

# Starting A Steiner School

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From Steiner Schools in Australia

([www.steiner-australia.org](http://www.steiner-australia.org))

## Introduction:

As the author of the Steiner Schools in Australia web site, I am often asked for information on how to go about starting a school. I am certainly not an expert, but I have been involved in one way or another with several Steiner schools from their beginnings, and I would like to share some of the information and knowledge I have gathered over the years.

I would like this to be a living, growing source of information, so please send me any suggestions, information or hints you may have.

The Bursar's Group of the Rudolf Steiner Schools Association has published an excellent book entitled

## "Administration Handbook for Rudolf Steiner Schools in Australia"

There is a cost for this book and it is not for sale to the general public. Contact the bursar at Mt Barker Steiner School on (08) 8391 0411 for more information.

There is no central authority for setting up and running Steiner Schools, so the impulse needs to come from your local community. Contact your nearest existing Steiner school, they may well be happy to support new initiatives by providing guest speakers, information on the curriculum, and also be a mentor to your group.

It is not an easy task, but to create something that you can see grow and develop over time is very rewarding, especially knowing that not only are you providing an alternative education, but in some small way making a real and lasting change to our society.

## The Core Group:

The energy in a Steiner group is spiritual, and the people who come together have a destiny in common, and are linked by the shared vision. The core group needs to be formed around this vision, whether it be starting a school, developing a garden at an existing school, or an agricultural project. This vision must be nurtured and fed not only through the social contact of the group members, but also by developing your common goals, acceptance of new ideas, and by studying and deepening your understanding of the works of Rudolf Steiner.

For the vision to come to fruition, it must be underpinned by the growth and development of the group. One way of achieving this is to start a Study Group which meets regularly to read and discuss one of Steiner's works, or one by another author on Steiner education such as "Teaching as a Lovely Art" by Marjorie Spock.

To be able to spread your vision and bring it into being, you need to let the public know what you are trying to do and why, and one of the best ways to do this is to organise regular information sessions.

## Information Sessions:

within legal and financial constraints, the school fulfils its mission. The board of management committee is run via a system of mandates. That is, a system whereby members are authorised to be responsible for particular tasks. The mandate system is opposite to the hierarchical structure, in that mandates exist when all are on equal standing and have equal rights, with just different responsibilities. Decision-making is run along democratic principles, where people with equal rights discuss issues until consensus is reached.

The third organ of Steiner schools lies in the Spiritual / cultural sphere and is called 'the Faculty' or 'College of Teachers'. Members of this group include everybody who looks at his / her task as pedagogical (the function, work or art of a teacher). It is the area where freedom is highly valued and every member of that organ must have the opportunity and freedom to express every point of view related to spiritual life. Spiritual considerations are consciously cultivated. There is an on-going commitment of the members to work within the school, to work with the colleagues in the school and a determination to maintain the quality, depth and professionalism of the teaching. The organ is responsible for, and oversees all programs and curriculum requirements, and the members tasks include the study of pedagogical texts, working on the festival life of the school, learning how to study a child, class discussions and so on. Decision-making is made again by consensus so that although everyone may not agree on a certain point, the process has been one in which every person has made the best effort to find the truth and each person is satisfied with the decision.

It can be seen that the three organs of a Steiner school work together, each with its own area of responsibility. Rather than a bureaucratic system of organisation, the school is seen as a partnership, with people who are responsible to each other and to the school. These people take responsibility for their actions and do not 'pass the buck' to an overriding authority, such as a Principal.

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Make up a calendar of events for the next 6 or 12 months, with a session perhaps every 4-6 weeks presenting information on general Steiner education, why parents should consider Steiner education, how it is different to mainstream education, etc. You could also run talks on craft, painting, or workshops on doll-making, etc depending on the interest from your group. Try to vary the time and day of the week you run these sessions so everyone who would like to attend gets the opportunity.

To advertise the Information Sessions, make up a flier and spread them as widely as your resources permit. We have found the best response comes from giving one to each family at Kindergartens (they usually have a "pocket" system set up for notices). Putting fliers on Kindergarten notice boards doesn't seem to work.

