

# CURRICULUM GUIDELINES



- VISION • PRINCIPLES • PEDAGOGY
- VALUES • KEY CAPACITIES

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## Purpose and scope

These guidelines have been developed by the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools of New Zealand to augment the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum and provide a framework to support teachers and curriculum leaders with the implementation and development of Special Character in the pedagogy and curriculum. The role of the Federation is one of fellowship and collaborative work for mutual benefit rather than one of proprietorship. While each school remains autonomous it is our expectation that any school calling itself a Steiner Waldorf school will use these guidelines in the shaping of their local curriculum.

## Background

The introduction of the 2007 New Zealand National Curriculum with its emphasis on values, principles and competencies provided a structure that enables New Zealand Steiner Waldorf Schools to describe our approach in a language and format that is accessible both for our schools and for the wider education sector.

Questions articulated by school representatives to the Federation included:

- What is the common and consistent ground shared by New Zealand Steiner Waldorf Schools?
- What characteristics are true to the principles of Steiner Waldorf education ?
- What are the non-negotiables that underpin and inform the approach used in our schools?
- What does this mean for our school culture, curriculum delivery and practice?
- How do we describe our Special Character?

Our aim has been to create an “essential” foundational document that is pertinent for Steiner Waldorf education in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is intended that this document be built on by each school to include the needs, culture and aspirations of their own local community. The guidelines serve to describe the essential and non-negotiable aspects of our curriculum and pedagogy. It is not our intention to fully define Steiner Waldorf education but rather to describe what constitutes our Special Character.

These guidelines embrace the premise that kaupapa Māori and te reo Māori me ōna tikanga should be considered an essential part of learning for all teachers and learners in Aotearoa New Zealand in accordance with the three Treaty principles of protection, participation and partnership.

The first Steiner Waldorf School was opened in Stuttgart, Germany in 1919 for the children of workers at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory. It is from this origin and the naming of the school that the term Waldorf arises and is used interchangeably, or together with, Steiner to describe the education movement he founded.

Caroline von Heydebrand, one of the original teachers of that school, created the first comprehensive curriculum for Steiner Waldorf Schools from the many suggestions Steiner made to teachers during meetings and lectures. Her comments below remain as pertinent today as they were in the 1920s:

*The ideal curriculum must be modelled on the changing image of the human being passing through different phases while growing up. But like any ideal it is confronted by the reality of life and must accommodate itself accordingly. This reality comprises many things: the individuality of the teacher, the class itself with all the peculiarities of every*

*pupil in it, the moment in history, the education authorities and education laws prevailing at the place where the school that is wanting to implement the curriculum is located. All these factors modify the ideal curriculum and call for transformation and discussion. The educational task with which the growing human being confronts us can only be achieved if the curriculum remains mobile and pliable.*

( Heydebrand, in Rawson and Richter, 2000, p. 16)

## **Introduction**

*Receive the child in reverence,*

*Educate the child in love,*

*Let each go forth in freedom.*

(Rudolf Steiner quoted in Trostli, 2011, p. xiv)

Steiner Waldorf schools are founded on the anthroposophical understanding of each human being as a being of body, soul and spirit in a gradual and purposeful process of development, often described as the process of incarnation. Anthroposophy, which can be translated through its etymological roots as “wisdom of the human being,” is the philosophy which inspires Waldorf education. It is also known as Spiritual Science and described by Rudolf Steiner as a pathway of knowledge leading the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe. It is not to be understood as a body of fixed doctrine requiring belief, but rather a mode of inquiry initiated by Rudolf Steiner with every element in it subject to being weighed and evaluated by each individual using his or her own freedom of judgement. The educational indications given by Rudolf Steiner form the basis for the Special Character of New Zealand integrated Steiner Waldorf schools.

Steiner Waldorf education has the healthy development of the individual child as its central impulse and fundamental to this is the cultivation of human values. The curriculum supports and enhances the healthiest possible development.

The curriculum gives equal importance to nurturing the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of the child, requiring different learning experiences to be brought to students at specific ages and times and in certain ways. Steiner Waldorf education aims to support the development of the whole child and this principle guides teaching and learning in every class. The study and observation of children is at the heart of teacher development and is, therefore, at the heart of curriculum development and delivery.

