The structure and security of the daily rhythm of a Steiner Kindergarten helps the children form a bridge between home and the busy world outside and builds foundations for a deep confidence and a healthy adult life.

At Beechtree, we have two kindergarten groups of up to 16 children each with a consistent teacher and assistant on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and one bigger group of up to 20 on Wednesdays and Fridays. The groups share our indoor and outdoor spaces at our premises on Moor Road in Headingley.

The Kindergarten day is structured with a rhythm based on “breathing in” and “breathing out”: of concentrated activity and free play. By maintaining this rhythm the children feel secure in the cycle of the days, weeks and months, through repetition of seasonal activities, festivals and songs.

The adults present in the Kindergarten are there to help the children to feel safe within the rhythm, to inspire self-motivated learning and to be role models worthy of imitation. One of the main principles behind the Steiner-Waldorf approach is that young children begin their learning through imitation, rather than instruction. Thus great care is put into the adults’ gestures, speech and movement in the Kindergarten.

The staff team at Beechtree are all committed to providing high quality child centred Steiner Education with an emphasis on kindness and care.

**BEGINNINGS:** We offer two options for starting the day at Beechtree; each designed to meet the needs of families today and to ensure the transition to Beechtree is as gentle as the rest of the day. These are as follows:

Breakfast Club is available from 8am where a warm breakfast of crumpets and honey is provided for the children before they begin to enjoy play with the special morning toys. There is always time for stores too until 8.45am at which time all the children are starting to arrive.

Form 8.45-9.30am the teacher welcomes each child into their Bluebell or Snowdrop kindergarten group and helps them prepare for the morning. The children can choose between joining the daily activity or begin or continue their most important work: playing!

**IT’S VERY IMPORTANT THAT ALL CHILDREN HAVE ARRIVED BY 9.30AM!!!**

**CREATIVE FREE PLAY:** This is a time for the children to “breathe out” without adult direction. Productive, imaginative play is extremely important in a child’s development. Amongst other things, play allows and strengthens independence, purpose, perseverance, social skills, enthusiasm and, of course, creative expression.

The children start their day either indoors or outdoors.

In the kindergarten room, playthings are carefully chosen and regularly cared for by adults and children. They are made from natural materials, including soft cloths, dolls, clothes-horses, planks and wooden boxes, which all serve to initiate the child’s play. We choose the toys carefully to ensure they are “unfinished”, allowing the most room possible for imaginations to develop. Fir-cones become train tickets, cake ingredients, forests, coins....anything they can be!
In the garden the children dig in the earth, play in the sandpit, explore the trees and wooded area, tend the garden or enjoy the swing from our Copper Beech tree. The adults support and observe the children, whilst caring for the garden doing practical tasks such as sweeping the paths, planting and tending vegetables and mending equipment. This allows each child to relax and play or work alongside the adults. We also go for walks together in the local area. We venture out whatever the weather.

**Activity:** Whilst some children continue to play, others will join the adults in the morning's activity. This is adult-led, and is a time for the children to ‘breathe in’. The adults doing the activity will work with the child’s capacity for learning through imitation. We call each day by it's activity name, which the children know and love, as the name of the day has real context and meaning for them. Although we value the importance of rhythm and repetition, a few times a term, there may be some flexibility with activity days, particularly around festivals and birthdays. This also allows children who come only two or three times a week to experience other activities.

**Drawing Day** - we use our crayons to draw pictures for ourselves and for one another.

**Painting Day** - we explore different colours, paints and techniques. Here, the emphasis is on the exploration of colour rather than form or the end-product, particularly when using the “wet-on-wet” technique.

**Baking Day** - we have time to watch the yeast rise in the bread, or grate, chop, squeeze and mix. We prepare food to eat at lunchtime, as well as birthday cakes or festival foods.

**Making Day** - we make a range of seasonal crafts, or continue with longer-term craft projects. Craft activities support the children initial hand-eye co-ordination and fine-motor skills. As the child grows, we gradually build on their learning, and include sewing techniques, eventually sewing a hobby horse or doll.

**Mending Day** - (a firm favourite!) allows us to take care of our equipment and help to keep it in good order, fostering care and reverence for our environment.

**Walking Day** - on Fridays the children go for a walk to Meanwood Park, and parents meet us there to pick up.

During the morning the lunch for the day is prepared by one of the kindergarten assistants with the help of the children.
**TIDY UP** At around 10.45 am, give the children some warning that it is nearly time to tidy away, so not to wrench them unsuspecting from their busy imaginary worlds. We meet together with “Tidy Gnome” and have a little snack to keep us all going. We take time to tidy up and put all the toys away in their correct places. Helping tidy is an integral part of Kindergarten, allowing the children to become responsible and to care for their own space and toys.

**RING TIME** We then make a circle, to have Ring Time, which is a period of “breathing in”. Through songs, poems and ring games, we experience our bodies, the seasons, the animals and the people that make up our world. The repeated Ring Time aids the children’s memory as they sing, act and move each day. It is a time not only to enjoy singing, but rhythm and co-operation. The songs become favourites to be sung at school or at home. We enjoy also singing songs in other languages, particularly those which may be spoken by staff and families within the kg community. After our songs, we go to the toilet together on our “Little Puffer Train”.

**LUNCH** At 12 pm we all sit down together to eat our healthy, nourishing lunch which we have prepared together that morning. A candle is lit and the candle song sung, as a small moment of quiet in a busy day and busy lives. Reverence and gratitude are encouraged in the knowledge that these qualities will later turn into a social responsibility born of respect for the world. The food is shared out, everybody knows that they must patiently wait their turn and that there will be enough for all. Practical maths is incorporated into these kinds of activities: counting, pouring, sharing, and measuring. It is also a social time, where we may listen to one another’s “News”.

**PLAY** Once more the children may breathe out, during a period of free play either inside or outside. At each transition inside/ outside, the children are encouraged to dress independently and we leave our things tidily: fostering good habits by taking care of ourselves and our belongings.

**STORY** We clean up from our busy, often messy times in the garden! We gather calmly in the story corner or roundhouse, to listen to a story told by the teacher, where the children listen and fill their imagination with pictures of the seasonal, folk or fairy tale. The story is repeated over several days, so the children grow to know and love the tale. It is a gentle, quiet time.

**AFTERNOON** After a busy morning in the Kindergarten(s) some children get ready to go home at 1.30 pm, whilst others stay for afternoon.

We start the afternoons with a peaceful rest to recharge ourselves, with time for relaxation, stories and if needed some sleep. The rhythm of the afternoon is a little quieter as the children have had a busy morning but the familiar repetition still gives the children the security they need. We have a wholesome snack which the children help prepare and we play inside and outside again with the breathing in and out routine of free play and adult lead activities such as baking, drawing and simple crafts.

Parents collect children before 5 pm, depending on their individual circumstances.

Further reading on the Steiner-Waldorf approach to the early years:-

- Rahima Baldwin Dancy, *You are your child’s first teacher* (Hawthorn Press, 2006)
- Janni Nicol & Christopher Clouder *Creative Play for your toddler* (Gaia Books, 2008)

*These books are available to borrow from the Parents’ Library, and others can be ordered from Amazon via our website, which allows 5% of the sale to be donated to Beechtree, with no additional cost to you!*  
http://steiner-leeds.org.uk/