



Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia

An Association

Incorporated in South Australia

ABN 88 082 942 541

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS INQUIRY INTO THE SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE BILL 2008 AND THE EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

*SUBMISSION BY
RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOLS OF AUSTRALIA – an ASSOCIATION*

About our association

Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia – an Association represents 31 independent Steiner schools in Australia. Included also in our network as Associate members are Parsifal College (adult education and teacher training provider), the Association for Rudolf Steiner Curative Education (special education) and the Australian Association for Rudolf Steiner Early Childhood Education (playgroups, pre-schools and kindergartens).

Current world context

Steiner education is part of a global educational movement which since its inception in 1919, has gained steadily in popularity and respect and has spread around the world. Today there are 1000 schools and 1600 kindergartens in 66 countries across every culture and continent. Recent expansion has taken place in Eastern European countries and in Asia – including Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, India, the Philippines and most recently mainland China. In every country, Steiner schools are regulated, monitored and approved by the relevant government authorities. In each country, the Steiner curriculum and methodology respects and adapts itself to the local culture, traditions and beliefs, whilst still reflecting our global and consistent picture of child development.

Australian context

Steiner education has been in Australia for 50 years. It has grown steadily over the years, showing an enrolment growth from 1996 – 2006 of 58%. Of our 31 schools, 11 currently offer both primary and secondary education. Whilst there are some larger schools in city areas, the average size of our schools is approximately 175 students. Fees are generally low to medium, depending on SES scores. It is of interest to note also that apart from independent Steiner schools, there are also Steiner “streams” in 10 State schools primarily in Victoria but also in South Australia.

Educational context

Globally Steiner schools share a core curriculum and methodology, which is based on the picture of child development and learning pathways given originally by Dr. Rudolf Steiner and sustained and developed by further research over the past 80 years. The approach is an integrated and holistic one, placing emphasis on supporting healthy growth across a range of areas – physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. Child-readiness is an important benchmark for the introduction of skills, knowledge and activities.

The educational principles of Steiner education are universally valued and recognised and are aligned with current directions in educational research and practice. Whilst the delivery methods of Steiner education may differ, the standard of education reached is high.

Schools Assistance Bill 2008

Our major concern:

Implementation of the National Curriculum

- In general terms, we are being asked to sign off on a curriculum which has not yet been developed as a condition of funding
- More specifically, the integrity of our curriculum, methodology and educational pathway - which our parents consciously choose for their children - could be under threat
- Whilst our association has been actively engaged in the consultation phase of the development of the National Curriculum (arguing for the greatest degree of flexibility possible which would accommodate our needs) there is no protection in the legislation for pedagogies such as ours. Nor is there any assurance in the legislation that the recommendations of the National Curriculum Board, whatever they might eventually be, will be adopted.
- There is a lack of clarity around compliance with a “mandatory” National Curriculum as a condition of funding (as stated in the legislation), and the statement in the most recent discussion paper from the NCB “The Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion” which states: “All states and territories currently have processes by which schools can be accredited to offer something other than their relevant state or territory curriculum.....such provisions could continue in the presence of a national curriculum, though that would still remain a matter for the states and territories” registration authorities.” This ambiguity leaves pedagogies such as ours very much in a grey area - we would ask that our difficulty be taken into consideration and that the Regulations will address and clarify this issue.

On other matters, we state that we are in support of the position as outlined in the detailed ISCA submission to this Inquiry.

Rosemary Gentle
Executive Officer
Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia
30th October 2008.