Special Character is not confined to any single aspect of a school’s activity<sup>1</sup>. It is expressed in educational aims, curriculum content and delivery, teaching methods and organisational structures, as well as in the social and physical environment of the school. It is essentially an integrated approach with all aspects interconnected in a mutually supportive way. The education is open to all faiths or none, free of dogma or sectarianism and includes the celebration of Christian, seasonal and relevant cultural festivals. Steiner Waldorf pedagogy is informed by anthroposophy in that it holds at its centre the question of what it means to be human and strives out of this understanding to honour the unique developmental pathway of each child. The insights and ethos of anthroposophy inform the curriculum

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<sup>1</sup> *Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools Aotearoa New Zealand: Special Character Review and Development Guidelines* (March 2015)

and provide teachers with a body of ideas from which they derive inspiration, with which they as individuals work and from which they are asked to conduct their own research.

The curriculum encompasses a broad range of subjects which contribute to a complete and balanced education. As far as practicable, within the full twelve-year, educational journey every area of human activity and endeavour will be entered into. Content and delivery in each subject meets the developmental stages of the children and is informed by the different soul needs (times of optimal readiness) of children as they mature<sup>2</sup>.

High value is placed on teaching and learning through the arts and movement, not only as stand-alone subjects but also as an integral part of all learning experiences. These activities activate the will and feeling life of the child and support the development of flexible and creative thinking. As far as possible, all subjects are brought in an artistic way or through practical experience where doing precedes understanding. Wherever possible, practical activity paves the way for discovery and enquiry, which in turn leads to the formation of concepts.

As of 2015, there are 11 Steiner schools which are members of the Federation of Steiner Waldorf Schools; eight of these are integrated, three are independent and one caters for children with special needs. New Zealand Steiner Waldorf schools are part of a global education movement. There are currently over 1,000 Steiner Waldorf schools and several thousand kindergartens in more than 60 countries worldwide. The principles that are fundamental to Steiner Waldorf education are accessible to and are able to be adapted to, the needs of different ethnicities, cultures and religions. Curriculum content allows for the exploration of a wide variety of cultural traditions and world views.

Each school is autonomous and reflects the unique qualities of the culture and place in which it has developed. Steiner Waldorf Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand strive to imbue their curricula with the unique spirit and history of this land and its peoples.

## **Vision**

The vision of Steiner Waldorf education is to enable young people to go into the world secure in their identity. Our students will be able to find direction and purpose in their lives and contribute to society as world citizens, respectful of the diverse nature of humanity. Our young people will be:

### **Confident**

- well-balanced individuals (head, heart and hands)
- secure in their own identity
- strong in their sense of moral integrity and personal values
- able to meet and work through challenges
- courageous, resourceful and resilient
- enterprising and enthusiastic
- able to use initiative
- independent thinkers

### **Connected**

- interested, respectful and caring for the concerns, views and feelings of others
- effectively communicators

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<sup>2</sup> See also *Essential Principles of Curriculum Formation*, page 6

- reverent and understanding of the spiritual nature of humankind and of the natural world
- willing to take up their roles as world citizens

### **Actively involved**

- responsive to and sharing responsibility for the well-being of the environment and of local and world communities
- able to discuss principles that underpin our society, such as democracy, fairness, equity and justice and to relate them to their own lives
- actively and purposefully engaged with issues and activities they regard as important

### **Lifelong learners**

- open, with a sense of wonder that develops towards enquiry
- confident in their ability to learn
- willing to try new things
- able to explore creative strategies in problem-solving
- willing to learn through experiences and from people
- active in seeking, using and creating knowledge
- able to discriminate between truth and opinion and between the essential and the non-essential
- active in social and cultural life

## **Essential principles of curriculum formation**

Together with the principles that provide the foundations of curriculum decision making as outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum document which include *high expectations; the Treaty of Waitangi; cultural diversity; inclusion; learning to learn; community engagement, coherence, future focus* (Ministry of Education, 2007), the additional principles below embody what is held to be important in a Steiner Waldorf school curriculum:

- Education of the whole child
- An education for head, heart and hands
- Curriculum and pedagogy based on child development
- The unhurried curriculum: readiness for learning

## **Education of the whole child**

Steiner Waldorf education is an integrated and holistic education. It strives to provide for the rounded and harmonious development of the whole human being, balancing the development of cognitive faculties with the cultivation of social, artistic and imaginative capacities and engagement in practical skills and experiences. The curriculum gives equal attention to supporting the healthy development of the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, moral, cultural and spiritual needs of each child.

