which can be designed completely freely, in eurythmy there is a very specific gesture for each spoken sound and tone—it is therefore speech and music made visible. In speech eurythmy, for example, the students represent the sounds that live in a poem, and in tone eurythmy what lives in the tone intervals of a musical composition. In the process, skills such as coordination, locating oneself in space, moving in an ensemble, a movement to music or recitation are trained, very much as an individual, but within a community.

## 19 | What role do the natural sciences play at the Waldorf School?

Between the fourth and eighth grades, science instruction is based on the precise observation of biological, physical and chemical phenomena and on the independent discovery of respective scientific laws. From the ninth grade onward, abstract model concepts and the conceptualization of modern natural sciences come to the fore, with the teaching continuing to be an open-ended, exploratory process based on the students' own perceptions and conclusions. A PISA study on the natural sciences conducted in Austria attested that Waldorf students had far above-average competencies in the natural sciences and explicitly attributed this to the phenomenological teaching methods, which were described as exemplary.



## 20 | What role do digital media play at the Waldorf school?

Media education is an integral part of the Waldorf school curriculum. It begins initially as an "indirect media education" in which the younger children experience the world with all their senses and engage with it creatively and imaginatively using a variety of materials. In the process, they develop their ability to make judgments, which is a necessary prerequisite for independent use of digital media. These are introduced step by step in the classroom after extensive experience with analogue media. In addition to practical handling, a real understanding of the technological foundations and functioning of the internet becomes important, which in the upper school extends to reflection on the worldwide social effects of these technologies, leading to a mature use of digital media.

## 21 | What if my family moves?

In Germany there is a Waldorf school within reach almost everywhere—currently (June 2022) there are 255, but new schools are founded every year. On our homepage ([waldorfschule.de](http://waldorfschule.de)) you can find the schools nearest you. Each Waldorf school will make every effort to accept Waldorf students after they move. Moving to and from regular public schools does mean a change, but it is possible and not uncommon. If you plan to move abroad, there are over 1,200 Waldorf schools worldwide - and the trend is clearly on the rise. This makes Waldorf schools the largest non-denominational and non-public educational movement in the world.



## **In conclusion**

**In this presentation, an attempt has been made to answer the most frequently asked questions about the Waldorf/Steiner schools in a clear and concise manner.** Naturally, not every topic can be dealt with exhaustively. Detailed information about the Waldorf School can be found on the internet at [www.waldorfschule.de](http://www.waldorfschule.de).

## **Literature:**

Dirk Randoll/Jürgen Peters (eds.): *Wir waren auf der Waldorfschule*. Ehemalige als Experten in eigener Sache (Alumni as experts in their own cause), Beltz Juventa, Weinheim 2021

Henning Kullak-Ublick: *Jedes Kind ein Könnler – Fragen und Antworten zur Waldorfpädagogik* (Questions and answers about Waldorf education), Verlag Freies Geistesleben, Stuttgart 2017

Brochure *Fürs Leben lernen* (Learning for life) – Information about the Waldorf School

Documentation from Waldorf Teacher Education: Contents, Goals, Perspectives (in German)

Reader *Medienpädagogik an Waldorfschulen* (Media Education at Waldorf Schools)

Reader *Medienkompass für Lehrer:innen* (Media Compass for Teachers) (Struwelpeter 2.0 – Media Literacy and Waldorf Education)

Reader *Medienkompass für Eltern* (Media Compass for Parents) (Struwelpeter 2.1 - An Orientation Guide on the Way to Media Literacy)

Various issues of the *Blickpunkt* (Perspectives) series, especially Perspectives 14: Waldorf Education in a Migration Society

All publications can be found at: [waldorfschule.de/about-us/print-media](http://waldorfschule.de/about-us/print-media) or ordered at: [waldorfschule-shop.de](http://waldorfschule-shop.de)



**Perspectives** is a publication that provides brief and concise information about Steiner/Waldorf schools and education at irregular intervals.

**Issues published in German under the title "Blickpunkt":**

Blickpunkt 1: Was bedeutet Waldorfschule? Eine Orientierung

Blickpunkt 2: Die Wissenschaftlichkeit der Lehrerbildung an Waldorfschulen

Blickpunkt 3: Lehrerbildung an Hochschulen und Seminaren im Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen

Blickpunkt 4: Waldorflehrer werden – Bildung fürs Leben

Blickpunkt 5: Prüfungen und Abschlüsse an Waldorfschulen

Blickpunkt 6: Erlebnispädagogik und Waldorfschulen – mit allen Sinnen Mensch werden

Blickpunkt 7: 21 Fragen – oder was Sie schon immer über die Waldorfschule wissen wollten ...

Blickpunkt 8: Waldorfpädagogik und Inklusion

Blickpunkt 9: Sieben Kernforderungen an die Bildungspolitik

Blickpunkt 10: Salutogenese – gesundheitsfördernde Erziehung an Waldorfschulen

Blickpunkt 11: Eltern an der Waldorfschule

Blickpunkt 12: Waldorfpädagogik und digitale Medien

Blickpunkt 13: Freunde der Erziehungskunst

Blickpunkt 14: Waldorfpädagogik in der Migrationsgesellschaft

**"Perspective" available in English:**

Perspectives 1: Steiner/Waldorf Education – A Short Guide

Perspectives 7: 21 Question about Waldorf schools

Perspectives 14: Steiner/Waldorf Education in a Migration Society

**"Enfoque" disponible en Español:**

Enfoque 14: Waldorfpädagogik en una sociedad migratoria

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