



Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia

An Association

Incorporated in South Australia

ABN 88 082 942 541

1 September 2009

To All Member Schools

Dear Friends

As you are all aware, the Australian National Curriculum Framework is currently being developed by the Federal Government as part of the Education Revolution of the Rudd Government. Compliance with this National Curriculum is mandatory for all independent schools as a condition of federal funding (Schools Assistance Act, 2008).

What does this mean for Steiner Schools?

Steiner schools, like all independent schools, depend on government funding for sustainability. Of this the largest part comes from the Federal Government. Continuance of funding relies on legal compliance. Registration of independent schools also depends on compliance.

All independent schools were required to sign their agreement to this legislative requirement in January 2009. At this stage, the only detail we had as to what might be contained in the National Curriculum documents (English, History, Science and Mathematics) was contained in Framing papers of broad general principles.

The RSSA and its representatives engaged fully with the consultative processes being offered by the National Curriculum Board – attending forums, writing submissions and providing detailed feedback to the framing papers. Our goal was, and continues to be, to have input into the rationale, form and content of the national documents at every stage.

The National Curriculum detailed content documents for English, Mathematics, Science and History are now being written and will be ready in draft form by the end of 2009. There will be opportunities for further consultation and feedback for the first three months of 2010 and it is anticipated that the final curriculum documents will be ready by mid 2010 and then distributed around all Australian schools ready for implementation in 2011.

However compliance with this National Curriculum, whatever its eventual form, is seen as one of the greatest challenges Steiner education has faced in this country. The essential question for the RSSA has been how to negotiate our way through these demands in such a way that we can remain true to our educational philosophy, our curriculum and most importantly the development of the children enrolled in our schools.

Possibilities

At the time of the passage of the Bill at the end of last year, it was stated by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julie Gillard that she would seek advice from the National Curriculum Board on a national “recognition” process, which would identify legitimate internationally recognised curricula which were already being offered in Australia – Montessori, Steiner, International Baccalaureate, and the Cambridge University Examinations - and determine whether these curricula could be regarded as equivalent or comparable to the National Curriculum – and therefore compliant.

This possibility has been the one the RSSA has been focussing on. Clearly if we can achieve comparability for our Steiner curriculum, we will secure optimum protection for our curriculum and its underlying educational principles. For the past nine months, ongoing meetings and conversations have been held by RSSA representatives with senior representatives of the National Curriculum Board (now known as the ACARA Board). From these meetings a number of facts have been ascertained:

- “Exemption” for Steiner Schools is not an option
- If agreement can be reached between the RSSA and ACARA on “equivalency” and “comparable educational outcomes, there will be a national “sign-off” with the peak body for Steiner Education (RSSA)
- Only RSSA member schools would be considered as compliant under the above agreement
- ACARA is only interested in identifying the process – State registration and accreditation bodies would still make the assessment as to whether the Steiner curriculum was being delivered
- The process is likely to be based around comparability (or equivalence) of a Steiner National Curriculum Framework against the Australian National Curriculum Framework

A working party of the ACARA Board was set up in July to design the process. It has been presented to the Board this month in a draft form and the RSSA has been invited to a meeting with Board members later this month – to give further input and feedback

What do we need to do now?

There are a number of common resource documents and books that teachers in Australian Steiner/Waldorf schools use. Furthermore each school has its own curriculum documentation which is often freely shared with other Steiner schools. However the fact is that there is no national Steiner Curriculum Framework as such.

The need for such a document as an overall guideline for our schools has been brought up from time to time over the past years, as something which would be very helpful but the scope of such a project has always been too daunting

Now however, the situation has changed.

In order to achieve national recognition by the Federal Government, the clear indications are that we will be required to table a National Steiner Curriculum Framework.

A national meeting of delegates’ from our 40 member schools was held recently at the Central Coast Steiner School. This whole issue was discussed. Options were considered. Accepting the mainstream national curriculum could put our whole Steiner approach in jeopardy. A school-by-school approach could have appealed to a few Steiner schools some years ago, but that was not seen as being the way forward now. There was very strong support for the view that we should accept the invitation of Julia Gillard and the ACARA Board to table our alternative to the National Curriculum framework for examination, evaluation and acceptance.

Whilst we are undertaking this project as a response to an external situation, it was also strongly felt we should approach it as a unique opportunity to be pro-active – to self-reflect and to write our “ideal” curriculum framework – one which identifies our core educational principles and shows how they inform the curriculum. Such a document would fulfil many objectives – support for new teachers, reflection for more experienced teachers, inspiration and insight for parents, clarity for the wider education community and a great opportunity for growth and development for Steiner education in Australia.

So the decision has been taken to grasp this opportunity with both hands. Between now and mid 2010, a Steiner National Curriculum framework will be written and published. A draft process was presented by the Executive of the RSSA and was accepted by the membership. The project will be staged and overseen by a Project Manager.

What do we need?

The biggest need is of course resourcing – human and financial. We will be asking for expressions of interest shortly for the key roles in this process. We encourage people in your school community with the relevant skills (which will be stated in the documents sent to schools shortly) to apply.

An immediate need is money to get the whole project rolling. It was decided at the meeting that the financing of this would be a 2-stage process:

Stage 1 2009

- The RSSA will set up a National Curriculum Fund with an initial amount (additional to this year's budget) of \$10,000.
- The RSSA Executive will write to each school community to ask for an amount of up to \$1000 **immediately**. We realise that this is also an unbudgeted item and therefore some schools may find the full amount difficult but we would ask schools to explore different means of raising this money – private donations, P&F contributions, etc – as this is of vital importance to all children in our schools

Stage 2 2010

- The RSSA Executive would ask that each school make provision in their 2010 budget for a provision of a special levy of \$10.00 extra per child. As present it is difficult to forecast what the eventual cost will be, but rather than underestimate and then have to ask schools for a further unbudgeted amount, it was considered prudent to provide for a larger amount which may not be fully drawn down

We are delighted to report that without even receiving this letter, two schools have already responded positively to this initial request – a great gesture of support.

These additional funds will be treated as donations and no GST applies. Donations should be sent either by:

- Cheque – make out to Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia and write “National Curriculum Fund” on the reverse side of the cheque. The cheque should be sent to the Finance Officer, RSSA, 19 Dunstan Street, Aldinga Beach, SA 5173
- Direct deposit to Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia
BSB 704 191 AC# 149 606
(Put “NC Fund” in the reference field Don't forget to identify the name of the school)

Where to from here?

Steiner education already holds a respected position in the educational landscape. Having a National Steiner Curriculum Framework, which is formally recognised and endorsed by the Federal and State authorities, will only enhance that acknowledgment.

Our theme for our recent delegates' meeting was “*Freedom and Co-operation*” An interesting picture was brought in that regard – that real freedom only arises in co-operation. Now is the time for that level of co-operation!

With kind regards

Jeff Onans

Rosemary Gentle