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**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.  
Commission on Independent Schools**

July 19, 2021

Ms. Jasmine Darland  
Head of School  
Lake Champlain Waldorf School  
359 Turtle Lane  
Shelburne, VT 05482

Dear Jas,

The Commission on Independent Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges met virtually on June 21-22, 2021 and reviewed the Five-Year Interim Evaluation Report submitted by Lake Champlain Waldorf School. The Report was accepted with the expectation that a member of the NEASC Staff will visit the School this coming fall (2021) to review enrollment and the current status of the School's finances. The Report, itself, was thoughtful, thorough, detailed and clearly addressed both the Standard Specific Recommendations and the Major Recommendations. The Commission shares your concern about enrollment while also applauding the clear focus on this significant challenge. A member of our staff will contact you to arrange a time for the visit.

While there has been a complete turnover in the School's leadership since the 2016 Visit, the Report clarifies the new structures, the move to a "Head of School" model and the reinstatement of the College of Teachers to provide pedagogical leadership. In many ways, LCWS is moving to a more "professional" approach to administration, finances and faculty development and these steps all seem positive.

It is to be hoped, obviously, that the school's enrollment will return to something like the 251 number at the time of the Visit. We note that the "Board will be reassessing [the School's] long-range plan this summer in the context of all that has been accomplished and the ways those accomplishments shed new light on the path ahead...long-range planning [will achieve a new level based on] the progress made in governance, professionalism and internal communication over the past two years."

The vision of a "fully enrolled, culturally and ethnically diverse School with robust parent education..." is inspirational and the Commission commends the School's clear and healthy intentions. Finding the specific actions that will bring this vision to fruition is the challenge.

It is clear that you, as the new Head of School, have helped the faculty, Board and School take positive and creative steps forward. Such clarity as the "Interim Collegium" helped to create "broad agreement throughout the organization on how to consistently empower the College of Teachers over the next few years to allow it to grow seamlessly into the full pedagogical role we want for it..."

The Commission particularly noted: "In the summer of 2019, the Board created a new role for the Head of School overseeing both administrative and pedagogical areas [and]...also articulated a Business Administrator to more directly oversee [and] coordinate the administrative team...at this time we have a highly professional and effective administrative team and structure...."

It is hardly a secret that Waldorf Schools tend, in general, to struggle with the role and, indeed, the concept of “leadership” in the schools. It is not the position of NEASC to require specific models, however, it has been our observation that schools with a clear “Head of School” and a specific organizational framework can be highly effective. There are many ways to ensure the full understanding, engagement and commitment to common mission and the “Head of School model” can be highly effective. We do understand that many Waldorf Schools consciously seek a more “diffuse” leadership approach. While it is possible for such approaches to operate, the balance between “engagement” and “efficiency” or even “effectiveness” is sometimes quite difficult to manage. Many Waldorf Schools in our observation have adopted the Head of School model with actual increases in engagement, effectiveness and certainly efficiency. This step at LCWS seems to us a wise and positive one. And particularly so given what are obviously existential enrollment challenges.

We note the comment made on page 5 of the Report: “When we found ourselves stumped, we came back to our School’s vision and mission and to the fundamental concepts of Waldorf education. We have looked to include diverse voices in our decision-making...going so far as to hire a Head of School to consolidate authority and decision-making as we navigate this challenging chapter in our School’s life.”

Founding faculty turnover, significantly declining enrollment at the high school and a 100% new administrative team along with restructuring throughout the School, and “the result is a very high level of performance, accountability, effectiveness and buy-in for the administrative work of our School...”

With the challenges of Covid one hopes retreating and the virtual revolution in the internal structures and leadership, Lake Champlain Waldorf is poised to take a positive and optimistic step – perhaps even leap – forward. The Commission commends the courage of the Board, the imagination and energy of the new leadership team and the vision for the School’s positive future.

We very much hope this fine School will regain its strong position in the wider Burlington community and we have every hope that the future for Waldorf education – a truly important and valuable approach to the growth, creativity and value of the human mind and spirit – will be bright.

Aside from the Staff Focused Visit in the fall of 2022, and the usual Annual Reports, the next major responsibility regarding accreditation will be the decennial evaluation visit scheduled for 2026.

On behalf of the Commission and the Association, I commend you, Jas, and the entire school community for all that has been accomplished in exceedingly trying circumstances. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance as you continue your follow-up to the Self-Study and Visiting Committee Report.

Sincerely,



Jay S. Stroud  
Director

JSS:ao

cc: Christina Bell, President, Board of Trustees  
Vermont Agency of Education