## **Curriculum and pedagogy based on child development**

Steiner Waldorf education is based upon the understanding that the human being is a spiritual being on a purposeful life journey and that during this journey distinctive, progressive phases of development unfold. Child development is seen as a process of gradual incarnation and individualisation. While the

child “grows up” in its physical body, it also “grows down” from the spiritual world and creates in this meeting ground its own world of soul (Masters, 2007, p. 185).

Approximately every seven years a new soul ‘faculty’ emerges and matures during the following period. A healthy education will make best use of the opportunities for development that the different phases present. The structure of the school, the content of the curriculum, the teaching methods and the relationship between pupil and teacher all reflect these distinct phases. In acknowledging the prime time of readiness for crossing new thresholds, the whole curriculum provides opportunities for learning experiences that can have the quality of traditional rites of passage.

This understanding gives rise to a pedagogy that brings content and skills not only at optimal developmental times but also in an age-appropriate manner that is accessible and nurturing for the child. For example, the dreamy at-oneness with the world in which the seven-year-old lives is met by the curriculum through the pictorial realm of the fairy tale, while the individualising and wakefulness of thinking experienced by the emerging adolescent is reflected in the teaching of modern history.

In the kindergarten phase, the main focus is on the facilitation of and immersion in, creative will activity. During the primary school years the education engages the child more through their feelings and imagination. The focus in the high school is towards developing the student’s thinking capacity.

## **Educating head, heart and hands:**

*In thinking, clarity;*

*In feeling, warmth of heart;*

*In willing, thoughtfulness.*

Rudolf Steiner (2003, p. 65)

Three overarching seven-year phases in the development of the child are recognised (Steiner, 1998). During each phase one of three soul faculties predominates and matures, shaping the way in which the world is met and experienced. These three soul faculties—thinking, feeling and willing—are all present in different stages of maturation at every point of a child’s development. Each lesson recognises the importance of engagement through head, heart and hands and the right balance will be found for each age group. The forming of the weekly timetable, main lessons and subject lessons take cognisance of this pedagogical approach.

### **The first seven years: Imitation and the development of the will**

From birth to seven years of age the children are full of will and movement, living in a world of fantasy and imagination, which they explore through play. They also learn through imitation and a hands-on approach. During these years the life forces of the children are bound up within their physicality, building and forming a strong healthy body. When this period of bodily development has been completed, at around six-seven years of age, some of the life forces are freed for a different kind of building—the forming of thoughts, at first mostly in the form of inner pictures. Steiner saw self-directed play as the “work” of the child at this age and as essential for the later development of thinking (Steiner, 1994).

### **The heart of childhood: Imagination and the development of feeling**

From seven to fourteen years of age the children begin formal learning when intellectual development is fostered through engaging the feelings. During this “heart” phase of childhood what could be dry,

abstract, or disconnected from the child is given life by imbuing it with strong personal meaning. Learning is largely experiential and the arts become an important vehicle for engagement. Music, dance, storytelling, drama, eurythmy, painting, drawing and modelling provide the means by which concepts, including those of literacy and numeracy, can be brought in a playful, pictorial way. The capacity for creative imagination is cultivated, encouraging thinking that is lively and mobile. At the time of puberty this capacity for thought becomes more penetrating and reflective as students begin to observe phenomena more closely, grapple with abstract ideas, causal relationships and the rigours of scientific thinking.

### **Toward adulthood: Rational judgment and the development of thinking**

From fourteen to twenty-one years the adolescent is in transition to adulthood. This period is characterised by intellectual development and the pursuit of worthy ideals. Students are ready for more rigorous self-directed academic learning, which requires clarity, objectivity and independent judgement. The high school curriculum is designed to inspire students to question, reflect, arrive at theories through the exploration of phenomena, analyse logically and view the world from a range of different perspectives.

### **The unhurried curriculum: Readiness for learning**

*I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core. We do not wish to see children precociously making great strides in their early years like great sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber, but better if they expand slowly at first and so are solidified and perfected.*

Henry David Thoreau (1892, p. 222, entry of November 5, 1860)

In Steiner Waldorf education readiness to learn is a guiding principle. Up until the developmental threshold of the child's seventh year, their education takes place in the kindergarten, where learning occurs through play and imitation. Although it is recognised that children can be taught to do many things before this time of *physical* and *soul readiness*, this is seen to come at a cost that will become apparent in later years (House, 2012; Suggate, 2010, 2014). The principle of readiness stands true right through the primary and high school years.

