

***The Special Character
of
Waikato Waldorf School***





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- ◆ General comments
- ◆ Indicators of Special Character
- ◆ Annual Plan: Special Character strand 2008
- ◆ Draft Special Character Review document

General comment

Special Character is a term used in New Zealand to describe the differences between a secular state school and schools that have a religious or philosophical basis for their education. It relates to the style, the delivery and the content of the education; and the structure of the school (within the legal parameters set by the Crown).

Waldorf (Steiner) education is based on the teaching of Rudolf Steiner and his philosophy. In an integrated school, the proprietors (RSSWT) have the responsibility to determine (provide meaning of), safe guard and maintain the special character of the school.

The RSSWT must remain convinced that the special character of the school is being maintained or must act to have the integration deed revoked. The RSSWT must provide to the Board of Trustees (BoT) its special character 'blue print', and through the mandatory RSSWT appointees on the BoT, and in review processes, ensure that the teaching staff and Principal are implementing its requirements.

RSSWT review of the implementation will be held annually, as will community consultation around special character as part of the Annual Plan consultation.

All those connected to the WWS have a responsibility to uphold special character and that responsibility is declared in the Integration Agreement. This includes the RSSWT, the BoT, principal, teaching staff, parents and students. This responsibility is made clear to staff in all employment agreements and job descriptions, and to parents in the enrolment interview.

Special character is indivisible from education in a Waldorf school. It is also evident in the environment, the buildings and the ethos of the school. The underlying Anthroposophical principles of the education should receive due recognition in the school.

Parent education is important for the health of the school, and so that parents can support the WWS special character. Information will be provided by the RSSWT to parents, and the RSSWT will assist class teachers where possible. Parents and teachers also have their own journey as the children are 'educated', and it is this journey that makes up much of the fabric and heart of a healthy school.

The RSSWT aims to provide buildings that meet generally held Waldorf design and colour principles as much as finances will allow. Review of this aspect will occur annually.



The most important aspect to consider is the special character of the education.

Principles or Indicators of special character are found in three ways:

- **In Rudolf Steiner's writing**
- **In the writings of innumerable Waldorf teachers**
- **As is currently practised in Steiner Schools**

(Where a practice has developed that is not referred to in any known Rudolf Steiner publications, it is deemed 'legitimate special character' because it has become common practice. Both are equally relevant – Legal advice to the Federation of Steiner Schools NZ, Mr P Green, 2007)

Special Character and Education

Steiner education rests on a concept of the universal pattern of child development. While there are trends in common, each child is an individual and has their own destiny to pursue.

'The central task of education... is to strengthen the "I", the spiritual core of each individual child. Education seeks to assist the "I" integrate itself into its bodily organism, its rhythms and processes and to establish faculties with which to express itself and help it relate to the world and other people in a socially fruitful way. The spiritual core of the individual and his or her life of thinking, feeling and willing have to grow together with the organism, in what Steiner referred to as the path of incarnation. This central task therefore is to stimulate and direct the child's self activity within the learning process. Its goal is to support individuals as they progressively learn to direct and take responsibility for their own learning process.'

*Rawson and Richter
The Educational Task & Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum*

Essential Features of Education in the WWS

- Education is teacher led
- The spiritual dimension to education
- The main lesson
- The threefold nature of the human being and the development of the child in relationship to the teaching
- The place of Rhythm
- Integration of the artistic into all lessons
- The collegiate of teachers
- Parental will/commitment



The Place of the Teacher

Education is teacher led: the curriculum provides a frame work. The essence of education will come from the teachers study, preparation and inspiration based on their insight into the children

- The class teacher and the long term relationship between the teacher and the class is of profound importance. Where possible the teacher will accompany the class through class 1 – class 7.
- The central task of education is to acknowledge the spirit within each child. The teacher carries a responsibility to know each child's inner being and so be able to bring what each child may need at anytime. The teacher gains a deep insight into the children through ongoing study of child development, observation, and reflection on the children.
- The teacher has a responsibility to work with imitation in the first seven years, to work with creativity and imagination in the second seven years, to develop thinking in the third seven years; and to integrate this into the education.
- The teacher will reflect on the child and support and unfold the individuality within. They will take into account the attributes of child development such as the temperaments, the constitution, the twelve senses etc.
- The teacher will nourish and protect the state of childhood for each child.

Main Lesson

The human being has a threefold nature of thinking, feeling and willing; and each aspect is addressed in the main lesson. The main lesson occurs each morning and has its own reliable rhythm. This includes review of previous days teaching, new material and individual student action (book work).

A healthy main lesson integrates willing, feeling and thinking in many ways.

