

Public Statement from The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley

The Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley (RSSKL) has appointed new leadership and governance to address ongoing issues at the School and work to prevent de-registration and closure. The School has appointed a new Council of Trustees including a new and independent Chair of Trustees, since May 2017, and a new Principal (Headteacher), Tim Byford, with extensive experience in school transformation.

The following statement reflects the views of the new leadership on the School's historic issues, and outlines how the School is going to address those issues, appeal against the notice of de-registration, and restore RSSKL as a standard bearer for the Steiner Waldorf tradition of open, child-focused education.

School Inspection Findings

In November and December 2016 the School was inspected by Ofsted, which found that Independent Schools Standards were not being met, including, amongst others, in safeguarding and leadership and management. As a result of this, the Department for Education in March 2017 decided to apply a Relevant Restriction to the School meaning that it may not admit new pupils. The School appealed this decision and that appeal is now part of the wider legal process.

In May 2017 a further Ofsted inspection found that, despite considerable improvements, several standards were still not being met, including in safeguarding, leadership and management, and teaching and learning. As a result of this, the Department for Education notified the School in July 2017 of the Secretary of State's intention to de-register the School, which would mean the closure of the School. The School is appealing this decision and will continue to operate while the appeal process is ongoing.

Acknowledging Past Failings

The new leadership of the School is putting into effect a strategy to address all of the issues identified by Ofsted and others, working closely with parents, staff and all stakeholders. It is essential that the School moves forwards in a spirit of transparency and openness. As such, the leadership wish to make the following clear:

- While the School feels it provides a positive experience for children, there have been real and serious failings going back several years, in leadership and management, safeguarding and Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, as highlighted in the course of the inspections. In particular, the School was found by Ofsted to have failed to always put the interests of the child first – this is unacceptable.
- The School and leadership wishes to fully and publicly apologise to those children, and their families, to whom the School failed to provide the safe and supportive learning environment it should and would wish to provide, and whose complaints the School failed to handle correctly or with the proper care in protecting confidentiality.
- In particular, the School wishes to apologise for any suggestion that may have been made in the past by school leaders or staff, publicly or privately, that families who had raised concerns about safeguarding and SEN provision were the cause of the difficulties the School has found itself in. The latter is wholly and entirely of its own making.
- To demonstrate our commitment to transparency, the School would like to take this opportunity to clarify the position relating to a former teacher at the School, Mr Denis McCarthy. Mr McCarthy was dismissed in January 2017 for Gross Misconduct, following a series of concerns about safeguarding and SEND provision, reluctance to follow management guidance and a breakdown of trust and confidence.
- The concerns that were raised highlighted ways in which the School's broader safeguarding policies, procedures and management practices were inadequate. These concerns were also raised by affected families. Internal investigations uncovered real failures, despite good intentions, of leadership and management in dealing with safeguarding concerns, such as:
 - A failure to properly respond to repeated concerns raised by parents
 - A failure to ensure appropriate SEND provision for some children with identified needs

- A lack of transparency to parents and external stakeholders
- A tendency to seek to protect the School's reputation above child welfare
- A failure to handle complaints properly and rapidly, causing unnecessary distress.

Several children and families were let down by the School, due to specific mistakes, an inadequate culture around safeguarding, and systemic failures of management and leadership around safeguarding. While these instances were relatively isolated and not reflective of the general experience of children at the School, the School takes full responsibility.

All these issues are being comprehensively and conclusively rectified, including seeking to bring resolution to any outstanding complaints and publishing the findings of investigations, where possible. The new leadership is determined that the School continues to learn and apply all the important lessons arising from past complaints to ensure that such failings never happen again.

Learning and applying the lessons

The School responded positively and in good faith to the December 2016 inspection findings and made significant efforts to change between the time of that inspection's publication and May 2017. These improvements and reforms were noted by Ofsted during feedback to School leadership at the May 2017 inspection, including stronger accountability of leadership and Trustees, strengthened governance and procedures, and independent reviews of the School's practices in regard to Safeguarding and complaints.

