

To Premier Bracks and Minister Kosky –

Please don't allow our government schools to be hijacked

New guidelines for alternative education streams do not protect mainstream students

There are over a dozen known government schools in Victoria offering an alternative “stream”. In particular one of these alternatives, known as Steiner, employs a seemingly opposing philosophy and different curriculum to that offered by the “mainstream” government education system.

Recently released new guidelines from the Education Department as to the operation of these alternative streams do not ensure the protection of the mainstream students. When an alternative philosophy competes with the values and resources of the government education system, schools become divided and fractured. This is what is happening at Footscray City Primary School, which houses a Steiner stream.

Call for independent investigation - where's the money gone?

It seems likely that schools will be required to heavily subsidise the introduction of these alternative streams and/or significantly increase fees because they use more resources than the rest of the school. If this is the case, this money goes forever to the disadvantage of the mainstream students.

For example, during the introduction of the Steiner education stream to Footscray City Primary School the school's bank balance steadily decreased as the number of Steiner students enrolled increased. The account balance plummeted from \$300,000 in 2001, to \$200,000 in 2002 to \$50,000 in 2003. This decrease was stopped in 2004 and 2005. During this period fees were dramatically increased for both streams (approx 100% for mainstream and approx 50% for Steiner).

In 2004 a Department of Education and Training report found that full tracking of expenditure had not been achieved during the period that coincided with the introduction of the Steiner stream at Footscray City Primary School. We are calling on the Bracks' government for an independent investigation of the Footscray City Primary School accounts to determine the true cost of the Steiner education stream to the school.

Steiner philosophy and education questionable – where's the research?

In 2000 the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) made an assessment of Steiner Education as a result of the planned introduction of a Steiner stream at Footscray City Primary School. We call on the Bracks' government to demonstrate their research into Steiner educational philosophy and curricula which show these original findings have been overturned. The 2000 DEET Report states:

- I. *“Steiner education would appear to be the antithesis of the philosophy of the Early Years Program”.*
- II. *“The attitude of [Steiner education] to students' exposure to media and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) appears [to be] in direct contradiction to [DEET's curriculum requirements].”*
- III. *“Steiner education is based on a philosophy of cocooning children from the world...”. This is in direct contrast to... [the DEET curriculum requirements].*
- IV. *“We are concerned by the recommendations [of the Steiner movement] about setting up Steiner schools [in government schools]. The main benefits cited are: The cost of the teacher is paid by the state; the facilities are provided by the school; the school will “carry” the reduced numbers in the Steiner stream; free administration.”*

Call for cap on enrolments

Minister Kosky has said that alternative streams should not dominate. How can this be ensured when the new guidelines do not ensure enrolments are capped?

We, along with many others, are calling for the numbers enrolled in these alternative streams to be kept low, eg. less than 20%, (Footscray City Primary School is now approaching 50% Steiner enrolments), otherwise the diversity of our schools will continue to be threatened.

Without caps on both enrolments and classes for these alternative streams, our state schools will become dominated by one particular view and value system unduly influencing every level of school life to the detriment of the school community.

Government funding spiritual and quasi-religious beliefs? Call for curriculum audit

The spirituality inherent in Steiner education, and the basis of the philosophical teaching method are of great concern to us. We call on the government for a curriculum audit of all alternative streams, so every parent knows what their child is being taught.

The Australian Education Union has been quoted in the media as saying: “it had concerns as Steiner Education was not strictly secular” (non-religious).

According to Steiner websites, “the philosophical basis for Steiner education is Anthroposophy” – the “science of the spirit”. It was developed by Austrian Rudolph Steiner, who was a “philosopher, scientist and spiritual researcher”. He died in 1925.

According to the Skeptics Dictionary, “Steiner's theory of child development is based on reincarnation, karma, and ‘the etheric body’, and ‘the astral body’.”

A Steiner handout says: “Reading is not taught until the ages of seven or eight and in many cases, even later. This is because, according to Steiner, children are not at the right stage of development for reading or writing until their adult teeth come in”.

And: “Early intellectual awakening can result in a weakening of the child's vital forces, manifesting in frequent colds or other illnesses.” Is this what state funded education should be about? What happened to free non-religious, high quality education for all children.

Free private education

Minister Kosky has said that these streams provide “choice” for parents.

Why is taxpayer money being used to fund private school education within the public system? Why is it being used to subsidise the “choice” of select groups in the community who do not want to pay for the private education that already exists in well-established independent private schools?

Contact us now!

We urge all Australians concerned about the future of public education and who care about their local communities, who share our concerns or would like to support us, to contact us.

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Your details will be treated with confidentiality.