Steiner Waldorf education respects the integrity of childhood and what is seen to belong rightfully to childhood. As a child progresses through school, emphasis is given to his or her individual development in an environment which is non-competitive and unpressurised in the academic sense. Teachers actively protect and cultivate the young child's capacity to wonder, to imagine and to experience awe and reverence for life and learning in a manner that is unhurried. Children learn at their own pace, guided and encouraged by the teacher, who is alert to the particular intelligences that emerge as well as any obstacles to learning that need to be overcome. Allowing children to experience a full and healthy childhood is seen as vital for laying the foundations for a healthy adolescence and well-balanced adulthood.

### **A localised curriculum**

It is essential that the curriculum is embedded within the context of each school's local community and the broader environment of Aotearoa New Zealand with its particular history, geography and culture. This will require schools to connect with whānau and the wider community to ensure that the curriculum reflects the unique characteristics of the community and location and utilises the resources of the community.

It is expected that schools are familiar with the principles of Tātaiako and the cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners (Ministry of Education, 2011). Schools will work with Māori learners, their whānau and iwi to ensure their worldview, aspirations and knowledge are an integral part of teaching and learning and the culture of the school and Kindergarten.

The Federation of Rudolf Steiner Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are in the process of developing guidelines for the Teaching of Te Reo Māori me ōna Tikanga for both specialist and class teachers in Steiner Waldorf schools. It is expected that these will be used to inform each school's curriculum and practice.

## **The art of pedagogy: Approaches to teaching and learning**

*In everything you do as a teacher begin with and connect everything to, the human being.*

(Steiner, 1981, p. 95)

The approach to pedagogy is seen as inseparable from the process of curriculum formation. Everything begins with the human being. Relevance is an essential driver of student engagement and interest. By connecting curriculum content to the human being children feel that what they are learning has something to do with them.

### **Role of the teacher**

*The teacher's role is to awaken the child's latent faculties and allow its profound individuality to emerge and develop; they thus help the children to find the appropriate relation between their individuality and physical being, their environment and the present day society into which they are to integrate. It is this relation which will enable them to make the appropriate use of their freedom. Young people are then able to enter into society not as passive spectators, but as conscious, sensitive citizens, ready to tackle the challenges of our times by taking an active part in the transformation of our world.*

(Niedermayer-Tahri, 2001, p. 94)

Teachers bring both an openness to engage with the anthroposophical world view and a preparedness to follow a path of inner personal and professional development. They work with the concept that human capacities evolve over successive lives. One aspect of this is the recognition that there is a destiny connection between a teacher and a particular class group. Another is acknowledging the essential spirit of each child and their particular developmental journey.

The kindergarten teacher is aware that he or she is an example whom the children will imitate. The child unconsciously absorbs all that surrounds them. At this stage learning is "caught" rather than taught and is implicit rather than explicit. In the first seven years, the world is experienced without judgement. The role of the teacher is to create a secure and harmonious environment, shaped by strong rhythms and routines, which nourishes the child's senses and encourages self-directed play. The

teacher of young children needs to have a heightened awareness of gestures, speech, actions and mood.

In New Zealand Steiner Waldorf schools, five and six year-olds on the school roll are taught by their kindergarten teacher as per the Memorandum of Agreement with the Ministry of Education<sup>3</sup>.

In the lower school, each class has a teacher who moves through the school with the class (looping). Traditionally, the class teacher remains with the class, or connected with the class, for up to seven years, although each school will make decisions about this based on the needs and capabilities of the teacher and the needs of the students.

The class teacher period is as much a journey for the teacher as it is for the child. To accompany a class for a number of years requires not only considerable personal commitment but also the ability to make the significant adjustments, necessary to meet the needs of the maturing group, both in inner orientation and outer practice. This long-term relationship allows teachers to come to really know their children and for their teaching to be guided by deep insights into the nature and inner being of each child—their daily soul, spiritual and physical needs.

The lower school class teacher aims to be a figure of moral as well as educational authority based on his or her commitment, responsibility, love of and care for the children. In this context, authority is understood as authorship or taking ownership rather than authority as power. The teacher is the captain of the ship in which the children can feel certain and safely guided. This manifests in the presentation of lesson material and in the social and pedagogical life of the class. When the children are around 12 years of age, the teacher makes a conscious transition and becomes more of a facilitator. The children begin to engage more in self-directed learning and more conscious goal setting. This shift in the teacher's role is sometimes characterised as "from king to shepherd".

