



CAIRNS  
RUDOLF STEINER  
SCHOOL

2007  
Annual  
Report

Rudolf Steiner defined three golden rules for teachers: "to receive the child in gratitude from the world they come from, to educate the child with love; and to lead the child into the true freedom which belongs to man."

Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919. Schools in other parts of the world followed in quick succession. Steiner schools have now earned the enviable reputation world wide as warm and caring institutions that produce creative, socially aware, freethinking and motivated adults. Steiner graduates enter all walks of life, and generally do so with great energy, self-confidence and commitment towards their chosen goals.

### **Who was Rudolf Steiner?**

Rudolf Steiner (1864 - 1925), an Austrian scientist, humanitarian and philosopher, was a man ahead of his times. He developed a new approach to many essential aspects of life including medicine, architecture, agriculture, the arts, social science and education. He ventured beyond the study of humans as merely creatures of intellect and physical form, to acknowledge the importance of human spirit. He viewed the world holistically as well as spiritually and foresaw the problems arising in our modern world and provided insights into possible solutions.

Anthroposophy, meaning 'the wisdom of man', is the name given to the philosophical perspective underpinning Steiner's work. It is not a religion. There is no compulsion and no dogma. Neither are Steiner's ideas actively transmitted to the children. They merely provide a perspective from which the teachers can deepen their understanding of children and develop their teaching craft, so that they can nurture their students in a more meaningful way.

### **What is Steiner Education?**

Steiner education endeavours to educate the whole child. It addresses equally the areas of academia, artistic experience and practical skills, along with a nurturing of the human spirit. Educating head, heart and hands is regarded as important so as to produce well-rounded, capable adults. Through this balanced approach students develop clarity of thought, a sensitivity of feeling, and a constructive strength of will.

The Steiner method removes competitive pressures. We prefer to see each child reach his or her own full potential and express his or her own uniqueness and individuality. This individuality can unfold in a creative, nurturing, stress free, peaceful and respectful environment. It is inhibited where children are required to compete against each other to achieve externally imposed goals. Steiner education prefers motivation and direction to come from within the depths of each human being. It is the teacher's role to kindle the spark through

creative, caring and inspired teaching practice. The teacher then allows the individual, in freedom, to unfold that which lies within him.

Steiner education uses the arts as a medium through which learning can take place. The teacher may introduce drawing, painting, modeling, drama, music or poetry to any lesson content; be it language work, maths, history, geography, science and so on. These arts balance intellectual achievement and allow for aesthetic self-expression and a depth of feeling experience. They act as a healing and nourishing force.

Steiner education divides childhood into three distinctive seven-year periods.

Each period has its own work, needs, expressions and defining features. Teachers actively work to probe curriculum content, tasks and experiences that harmonise with the age and stage of development of the children in their charge. The theory of childhood cycles arises from Steiner's insights into human nature. The human being in his totality and depths is acknowledged and encouraged.

### **Our School**

The Cairns Rudolf Steiner School grew out of a perceived need for a genuine educational alternative in our local community. In 1997 Nila Chambers, an experienced Steiner teacher from Melbourne began planning for the school. The school subsequently opened its doors in 2002 with 25 children, in a small house in Stratford. Enrollments have now reached 78 children.

A 40-acre bush property in Kuranda (approx 25mins North of Cairns), purchased in 2007, and is now the school's permanent home. The property is a beautiful, tranquil place. Children have access to wide open spaces cocooned by rainforest. There are multiple rainforest walking tracks that lead to seasonal creeks on the property.

The school offers kindergarten and preschool through to class 7. The school intends to develop a secondary school when there is sufficient support from the school community.

## **School Management Structure**

The Cairns Rudolf Steiner School is an independent school and a non-profit company. It is not a community school nor is it a denominational school. It is co-educational and has a current enrollment of 78 students. There is a board of directors who oversee the long-term planning, legal and financial management of the school. The board is comprised of dedicated teachers who are supported by legal and financial advisors.

The day-to-day running of the school is guided by the College of Teachers; a democratic body who collectively make educational and philosophical decisions based on insights gained from the study of Rudolf Steiner's works. The teachers elect a Head of College for a specified term. This teacher liaises with outside organisations, the Board, the admin and the parents.

The office is the first point of contact for all general inquiries. The office is usually manned from 9-3 Monday to Friday and the telephone number is (07) 40 93 8809.

