



CHRYsalis SCHOOL
for Rudolf Steiner Education



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Rudolf Steiner School ?

Rudolf Steiner education is a unique and distinctive approach to educating children that is practised in Steiner, or Waldorf, schools world wide. Steiner schools collectively form the largest, and quite possibly the fastest growing, group of independent private schools in the world. There is no centralised administrative structure governing all the Steiner schools in Australia; each is administratively independent. However, there is an association (Rudolf Steiner Schools Association) established in Australia which provides support, resources, sponsorship for conferences and promotion of the movement in Government circles; most Steiner schools join this association. Similar associations are also operating overseas.

What is unique about Steiner Education? How is it different from other alternatives (State, Catholic etc)?

The best overall statement on what is unique about Steiner education is to be found in the stated goals of the schooling: "to produce individuals who are able, in and of themselves, to impart meaning to their lives". The aim of Steiner schools is to educate the whole child - head, heart and hands. The curriculum is as broad as time will allow, and balances academic subjects with artistic and practical activities. Steiner teachers are dedicated to creating a genuine love of learning within each child. By freely using arts and activities in the service of teaching academics, an internal motivation to learn is developed in the students, doing away with the need for competitive testing and grading.

Some distinctive features of Steiner schools include the following:

- academics are de-emphasised in the early years of schooling. There is no academic content in the Steiner Kindergarten (although there is a good deal of cultivation of pre-academic skills), and minimal academics in the first class. Reading is not taught until second or third class, though letters are introduced carefully in first and second.
- during the primary school years (classes 1 to 6) the students have a class teacher who stays with the same class for (ideally) the entire seven years of primary school.
- certain activities which are often considered "frills" at mainstream schools are central at Steiner schools: art, music, gardening and foreign languages to name a few. In the younger classes all subjects are introduced through artistic mediums because the children respond better to this than dry lecturing and rote learning. All children learn to play the recorder and to knit.
- there are no textbooks as such in the first to fifth or sixth grades. All children have "main lesson" books which are their own workbooks and which they fill in during the year. They essentially produce their own "textbooks" which record their experiences and what they've learned. Upper classes use textbooks to supplement main lesson work.
- learning in a Steiner school is a non-competitive activity. There are no grades given in primary school but the teacher may write an evaluation of the child at the end of each year.
- the use of electronic media, particularly television, by young children is strongly discouraged in Steiner schools.

What is the curriculum of a Steiner School like?

The Steiner curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of a child's development. The relationship between student and teacher is, likewise, recognised to be both crucial and changing throughout the course of childhood and early adolescence. The main subjects, such as maths, history, language, science and English are taught in main lesson blocks

of two hours each morning, normally of three weeks duration. The total Steiner curriculum has been likened to an ascending spiral: subjects are revisited several times, but each new exposure affords greater depth and new insights into the subject at hand. A typical lower primary curriculum could be:

Primary Classes from 1 – 3

- pictorial introduction to the alphabet, writing, reading, spelling, poetry and drama
- fables, legends and folk stories
- numbers, mathematical processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
- nature stories, house building and gardening

Primary Classes from 4 - 6

- writing, reading, spelling, grammar, poetry and drama
- Norse myths, history & stories of ancient civilizations
- review of the four maths processes, fractions, percentages and geometry
- local and world geography, comparative zoology, botany and elementary physics

Classes from 7 – 8

- creative writing, reading, spelling, grammar, poetry and drama
- medieval history, world exploration, American history and biology
- geography, physics, basic chemistry, astronomy, geology and physics
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Special subjects also taught are:

Handwork:	knitting, crochet, sewing, cross stitch, basic weaving, toy making and woodwork
Music:	theory, singing, flute, recorder, pentatonic, stringed instruments
Foreign language:	ideally one Asian and one European
Art:	wet-on-wet water colour painting, form drawing, beeswax and clay modelling, perspective drawing.
Movement:	eurythmy, group games

How did Steiner Education get started?

