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## Steiner school faces scrutiny

Milanda Rout | September 10, 2007

**A PUBLIC school offering the Steiner method is under investigation after more than 60 per cent of its prep students failed to meet state government standards for reading and maths.**

A panel of experts has been assembled by the Victorian Department of Education to investigate the operation of Collingwood College, including whether its Steiner stream can meet government requirements.

The review comes amid increasing concern over the move of Steiner into government schools and follows an inquiry into the stream at Footscray City Primary School.

Critics have attacked the alternative curriculum for not teaching children to read and write until they are seven and have also questioned the spiritual basis of the system.

The 2006 annual report of Collingwood College - where it is believed more than half of the prep to Year 12 students are enrolled in Steiner - shows prep and Year 2 students are not achieving expected levels in text reading. "The results show achievement below those of the like-school group and the state means for Year prep and Year 2," the report says.

By Year 10, 82 per cent of students are performing at an expected level for reading and writing. But The Australian understands there are still serious concerns about the performance of the college's secondary students.

A Department of Education spokeswoman said a panel had been established to review the "operation" of Collingwood College, which offers mainstream, Steiner, Reggio Emilia and vocational curriculums.

She said the panel would look at the effectiveness of the school's programs and the ability of alternative streams like Steiner to meet government guidelines.

The spokeswoman said the panel would make recommendations to the department about the school - which is located at the bottom of housing commission flats and has students from more than 70 different postcodes - by December.

University of NSW professor of education John Sweller said there was not "one iota" of evidence to support the notion that delaying the introduction of formal reading and writing was beneficial to children.

Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia executive officer Rosemary Gentle said the schools had been operating for 50 years.

"It's absolutely a false premise that the earlier children start reading and writing, the better children will be in the long run," she said. Opinion was divided internationally on the right age to start on formal reading and writing.

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