While a lot has been done, there remains a lot to do. The new leadership team is fully confident that the required progress can be achieved. As it appeals the notice of de-registration, the School is going to continue improving, to make sure that all the lessons of the past are comprehensively learned and applied. Some of the key measures to do this are outlined below, all underpinned by a renewed and unceasing commitment to child safety, transparency, and accountability:

- **Safeguarding:** The School must embed a whole-school culture of safeguarding which permeates all activities at the School, so that the interests of the child come first in all decisions, policies and procedures. This culture-shift is already underway, and will also be reinforced by concrete measures such as:
 - External hire of a new, dedicated Designated Safeguarding Lead
 - A full safeguarding audit, and further training for staff, Trustees, pupils and parents
 - Updated policies, training and culture around complaints and whistleblowing
 - A full audit of safety infrastructure and health and safety around the School
- **Special Educational Needs and Disability:** The School will review and improve its SEND provision, especially systems to identify children with needs and put in place robust support plans. Key measures will include:
 - Clarify SEND leadership with full accountability for SEND provision in the School
 - Further training for the SEND team and for all teachers on SEND awareness and resources
 - Recruitment to strengthen the SEND team at the School
 - A review of integrating latest SEND provision and techniques with Steiner education methods
- **Leadership and Management:** The School will pursue continuous improvement in this area. The appointment of a new Principal and Trustees is the key step, but further steps will be taken including:
 - Skills audit to ensure appropriate balance of professional skills in new Council of Trustees
 - Appropriate training within the new Council of Trustees
 - Continued training of the School Management Team to develop its role leading School improvement
 - Stronger links between teaching, pastoral, SEND and administrative departments
 - A new rigorous annual self-evaluation framework
- **Teaching and Learning:** The School will undertake a review of Teaching and Learning and pupil outcomes. This will be used to identify ways in which the School's unique Steiner offering can be improved, taking on board the findings of the most recent inspections in this area. Other measures will include:
 - Any additional methods to better measure pupil progress, consistent with the Steiner approach
 - Supporting teachers in managing learning for all pupil abilities in the classroom
 - Completing the roll-out of a supportive system of staff performance management.

Our Steiner Education and Values

The mission of RSSKL is to *'provide the best possible education for its pupils so they may become not only knowledgeable, but also free, secure and creative adults, with the moral strength and confidence to face the challenges of life with initiative and responsibility.'* The School teaches its children values of truth, openness and responsibility, and the School will embody these same values in everything it does going forward.

It is important to note that many children continue to enjoy a good education at RSSKL, thanks to the many committed teachers and staff who are working hard to realise that mission, and a hugely supportive parent body. The new leadership wishes to recognise that commitment and quality, and the significant progress that has already been made at the school.

There is a great deal to build on, and the School intends to do so and demonstrate to the Secretary of State and Department for Education that to close the School would be to lose a deeply valued educational institution whose values and ethos of tolerance, openness and child-centred learning exemplify many of the best qualities looked for by the Government in schools today.

The appointment of a Principal with extensive experience in school improvement and transformation is a new and radical step for the School. The new Council of Trustees believes this will ensure that the School addresses the issues highlighted above, meets and exceeds the Independent School Standards, while at the same time staying true to the ethos, principles and values of the Steiner Waldorf Education that is valued by so many children, parents and teachers, and which has an important contribution to make to education in general. The Trustees also wish to stress that in no way are those values incompatible with a School that also embodies an outstanding culture and practice of safeguarding, and is outstanding across all Independent School Standards.

While recognising the work to be done, the School feels that in the context of improvements made and the steps being put into place, de-registration of the School would be disproportionate and detrimental to the community. It is hoped that the School will be permitted the chance to demonstrate how it can and will meet and subsequently exceed all Independent School Standards, supported by strongly committed parents and a supportive community.

In its appeal, the School is confident it will show the many strengths of the School and the Steiner Waldorf education it provides, while demonstrating beyond doubt that it has rectified all past failings, learned lessons and gone on to meet and exceed the standards laid down for independent schools, in particular instilling a culture of proactive safeguarding that always puts children first and encompasses the whole school community.

The Trustees and Principal of the School are confident that the School can and will move forward and thrive, with the continued support of parents, staff and others.

The Council of Trustees

Tim Byford – Principal