

Submission to the Castlemaine Secondary College (CSC) audit of alternative (Steiner) curriculum

1. Capacity to deliver quality educational outcomes for all students.

This has not been demonstrated.

The Steiner form of education is not based on educational need or proven educational techniques. It is a spiritual and lifestyle philosophy which informs all aspects of curriculum. The C.S.C. Steiner Stream needs to demonstrate that the curriculum is not informed by anthroposophical theory.

There is no evidence that the Steiner philosophy as adapted for use in Steiner education delivers quality educational outcomes for all students. This Guideline makes it imperative that such outcomes be demonstrated at C.S.C. if the Stream is to continue.

2. Demonstrated evidence of responsiveness to the existing school culture and local school community needs.

The Steiner Stream was initiated in response to approaches made by members of the local Steiner School community. There was no open consultation process. The introduction of the Stream was actively opposed by some members of the existing school community. The existing school culture then as now could be described as rural and mainstream, with a significant proportion of students coming from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage.

I do not believe that families of children attending Castlemaine Steiner School are part of the C.S.C. school community. If so, it could also be argued that the C.S.C. school community also includes families whose children attend Olivett, a local Christian school and families whose children attend Bendigo Senior Secondary College. This is patently not the case.

The Steiner Stream has diverted energy and resources to a small group of students on the basis of their parents' ability to organize and demand special treatment for their children. The implementation of the Stream was not a response based on the needs and expectations of the C.S.C. school community. This remains the case.

3. Evidence of effective delivery of existing school programs and the ability to meet DEET curriculum policy and legislative requirements.

The ability of C.S.C. to effectively deliver existing programs is seriously compromised. Staff and other resources are stretched to the absolute limit. The existence of the Steiner Stream has compounded this situation to the detriment of other students. Some current problems which have been identified are:

- The REAL program has been cancelled. This was a unique program with demonstrated positive outcomes for a group of students with specific educational needs.
- Physical Education, as a major KLA, is struggling to meet DEET prescribed guidelines, particularly on the Junior Campus. House Athletics and Swimming sports have been cancelled due to inadequate staff time to facilitate the program.
- Five Year 11 students of Indonesian are studying by correspondence in 2007, despite a teacher being available for Years 9 and 12. Initially 10 students requested to study Indonesian at Year 11.
- Year 11 Geography is not being offered in 2007, despite approximately 10 students expressing an interest in studying the subject.

4. Evidence of community support and the capacity for governance arrangements and resource allocation to continue in a sound manner.

General community support for the Steiner Stream is not evident.

Support for the Stream is evident within the cohort of families who are directly involved with Steiner education in Castlemaine. There also appears to be some interest in the Stream from another group of people associated with Winter's Flat Primary School, who are proponents of a special program run there. The group claims not to be interested in Steiner philosophy or education, however.

I have no information relating to governance arrangements and resource allocation, except for the concerns raised above in (3). I commend the College for initiating this audit, and I am interested in receiving further information showing ongoing accountability structures surrounding resource allocation.

5. Demonstrated capacity to ensure equity and access for all students in the school community, including students with special needs.

Access to the program has been restricted by the conduct of a separate "Open Night" in 2006, which was not advertised to the school community. It was however advertised at the Castlemaine Steiner School, and in the Stream's separate newsletter.

A further perceived barrier for families wishing to access the Stream is the requirement for parents and the prospective student to submit to an interview conducted by a panel which includes parent/s of existing students of the Steiner Stream. Parents of existing students are not part of any other selection process for subjects or Streams within C.S.C.

Equity between Steiner Year 9 students and other Year 9 students is not possible due to their location on separate campuses. The Junior campus is regarded as having inferior facilities, and operates under a different uniform and discipline code to the Senior campus.

Some of the overt differences which have been evident are as follows:

- Uniform is compulsory for Year 9 Mainstream students but not so for Year 9 Steiner students.
- In 2006, Steiner Year 9 students were invited to attend the Senior Formal; Mainstream Year 9 students were not permitted to attend the Senior Formal. Year 9 Steiner students were also invited to the Year 9 Formal.
- In 2006, attendance at House meetings and sports days was compulsory for Year 9 Mainstream students and no alternative program was offered for students who did not attend. Attendance was not compulsory for Year 9 Steiner students and an alternative program was available for students who chose not to attend.
- Year 9 Steiner students were included in the Senior music ensemble groups, while the Mainstream Year 9 students remained in the Intermediate Groups. This has been an important expectation of Year 9 students to assist and work with less experienced music students. It has not been an expectation of the Steiner Year 9 students.
- Year 9 Steiner students have access to a "home room" and Main Lesson block, features which the majority of students would benefit from, but which are not available to any other groups of students on the basis of timetabling difficulties.

6. Evidence of quality assurance mechanisms to ensure quality teaching standards and educational outcomes are met.

Whilst I understand that mandatory registration and reporting systems should be in place, I personally have no knowledge of these processes.

I have addressed the issue of educational outcomes in Steiner education in 1) above. It would be an unusual outcome if students in the Steiner Stream at C.S.C. did not produce good results given the privileged allocation of resources they receive on a per capita basis.

7. Capacity to operate a specialized curriculum approach in a transparent manner, including reporting and communicating to the school community in an open manner.

To date this Guideline has not been complied with.

Questions asked in letters to the Principal and School Council during 2005 and 2006 have not been answered. Information has been carefully guarded. In some cases information released to the media has subsequently been shown to be untrue.

Some of the information which should be available to members of the school community is as follows:

- What is the role of the Steiner College of Teachers at C.S.C. and what links does this group have with external organizations?

- What is the curriculum for the Steiner Stream in Years 9 and 10? What is the role of anthroposophy in the development of the curriculum?
- What is the status of plans to extend the Steiner Stream to Years 11 and 12?
- Did the Year 9 Steiner students complete the AIMS test in 2006?

In the interests of transparency, I hope that copies of the Report which results from this audit will be made available to all School Councillors in the first instance, and at a later time to interested members of the school community.

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