



## Illegal Steiner school forced to shut doors

By Linda Doherty, Education Writer

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The NSW Board of Studies has forced a Steiner primary school operating illegally in Leichhardt to close after it failed to supervise unqualified staff or meet minimum curriculum standards.

The Michael School, which had operated for 17 years under Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner's spiritual and creative principles, is the only NSW school the Board of Studies has deregistered through legal action in the past three years.

The 18 students were forced to find new schools, and a Supreme Court injunction prevents its teacher, Diane Watkin, from operating a school in NSW unless she meets registration rules.

Ms Watkin said last night that the Board of Studies had changed its requirements "periodically", and information management requirements had "got out of control worldwide".

"The loss of registration is not a disgrace," she said. "Lots of schools have fallen in and out of registration."

The Supreme Court issued the injunction on April 9, about the same time as a report to the State Government recommended that registration procedures for non-government schools be "strengthened considerably".

The Review of Non-Government Schools in NSW, by Warren Grimshaw, the director of the Coffs Harbour Education Campus, criticised current requirements that include teaching the minimum approved curriculum, having qualified teachers and supervising untrained staff, providing adequate school facilities and discipline policies that ban corporal punishment.

Mr Grimshaw recommended that NSW's 901 non-government schools - attended by 29 per cent of students - should be established as legal entities, have "good character" provisions for owners, managers and staff, and report annually to the education minister on academic performance and school finances.

The Board of Studies took legal action against The Michael School when it continued operating this year without registration. The six-year registration had expired on December 31, and holding classes after that time meant it was operating illegally.

"In March 2002, the Board of Studies initiated Supreme Court proceedings in view of evidence that an unregistered school was operating from The Michael School's premises," the board said in a statement.

The board had recommended against re-registering the school after inspectors last year "identified areas" where the school did not comply with the Education Act.

The school, run by Ms Watkin in Wetherill Street, Leichhardt, could not provide evidence that it met minimum curriculum requirements "relating to teaching programs in all learning areas" or "had a program for supervision of unqualified staff", a board spokesman said.

The Michael School was one of 17 Steiner schools in NSW where children are nurtured to learn through Steiner's concept of "head, heart and hands", which encourages freedom, imagination and creativity.

Although the schools follow Steiner's philosophy and the Waldorf School model he established in Germany in 1919, they each have independent administrations and have no formal links.

*This story was found at:*

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/04/21/1019233296887.html>