## **Kinder/ Prep**

In our school we seek to cultivate an atmosphere of love, wholesomeness, and respect. This is expressed in the way children are spoken to, the materials the children are given to work with, the classroom arrangements and equipment, the activities the children are involved in, the food available with the school etc. Everything is considered from a perspective of seeking to nurture and care for the child in the best possible way.

Our school begins with a kinder, for children turning 5, and a Prep for children turning 6. We seek to foster an environment that is more like a home rather than a classroom. A warm, secure and calm atmosphere is created where, surrounded by beauty, the young child's imagination and creativity can unfurl within their play and work.

Every feature of the kindergarten, from the choice of colours to the design of the wooden furniture, has been carefully chosen to provide the optimum environment for the young child to unfold.

The children are not introduced to an academic program. They are simply allowed to be children. A great deal of what they need to learn at this age can be achieved through their own rich and rewarding world of self-directed play. The teacher maintains an unobtrusive but watchful and loving presence.

The children are also free to join the teacher in a range of wholesome home-based activities, artistic pursuits and music. They may be involved in baking bread for morning tea, working in the garden to grow veggies that we can make into soup for lunch, growing flowers for flower garlands or fairy rings, sweeping and mopping, washing tea towels or dolls clothes and hanging them out to dry, building cubbies, weaving or sewing, painting, drawing and clay work, singing and ring dancing etc.

Each day the children have circle time, when they come together for verses, songs, finger plays and action dances. Later in the day they all "meet" again for story time, where they are exposed to traditional folk and fairy tales and simple nature stories.

The year is also enriched with the celebration of various festivals. The children prepare for these and the excitement mounts as the day approaches. The school celebrates a harvest festival, a music and drama festival, a festival of lights and a Rainbow Fair/Open Day.

### **The Primary Years**

The children usually enter class one in the year they turn seven. All academic work is taught in an artistic and holistic way. In class one for example the children learn the alphabet out of traditional tales in which strong images occur. The story is told, the images are drawn out of the story and the children find in the images, the letters of the alphabet. A mountain might unfold in to the letter "M" or through the image of a valley they might discover "V". They might paint the letters or draw them, model them or sew them. In class six science they might paint the different types of galaxies, or dance like the planets orbiting the sun. In class five history they might act out being citizens of Athens, debating in the forum. Academic learning is never dry or abstract. Rather it is a living, breathing, and creative process.

The children are also given grounding in practical skills. They are involved in gardening and cooking, furniture making and building, looking after animals and maintaining school grounds. In craft they make things they will need to use e.g. recorder bags, book bags and pencil cases. We aim to produce well-rounded, practical adults.

All children are involved in music and the arts. They may be involved in acapella singing groups, recorder ensembles, orchestra or drumming groups etc. From class one they all learn recorder, and from class 3 or 4 the children are encouraged to take up a stringed instrument. They are also involved in the dramatic arts. The classes perform one play each year. Other activities might include creative dance or eurhythmy - an art performed only in Steiner Schools.

The sports program in our school is often linked to other work spheres. In class 5 for example, the children study ancient China, and in sport they will do a block of Tai Chi. They also study ancient India and would be offered Yoga classes at that time. When Ancient Greece is being studied, athletics is offered and this may culminate in a classical Olympic Games. Australian history might be linked to horse riding etc. Survival skills such as orienteering and swimming are also offered. There is a strong emphasis placed on the non-competitive aspects of sporting achievement. Teamwork, individual effort and mate ship are highlighted.

Computers are not introduced in the primary years as they are seen to deaden the child's creative potentials. Computer skills can be taught after the 14<sup>th</sup> year. Children easily catch on to computer technology and so the later introduction is no disadvantage.

### **The Class Teacher**

Ideally in our school, one class teacher guides a class through their entire seven years of primary school. The class teacher is supported by specialist teachers e.g. foreign language or sports teachers, music and craft specialists etc. The classroom is therefore like a small country school in atmosphere and the teacher is more akin to a "parent", who is intimately connected to the class. They grow together over the years.

The teachers are involved in ongoing studies of Steiner education, to allow their own potentials and capacities to unfold. They have normal teacher qualifications and receive ongoing Steiner teacher training through participation in on-site and external professional development opportunities.

### **The School Community - Parent participation**

We seek to work alongside parents to ensure that together we can offer the children the very best. School and home are seen as two elements that create a whole learning experience for children. Both must be working harmoniously towards the same goal for a successful outcome.

