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Steiner students 'unable to cope' with maths testing

Milanda Rout | *October 02, 2007*

CHILDREN enrolled in the alternative Steiner education curriculum are "overwhelmed" by literacy and numeracy testing, says a Victorian state school in excusing its poor academic performance.

Up to 80 per cent of Year 3 students at Mornington Park Primary School, south of Melbourne, failed to reach state government standards for maths and more than half are not achieving at or above "expected levels" for reading.

The school, which offers a Steiner stream, admitted the results were of "concern", especially given a further 70 per cent of students did not reach state benchmarks for maths in Year 5.

"Student achievement, as measured by the AIM (Achievement Improvement Monitor) test, was moderate in 2006," the school's annual report reads.

"Low percentages are generally recorded but of significant concern is the overall poor performance in mathematics at both Year 3 and Year 5 levels."

The annual report says one of the explanations for the school's poor performance could have been the increasing number of Steiner Year 3 and Year 5 students completing the tests.

"They are not used to the regimen and the rigour of the testing and may be overwhelmed by the process," it says.

The report also suggests that a high teacher turnover, increased mobility of students and a high number of welfare recipients may have also contributed to the school's poor results.

The school's website describes its Steiner program as "non-competitive" learning. "Storytelling, rather than reading, is an essential element of the program," it reads.

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

Mornington Park Primary is the latest public school offering Steiner streams to come under scrutiny, with the Victorian Department of Education launching two investigations into the alternative curriculum.

The University of Melbourne has been commissioned to examine the stream at Footscray City Primary School in the city's inner-west, and department experts are looking at Collingwood College, in the inner-north, where 60 per cent of prep students failed to meet reading and writing benchmarks.

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