In 1919, Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher, scientist and artist, was invited to give a series of lectures to the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. As a result, the factory's owner, Emil Molt asked Dr Steiner to establish and lead a school for the children of the factory's employees. Steiner agreed to do so on four conditions:

the school should be open to all children; it should be co-educational; it should be a unified twelve year school; and that the teachers, those who would be working directly with the children, should take the leading role in running the school, with a minimum of interference from the government or economic concerns. Molt agreed to the conditions and, after a training period for the prospective teachers, die Waldorfschule (the Free Waldorf School) was opened on 7 September 1919.

What is the philosophy behind Steiner Education

Consistent with his philosophy called Anthroposophy, Steiner designed a curriculum responsive to the developmental phases of childhood and nurturing of the child's imagination. He thought that schools should cater to the needs of children rather than the demands of the government or economic forces so he developed schools that encourage creativity and free-thinking.

Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Dr Steiner was a highly respected and well-published scientific, literary and philosophical scholar who was particularly known for his work on Goethe's scientific writings. He later came to incorporate his scientific investigations with his interest in spiritual development. He became a forerunner in the field of spiritual-scientific investigations for the modern 20th century individual. It is a deeply insightful application of learning based on the study of humanity with developing consciousness of self and the surrounding world.

What is Anthroposophy?

The term "Anthroposophy" comes from the Greek "anthropos-sophia" or "human wisdom". Steiner expanded an exacting scientific method by which one could do research for her/himself into the spiritual worlds. Such investigation, known as Spiritual Science, is an obvious complement to the Natural Sciences we have come to accept. Through study and practised observations, one awakens to his/her own inner nature and the spiritual realities of outer nature and the cosmos. The awareness of those relationships brings a greater reverence for all of life.

Steiner and many individuals since, who share his basic views have applied this knowledge in various practical and cultural ways in communities around the world. Most notably, the schools have made a significant impact on the world. Curative education for mentally and emotionally handicapped adults and children, has established a deep understanding and work with people who have this difficult destiny. Biodynamic farming and gardening greatly expand the range of techniques available to organic agriculture. Anthroposophical medicine and pharmacy, although less widely known, are subjects growing in interest. It should be noted that while Anthroposophy forms the theoretical basis to the teaching methods used in Steiner schools, it is not taught to students.

How is reading taught in a Steiner School? Why do the students wait until Class 2 before they begin to learn how to read?

Steiner education is deeply bound up with the oral tradition, typically beginning with the teacher telling the children fairy tales or stories throughout Kindergarten and class 1. The oral approach is used all through Steiner education: mastery of oral communication is seen as being integral to all learning. Instruction in reading, as such, is deferred. Instead, writing is taught first. During the first year the children explore how our alphabet came about, discovering, as the ancients did, how each letter's form evolved out of a pictograph. Writing thus evolves out of the children's art, and their ability to read likewise evolves as a natural and, indeed, comparatively effortless stage of their mastery of language.

Why are festivals and ceremonies important in Steiner Schools?

Seasonal festivals serve to connect humanity with the rhythms of nature and the cosmos. The festivals originated in ancient cultures but have been adapted over time. To join the seasonal moods of the year in a festival way, benefits the inner life of the soul. Celebrating is an art. There is joy in the anticipation, preparation, the celebration itself and the ceremonies. The four seasonal festivals are Michaelmas (Spring), Christmas (Summer), Easter (Autumn) and St John (winter).

Why do Steiner Schools discourage television?

The reasons for this have as much to do with the physical effects of the medium on the developing child as with the questionable content of the programs. Electronic media are believed by Steiner teachers to seriously hamper the development of the child's imagination - a faculty which is believed to be central to the healthy development of the individual.

Computer use by young children is also discouraged. Steiner teachers are not alone in this belief. Several books have been written in recent years expressing concern with the effects of television on young children. For example, "Endangered Minds" by Jane Healy, "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television" by Jerry Mander and "The Plug in Drug" by Marie Winn are a few books that are available on this subject.