Parents' role within the school is to help develop and grow the cultural life of the school. To help organise and participate in community building activities, festivals and celebrations, concerts and plays, excursions, music consorts, fund raising and study groups.

Parents also participate by contributing 20 community hours each year. These hours can be used helping out at the tuck shop or in the library, attending

working bees or becoming a class carer. Class carers organize class social events and support the teacher as needed.

We aim to promote a strong and meaningful sense of community within the school.

### **Quality Assurance - Staffing information**

Our school is committed to delivering Steiner education of excellence. Teachers in the school are involved in ongoing professional development. A mentoring system is in place within the school so that more experienced teachers can support those with less experience. Teachers also undergo an annual assessment from an experienced, external Steiner teacher, for the first 3 years of employment. Teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and professional development opportunities offered by the wider Steiner and educational communities.

Staff appointments involve not only an extensive interview process but also a practical classroom demonstration of skills. Our staff must have the right personal qualities as well as professional qualifications to join the school.

In 2007 a majority of the teaching staff participated in four full day professional development seminars at the school. All teachers attend a weekly meeting, where teachers discuss successes, failures, ideas and insights, individual child studies and curriculum development activities.

In 2007 our staff consisted of;

- 6 teachers who have teaching qualifications from a higher educational institution with Australia.
- 1 afternoon teacher who has qualifications from a higher education institute within Australia, but lacks formal teacher qualifications
- 1 afternoon teacher who does not have qualifications as described in (a) or (b) but has relevant successful teaching experience and appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context.

Nb. All teachers in the third category have been employed due to their expertise and knowledge in Steiner education and their content areas.

In 2007 the staff attendance rate for permanent and temporary staff and school leaders was 96%.

The proportion of teacher retained from 2006 was 78%

## **Assessment of Student Performance**

We believe that, like walking and talking, all children learn at their own individual pace. We aim to honour this process and seek to maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of each child. Formal testing and ranking of children is not in accord with our school ethos.

The school will arrange government standardised testing for parents who wish their children to be involved. However the school does not philosophically support the standardised testing of children. Nor is it school policy to participate in these tests.

We prefer to foster an atmosphere of co-operation and collaboration rather than competition. The formatting of the tests suits the style of teaching in mainstream education, but is not harmonious with Steiner's ideas about good teaching or testing practice.

Issues also exist in relation to the consistency of gradings across markers, the amount of time individual schools spend in preparing their students to sit the tests (time not spent in teaching valuable curriculum topics), socio-economic and cultural factors that will be reflected in test scores and so on.

We also have concerns about the labelling of children and the adverse effects this can have. Children who perform well on the day may become lax or egotistical. Those who perform poorly on the day may encounter unnecessary external pressures, be labelled and develop poor self esteem or lose motivation.

In our experience children's skills develop in spurts and starts, and a result at one time is no reliable indication of the long-term success and abilities of the individual. We prefer that children be allowed to develop at their own pace without external judgements being applied.

Non-invasive methods of assessment are used throughout the child's education and teachers issue parents with reports biannually. Teachers are available for formal parent/teacher interviews twice a year. The school encourages continuous close and effective liaison between parents and teachers. Teachers make their home phone numbers available to parents and are happy to discuss children's progress with parents on a regular basis.

In 2007 0% of parents chose to have their children sit government-standardised tests.

## **Graduate Results**

From an article in the Cairns Sun Newspaper in 2008 -

"What the Cairns Rudolf Steiner School lacks in size, it more than makes up for in the classroom. The small school is celebrating the success of its first three graduates, who now all attend Cairns State High School.

**Ruby Breeze and Jennifer and Isabelle Whitmill received 29 awards for academic merit and excellence between them at the Cairns High annual awards night.**

Jennifer, 15, became the first student to graduate from the Cairns Steiner School in 2005, followed by Ruby and Isabelle, both 14, in 2006.

"We are thrilled to bits," said the head of Cairns Steiner School Nila Chambers. "The results are an endorsement of the Steiner methods."

Ruby's mother, Susan Breeze, said she believed the Steiner school had helped her daughter achieve success across a broad range of high school subjects. "I think what she's got from here is that she's really conscientious, really wants to put the energy and effort into it. And coming from Steiner, the way they've taught, she's not getting to high school and is really bored."

"She's been inspired through primary school in the approach they have had. She is still keen to achieve."