The class teacher usually teaches the Main Lesson, generally during the first two hours of each day and some other subject lessons throughout the week. Subjects such as foreign languages, eurythmy, handwork, woodwork, gardening, gymnastics, art, music and te reo Māori me ōna tikanga may be taught by the class teacher or by specialist teachers.

High school students are taught by subject teachers. In adolescence the emphasis on authority shifts to the teacher as an authority in a given subject field. The adolescent is now learning to be the captain of his or her own ship, developing an inner authority. While the mode of teacher in the lower school may be seen as that of an artist, the gesture of the high school teacher is that of a scientist on a quest for truth. High school teachers guide students to critically observe phenomena and support them to question, explore, evaluate, form judgements and make objective decisions. They teach main lessons in their subject areas while using an integrated approach. Pastoral care is carried through collective responsibility and by the class sponsor or kaitiaki.

Rudolf Steiner referred to three golden rules of the art of education, rules which must imbue the teacher's whole attitude and the impulse of their work. These three rules were not envisaged as theory but to be embraced by the teacher's whole being:

- *reverent gratitude toward the world for the child we contemplate every day, for every child presents a problem given us by divine worlds*

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<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary of Education and the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand in relation to issues of legal compliance for integrated Steiner Waldorf schools (May 2013)

- ... gratitude to the universe and love for what we have to do with a child
- ... respect for the child's freedom, which we must not endanger, since it is this freedom to which we must direct our teaching efforts, so that the child may one day stand at our side in freedom in the world.

(Steiner, 2004, p. 57)

### **Self-development of the teacher**

*[I]t is 'aliveness' that must be the guiding principle. 'Aliveness' in the teacher must pass over to 'aliveness' in the children.*

(Steiner, 1995, p. 115)

*Joy, and happiness in living, a love of all existence, a power and energy for work—these are among the lifelong results of the proper cultivation of a feeling for beauty and art.*

(Steiner, 1996, p. 35)

*A need for imagination, a sense for truth, and a feeling for responsibility—these are the three forces that constitute the nerves of pedagogy.*

(Steiner, Allgemeine Menschenkunde als Grundlage der Pädagogik/1996, p. 212)

Although the curriculum provides a framework from which teachers can work, it is the relationship between the teacher and child that is paramount for meaningful learning. Fundamental to this is the understanding that teachers need to recognise the capacities that they have and those that they need to develop in order to work in a healthy way with the children. As learners themselves, teachers are the greatest role model of lifelong learning and should maintain an active interest in the world. Students are great sensors of authenticity and it is essential that teachers are seen to walk their talk.

Rudolf Steiner consistently emphasised the importance of *who* the teacher is, not what they know. He gave many exercises that can be used by teachers to develop their mindfulness, perception and self-knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to utilise these for their inner schooling. Schools may offer weekly space in teacher meetings for study in support of teachers' personal and professional development.

### **The main lesson: An interdisciplinary approach**

A central and intrinsic feature of the Steiner Waldorf approach is the Main Lesson. The main lesson is the primary teaching form and process that carries the framework of the learning areas of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. Main lessons will be found throughout the school from Class 1 to Class 12 and they provide windows into the world—the outer world of the senses and the inner world of ideas and feelings.

The design of main lessons strives to meet the maturational needs of students at every stage of their physical and soul development. Main lessons are usually held during the first two hours of each day and most themes continue for three or four weeks. Over the course of the year the students receive a balanced programme of main lessons. Main lesson themes reappear at deeper levels through the school years.

Main lessons have aspects of several learning areas integrated into the theme. For example, a house building main lesson in Class 3 might incorporate learning about measurement, hands-on technological skills, writing and the study of houses from different cultures and different periods of history. Activities that engage the students' thinking, feeling and willing are incorporated into every main lesson. This immersion and structure gives the time and space for deep and rich exploration of themes.

