

The Age

Inquiry request into Steiner funds 'diversion'

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VICTORIA'S financial watchdog has been asked to investigate public schools that offer the Steiner curriculum, amid claims that hundreds of thousands of dollars have been misappropriated at one inner-city school to boost the specialised learning program.

Parents from Footscray City Primary School have written to Auditor-General Des Pearson after documents obtained under freedom-of-information laws suggested more than \$500,000 had been diverted from parents' fees and the school's general budget to subsidise the Steiner stream.

Under the Steiner system — based on teachings of 20th-century Austrian educationist Rudolf Steiner — children have the same teacher for the first seven years, learn more about spirituality and are discouraged from using computers or watching television.

But parents claim the Steiner program, including a teaching course and \$25,000 internship, is being heavily subsidised by funds that they argue should have been spent on mainstream programs.

"If money is being moved around — that's a diversion and misappropriation of funds ... That's unconscionable," said Cornelius Chidlow, one of the parents who alerted the Auditor-General.

Parents have also claimed:

- * \$75,000 was diverted from the school's budget to subsidise a Steiner literacy program.

- * Payment was made for a parent to undertake "voluntary" work.

- * About \$20,000 was used for extra Steiner supplies, furniture and building changes.

The school's acting principal, Annia Dear, said the school's council was looking at the matter.

The Auditor-General's office did not return *The Age's* calls.