Also put them up in libraries, community centres, organic fruit shops, health shops, etc. They need to have a "Steiner" look which will help catch people's eye, so it needs to be artistic and coloured, perhaps with rainbow colours. A business-card size (or larger if you can afford it) advertisement in the local paper is definitely worthwhile, but may cost a hundred dollars or so.

At fairs, organise a stall displaying Steiner art and craft work, and hand out your fliers. Make sure you collect the names of interested people.

For a venue for your public meetings, try a Community centre or neighbourhood house, you just need enough room for 20 or 30 people to sit in a circle.

At the information sessions, make sure you have more detailed information on Steiner education available for parents to take home (one resource is the [Overview of Steiner Education](#) from the Steiner Schools in Australia site, plus newspaper or magazine articles - try your nearest Steiner School again).

Provide coffee and herbal teas, and bring along some home made cakes or nibbles to share after the talk so people can stay for a less formal chat if they want to.

Ask people to register their interest on your form, which should contain at least: Name, Address, Contact Phone number, and the year their child will be starting school.

### **Building the Steiner Community:**

To start a school you will need a large group of interested parents, because even if you have 40 or 50 people involved, from that group you may only finish up with 10 or so children of the right age for the initial class. People don't like being pioneers, so you'll find that the first class will be a real struggle, however once the class is established and parents can come and see and feel the difference, interest will really start to grow.

Once you start collecting names, make sure you don't lose contact with them. Start a regular newsletter (perhaps monthly) describing why you are starting the school, the progress so far, information sessions coming up, open days at nearby Steiner schools, etc.

Once you start growing, word of mouth will be your best friend.

### **Consider Starting with a Kindergarten:**

It is much easier to start a school if you have a solid feeder group, and the best feeder group is a Steiner Kindergarten. It is also easier to start a Kinder than a school, as the facilities are simpler, and you can start with quite a small group.

### **The Teacher and Facilities:**

With many of the class one classes I have seen begin, the appropriate teacher is not always obvious, but with effort at the right time, one will usually become available, sometimes quite miraculously. Don't worry about it too soon, but when the time comes, make sure your nearest Steiner school knows you are looking, advertise at the Steiner Teacher Training centres at the Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School, Glenaeon and Mt Barker, as well as on the Positions Vacant page of this web site.

If possible, it is ideal if the teacher comes from within your own community, as they will have been part of the process and will be committed to your aim and goals.

### **Schools within the Government sector:**

The two main benefits to starting a stream in a Government school are that the cost of the teacher is paid by the Education Department, and the facilities including buildings and furniture are provided by the host school.

However, there are some additional issues you will need to deal with.

The Education Department provides teachers to schools based on a ratio, which in Victoria currently is 1 teacher for 21 children. As you will be unlikely to get 21 children in the first year, the school will need to agree to "carry" the Steiner stream for the first year or two, on the understanding that once it is established, it will grow.

Assuming the Steiner stream continues through to class 6, the school will need to be able to accommodate 7 additional classes, either in existing empty class rooms or have room (and the desire) for portable classrooms.

You will need to liaise closely with the school administration to make sure they are sending correct information to prospective parents, and keeping them informed of information nights etc. Also, either keep a parallel contact list, or make sure the school is keeping very good records of enquires. They won't be used to keeping records of parents interested in enrolling two or three or more years in the future.

Remember that you must be able to influence the selection of your class teachers. If the Education Department wants to appoint a teacher, it might be OK for the first one or two, but at some stage it won't work. It may also be very difficult to change a class teacher if you need to.

The Principal affects the whole school and the relationship with the Department, so it is important that they are a strong leader and very supportive of Steiner education. Often, a Principal will be interested in setting up a stream just because the school is shrinking which is not ideal. Unfortunately, these are usually the schools with space.

At some stage the Principal will retire or move on, so you need to be aware of how a new appointment will be made. Will the department appoint someone who may not be interested in Steiner, or does the school have a say in who is chosen?

Good luck, and remember, if you have any other ideas, let me know so I can add them.