## **The importance of arts, handcrafts and the practical curriculum**

*For it is of very great importance that you not only make all your teaching artistic, but that you also begin teaching the more specifically artistic subjects—painting, modelling, and music, as soon as the children come to school, and that you see to it that the children really come to possess all these things as an inward treasure.*

(Steiner, 1995, p. 99)

Every child will learn to sing, play musical instruments, paint and draw, sculpt, move with grace and awareness, write, learn and recite poetry, act in plays, knit and sew, work with wood and metal, model wax and clay and create work that is beautiful as well as useful. In addition, opportunities for gardening and cooking are woven throughout the curriculum, from kindergarten through to high school. The Outdoor Classroom is a feature of the curriculum in many Steiner Waldorf schools where a range of traditional handcrafting processes are experienced in the natural environment (e.g. constructing treadle lathes or harakeke) (Graves, 1996; Martin, 1999).

## **Education outside the classroom**

Education outside the classroom has a significant role in learning programmes. For example, a local history and geography main lesson in Class 4 will have children out and about exploring their wider community; a trigonometry lesson in Class 10 might have students on a “trig camp” learning surveying techniques.

Camps are a highlight of each year and give important opportunities for immersion in practical learning (e.g. bushcraft, orienteering) as well as providing thresholds or rites of passage that challenge students to take new steps.

## **The whole class and the individual**

The Steiner Waldorf classroom is seen as a model for community, with a strong emphasis on social awareness and cohesion, with children learning and helping each other through shared experience. The lower school teacher will be the leader, guide and focus of the learning experience. The ability to work with the whole class as a community and be responsive to the diverse and differentiated needs of individual learners within that community is at the heart of the art and craft of teaching. The teacher will ensure that rich lesson content has the capacity to engage every child at their own level, temperament and learning style. Those who need it will receive support. Extension, which is based on the learning activity, will be given to those who need further challenge.

In the first two to three years of schooling, when the children’s mode of learning is still highly imitative and their reality is experienced as an undifferentiated unity, the teacher will teach primarily to the class as a whole. The third year is seen to be particularly significant developmentally as children around the age of nine waken to their difference and individuality. They start to become more self-conscious, experience themselves as the centre point of their experiences and have an emerging sense of self and other. It is a time of transition for the individual child and for the dynamics of the class. This is a time when children are observed to be able play team sports with unfolding social consciousness and is seen as an appropriate time for children to learn how to work in groups, to experience differentiation and roles. Group work will usually follow common experience. What has been worked on will then be reintegrated back into the whole by the end of a lesson. The teacher will increasingly provide opportunities for individual or group project work after this time depending on the needs and interests of the children.

Children needing learning support may receive individual remedial help from specialists or teacher aides. In cases in which a learning difficulty is perceived to have an underlying physical basis children might take part in Extra Lesson™ or other therapies, e.g., therapeutic eurythmy.

## **Working with temperaments**

*[A person's temperament] is the basis from which we discover what we have to seek as the innermost essential kernel in each individual.*

(Steiner, 1944)

Teachers use the concept of the four temperaments, which were described by Steiner as the cornerstone of education, as a means to understand and work consciously with the behaviour and personalities of children. These temperaments: the choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic and sanguine, express personality and the characteristic way the child perceives and interacts with the world.

The teacher's task is one of harmonising the temperaments in the child and of bringing balance to what could be one-sided. Similarly, the teacher's personal and professional development requires gaining insight and working actively with their own temperamental disposition. Working with the temperaments is implicit in classroom organisation, behaviour management and the optimising of individual learning styles (see Merenda, 1987; Rothbart, 2012).

## **The nature of the learning environment**

A distinguishing characteristic of Steiner Waldorf schools is the attention given to creating a learning environment that combines function with beauty and nourishes the senses without overwhelming them. The outer environment is seen to have a formative influence on the child's inner environment; the younger the child, the greater the impact will be and the greater the care the teacher will give to considering the impressions he or she wishes to bring.

In the kindergartens the atmosphere is purposefully home-like and intimate, with devotion given to the detail of everything the children encounter in their daily exploration. Natural materials are used wherever possible, furniture and toys are often handcrafted and chosen to allow room for a realm of imaginative possibilities.

The grounds of both kindergarten and school are landscaped to enhance exploratory, imaginative and creative play and to nurture a connection with nature and its elements. Ideally they will incorporate fruit and vegetable gardens that give the possibility of experiencing the transformation of food from earth to plate and be tended using biodynamic/organic methods.

Buildings are designed or modified to incorporate organic architectural features. Conscious thought is given to the aesthetics of interior design and decoration; to colour, form and materials.