Main lesson content must be age appropriate. The timetable will be set to enable main lessons and the cyclical nature of subjects and resting periods.

Artistic education: Our school pupils are in the feeling realm of development. Effective teaching involves engaging the imagination through pictures and parables rather than through analysis as children develop through perception rather than a rational understanding.



The Importance of Beauty and Artistic Work

The threefold nature of man (willing, feeling and thinking) has specific ideals of goodness, beauty and truth set by Plato and expounded by Rudolf Steiner. In the first seven years or so children see the world as a place of goodness and learn through imitation and activity. Our feeling through the heart realm can lead us to beauty and to the joy of life.

From ages 7/14 years, in the feeling element, children learn most naturally through beauty – visual and aural. All aspects of work are accompanied by artistic work – painting and drawing in true colour, modelling, eurythmy, and music. “Children of all ages learn better if their emotions are engaged through beauty, both experienced from without and expressed from within”. *June Cunningham, Working with Curriculum in Australian Steiner Schools, pg 26.*

Festivals

- Festivals integrate the cultural and spiritual ethos of a Waldorf School and celebrate the essence of life. Festivals mark the Christian and seasonal rhythms of the year. Teachers and class preparation in the week leading up to the festival reinforce meaning in the event e.g. Advent, solstice, harvest, Easter.
- Festivals will involve the community.

Rhythm

- Teaching and curriculum work with rhythm observing the main lesson rhythm and the 3 day rhythm of learning. The structure of the day works with the natural rhythm of breathing in and breathing out.
- The daily, weekly and termly timetables observe rhythm so that children have security in the pattern of their days.
- Festivals mark the rhythms of the seasons.

Teachers’ Professional Environment

“Teachers meetings should be seen as a research cluster where the Waldorf impulse is carried forward changing with the time and circumstances and is non-prescriptive.”

Brian Masters

A weekly meeting of teaching staff that empowers each and every teacher to be independent thinking and a confident Waldorf teacher.

A meeting where there is a collegial approach to knowledge sharing, and that fosters reflection and insight into the child and curriculum.



Essential Features of Special Character in the RSSWT Kindergartens

The child from ages one to seven years has been described as wholly sense-organ, and that in this period the physical forms of the organs are developing. The kindergarten child enters an environment that builds and moulds the physical organs responsible for gross and fine motor skills, oral and aural skills, and socialising. Pleasure and delight are the forces which most rightly quicken and call forth the physical forms of the organs. "The child who lives in ... an atmosphere of warmth and love and who has around him really good examples for his imitation is living in his right element."

Rudolf Steiner, The education of the Child in the Light of Anthroposophy, pg. 28.

Learning in the kindergarten, is found in every activity and is not separated out.

Identifying Features

Kindergartners

- ❖ Strive to provide examples of behaviour, action and speech that are worthy of imitation
- ❖ Engender a sense of reverence for the world
- ❖ Develop an atmosphere of warmth and caring
- ❖ Provide opportunities for motor skill development
- ❖ Develop a partnership with parents
- ❖ Provide access to resources that are age appropriate
- ❖ Encourage creative and imaginative play
- ❖ Nourish and protect the state of childhood for each child
- ❖ Work with rhythm, music, movement
- ❖ The teacher will reflect on the child and support and unfold the individuality within. They will take into account the attributes of child development such as the temperaments, the constitution, the twelve senses etc.

Daily Rhythm

- ❖ Daily activity (water colour wet painting, beeswax, cleaning, drawing, baking, each on a set day)
- ❖ Circle time: focus on language, singing, music, movement, seasonal themes
- ❖ Outside Play
- ❖ Story Time age appropriate fable or fairy story repeated for at least one week
- ❖ Lunch Time, and when younger children will leave
- ❖ Rest Time
- ❖ Afternoon sessions for older children with pre-academic activities.



Room for the Imagination: Play is critical to development

- ❖ Use of simple and natural building materials and objects
- ❖ No electronic items, or words in print
- ❖ Use of puppets
- ❖ Access to gardens, lawn, trees, sand, water
- ❖ Play occurs inside and outside
- ❖ Skipping and traditional movement and singing games

Physical Environment: Domestic setting

- ❖ Mixed age groups
- ❖ Food prepared by teacher during class and with children
- ❖ Cleaning tasks performed in class
- ❖ Warm colour and natural fibre interiors and furniture
- ❖ Sharing food sitting at a table

Reverence

- ❖ Natures seasons
- ❖ Festivals
- ❖ Prayer/grace at meal time
- ❖ Verse in Morning circle

Social Skills

- ❖ Cooperation through creative play
- ❖ Responsibility in domestic tasks
- ❖ Learning through imitation

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