Why do teachers stay with one class for seven years ?

Between the ages of seven to fourteen the child learns best through acceptance and emulation of authority, just as in their early years they learned through imitation. In primary school particularly in the lower classes, the child is just beginning to expand his or her experience beyond family or home. The class becomes a type of "family" as well, with its own authority figure - the teacher - in a role analogous to parent. With this approach the students and teachers come to know each other very well and the teachers is able to find over the years the best ways of helping individual children in their schooling.

What kinds of training do Steiner teachers have ?

Requirements for individual schools vary and mandatory state qualifications may also apply. Ideally, teachers will have a degree in education or other tertiary qualifications and have completed a teacher training course. However, an experienced Steiner teacher is generally the most important criteria for schools when they are selecting a new teacher. There are several accredited teacher training courses in Australia and the University of New England offers some Steiner units in their Bachelor of Education course. Some schools also offer in-house teacher training courses that help to give prospective teachers an idea of what is involved before they take on a seven year commitment with a class. In a lecture Dr Steiner gave in 1922, he defined "three golden rules" for teachers: "to receive the child in gratitude from the world it comes from, to educate the child with love, and to lead the child into the true freedom which belongs to man".

How is a personality conflict handled between students and teachers?

This is a very common concern among parents when they first hear about the "class teacher" method. However, in practice the situation seems to arise very rarely especially so when the teacher has been able to establish a relationship with the class right from the very beginning. If problems of this sort do occur, College works with the teacher and child or family to determine and undertake whatever corrective action would be in the best interests of the child and of the class.

Are Steiner Schools religious?

In the sense of prescribing to the beliefs of a particular religious denomination or sect, no they are not. Steiner schools tend to be spiritually oriented and are generally based on a Christian perspective. The historical festivals of Christianity and other major religions may be observed in the class room and school assemblies. Classes in religious doctrine are part of the Steiner curriculum and children of all religious backgrounds attend Steiner schools. Spiritual guidance is aimed at awakening the child's natural reverence for the wonder and beauty of life.

How well do Steiner students fare if they transfer to another system, like the state schools?

Generally, transitions to public schools are not problematic. Transitions in lower classes may give rise to some difficulties because of the significant differences in the *pacing* of various curriculum. For example, a child coming from class 2 in the state system will be further ahead in reading compared to the Steiner student in the same class. However, a Steiner student may well be ahead in other areas of study. Generally speaking, the reading differentiation diminishes as the child progresses into the middle primary years and disappears altogether by the end of this phase.

How do Steiner graduates get a place at Universities and how well do they fit in?

Anecdotal evidence from past students of Chrysalis clearly demonstrate that the Steiner education process as presented by dedicated and caring teachers provides an excellent foundation upon which future studies may be built.

The Mt Barker Waldorf School in Adelaide has had tremendous success with the placement of students who want to go onto university. In fact, the universities are so impressed with these students they accept them on the basis of their year 12 final projects and the teacher's recommendation. Some Mt Barker students have also gained university places in other states. The feedback from universities suggests that the Steiner students have a joy and enthusiasm for learning compared to other students and makes the transition to tertiary studies more readily. Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School, in Sydney offers the Higher School Certificate and is ranked in the top 40 private schools in NSW. Their graduates have gone onto many varied fields of tertiary study.

What is eurythmy?

Put simply, eurythmy is a dance-like art form in which music or speech are expressed in bodily movement; specific movements correspond to particular notes or sounds. It has been called "visible speech" or "visible song".

Eurythmy is part of the curriculum of all Steiner schools and while it often puzzles parents new to the school, children respond to its simple rhythms and exercises which help them strengthen and harmonise their body and life forces.

Later the older students work out elaborate eurythmic presentations of poetry, drama and music, thereby gaining a deeper perception of the compositions and writings. Eurythmy enhances co-ordination and strengthens the ability to listen. When children experience themselves like an orchestra and have to keep a clear relationship in space with each other, a social strengthening also results.