## **Working with rhythm**

Rhythm is fundamental to the health of the human being. The quality of each day, the progression of each week, the passing of the seasons, the annual signposts of celebrations and festivals all work to create a healthy rhythm in school life. Teachers use rhythmic processes to structure their teaching within the daily weekly and main lesson timetable in ways that harmonise with the physiological needs and learning processes of the children. In every lesson the teacher strives to provide structure and rhythm by creating times of "breathing in" and "breathing out." This might come through finding a healthy balance between the poles of concentration and relaxation, focussed intellectual activity and practical or artistic activity, movement and rest, group and individual work. Generally the morning is

better suited to learning that requires mental wakefulness and the afternoon to practical and artistic activity.

### **Whole to the parts**

An important pedagogical principle is that children comprehend that the world and the systems within it are an integrated whole. Beginning with the whole gives meaning and context to any learning activity. Children first experience the whole and then work with or analyse the parts that make the whole.

### **A rich oral culture**

In Steiner Waldorf schools the fundamental elements of emerging literacy are nurtured in the Kindergarten, where children, active in imaginative play, live in an environment steeped in oral tradition, in rhythm, story, conversation and song. When the child enters school, this conscious focus on oral language remains central to many areas of learning. The power of narrative and verse is seen to have profound significance in Steiner Waldorf pedagogy. In the early years most learning is brought in narrative form. Whatever the subject matter, if it is brought through a well-crafted story (e.g. imaginative or biographical), the children will identify and engage with it and experience that it has relevance for them.

Children hear stories from many sources such as fairy and folk tales, legends, fables, parables, mythology, history, biography, literature and in a variety of forms, such as prose, poetry, song and drama. The emphasis is on the teachers telling the stories in their own words, crafting them to meet the needs and temperaments of the children. Storytelling is also used as a tool for healing and to help children find ways to deal with life difficulties and challenges. Teachers will often create their own stories to meet specific situations as well as drawing on quality literature to read to the children. Students actively participate in this oral tradition with the retelling of main lesson stories, through the recitation of learned poetry or, for example, through puppetry and plays.

As students progress through the middle school and into high school, they are increasingly encouraged to engage in debate, dialogue and exchange of ideas. Subjects are brought to life through the biographies of people who have been pioneers, leaders, or central figures in a particular field. Student project work is often accompanied by a verbal presentation. The Class 12 project presentations, delivered to a large community gathering, is a feature of all New Zealand Steiner Waldorf high schools.

### **Pictorial thinking**

When new concepts are introduced the lower school teacher will find ways of presenting these in a pictorial or metaphorical form using vivid descriptions and characterisations rather than defined ready-made concepts. This not only brings things alive for the children but engages their feelings as well as their minds encouraging thinking that is mobile, flexible and creative and open to the world of possibility and further discovery.

### **From writing to reading**

Oral language and the ability to 'read' visual imagery is the cornerstone of development in writing and reading. In the first years of school, the emerging skills of writing and reading arise as an integral and natural consequence of language that is introduced aurally and visually, through images and sound, in a process that simultaneously fosters the child's feeling and imagination. Children are led through story and picture, with associated aural connectivity, to writing and then to reading in a timeframe that is

clearly guided and supported yet unhurried; attentive to the necessary maturation of the senses of balance and of self in three-dimensional space (proprioception) (Johnson, 2014 Vol 23/2).

## **Digital technology**

In a world where children in their daily lives are surrounded by the tools of information technology and these are normalised in most households, there is a growing body of research which outlines negative social, physical and mental health effects of this on young children (Ben-Sasson, 2010; Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, 2012; Sigman, 2008, 2015).

In the teaching programmes of the kindergarten and lower school the emphasis is on hands-on learning that engages all of the senses and on meaningful interactions with real people. Engaging in the living world develops a sense for truth and authenticity; it keeps children connected with reality and what it means to be human. Direct face-to-face communication is seen as vital for the development of language, social competence and empathy. In the middle school teachers may use audio-visual means to enhance a lesson or as a stimulus to learning activities or discussion. In this way information technology can be a useful tool to complement the teacher's craft.

In the educational context of a Steiner Waldorf school the appropriate developmental time for utilising the computer as an integral tool in learning and study is during the high school years. At this time the faculty for critical judgement enables students to make discriminating choices and have a healthy relationship with electronic media. The emphasis remains, however, on the teacher's capacity to create lessons that require students to engage in discussion with one another in relation to the content which is presented. Steiner high schools aim to develop a discriminatory computer intelligence in order that graduates have capacities with electronic media to operate successfully in the modern world.

Schools will explore the role of assistive technology for children with special educational needs on a case by case basis. In such instances these decisions need to be made with consideration for the range of therapeutic and other interventions that are available and, where possible, accompanied by action research.

## **Learning support material**

Teaching in the lower school comes primarily through the teacher and through teacher-directed learning experiences, not through textbooks. Other than readers and dictionaries, textbooks as such are not used in the younger classes of the lower school. The children produce their own "textbooks" (main lesson books) in which they record their stories, experiences and learning. This record is in pictorial as well as written form. When they are introduced, textbooks are carefully selected so that they are appropriate and are used to support lessons rather than as a tool for direct teaching. Photocopied material is not normally a feature of main lesson work but might be found in practice lessons when students are exercising particular skills. As students progress through middle school and into high school, they will be using an increasingly diverse range of texts and information sources to support their learning.

## **Assessment**

Teaching in Steiner Waldorf schools fosters an internal motivation to learn and promotes a philosophy of achieving personal best and celebrating progress. The teachers carry a loving respect for the unique individuality of each child. They hold to the principle that every child has a store of potential that is not yet revealed.

Learning is a non-competitive activity. Any testing, or reporting, particularly for young children, is undertaken in a way that minimises anxiety, a sense of failure, or a perception of competitiveness. Every child is seen to be on a different learning continuum so the focus is primarily on individual progress and personal bests).

Observation is a primary assessment tool in Steiner Waldorf schools; observation of children and attention to naturally occurring evidence is at the core of teacher judgement and therefore guides curriculum development, teaching and assessment practice.

The child study provides teachers with an opportunity to work collaboratively to address a child's needs. In such a study teachers meet with reverence and build a thorough observational picture of the child. Contemplation and meditation on these shared pictures can help in finding the right way forward. Parents may participate in these conferences.

Summative assessments that provide quantifiable data related to specific achievements, school goals and government requirements are carefully selected and used at age-appropriate levels. Teachers look at trends of student achievement to guide their next stage planning for classes or for individual children.

Feedback and feed-forward to students is provided through formative and summative assessments at age-appropriate times and in an age-appropriate manner. Teachers provide a range of responses that fit with an anthroposophical understanding of child development. Self-reflection is seen to be a maturing capability. As the children move through the school they become progressively more involved in the conscious articulation and selection of their individual learning goals.

From the time the child enters the kindergarten to the time they leave the school, there is comprehensive dialogue and information sharing between teachers and parents. In the lower school, teachers write comprehensive narrative reports for each child at the end of the school year. In these reports they strive to describe the journey undertaken during the year by the individual child within the context of the class as a whole. Alongside progress made in learning, this characterisation might include reflections on temperament and learning style as well verses chosen or written for each child that affirm or support the child's next steps.

High school reports might carry a descriptor of the main lesson or subject with summative and/or formative results. Each high school makes a local decision about its qualification pathway. Schools may provide testimonials, personal profiles or localised certificates that comment on the developing personal qualities of the student. Steiner Waldorf High Schools can apply to the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand to be accredited to offer the Level 1- 3 Steiner School Certificate. This qualification is recognised by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

Evaluation and self-review is first found in the on-going self-reflection of the teachers, who consider their teaching through observation of individual children, identified priority learner groups and the class as a whole and through their own responses. Evaluation and assessment can be supported by mentor sessions, teacher meetings, involvement of parents, conferencing with students and on-going dialogue with other teachers or agencies.

## **National standards and learning steps**

In 2011 the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand entered into negotiations with the Ministry of Education regarding National Standards policy. The implementation of this policy was seen to present a challenge to the various schools' integration agreements which seek to uphold and protect Special Character. Steiner Waldorf curriculum and pedagogy are seen as intrinsic to Special

Character. These emphasise the importance of unhurried and unpressured learning, particularly in the early years.

We wished to ensure that the Steiner Federation's pathway of Learning Steps<sup>4</sup> would be acknowledged as a different but valid progression towards most students achieving at the same level or above that of the National Standards by the end of class 7 (year 8). The Ministry-appointed auditors of these steps validated that this was the case. The Learning Steps have been accepted as the means by which Steiner Waldorf Schools can report progress and achievement to children in an age- appropriate manner, to parents, Board of Trustees and, as part of the annual report, to the Ministry of Education.

## **Overview of the Steiner School Certificates**

The Steiner School Certificates (SSC) are secondary school qualifications which are owned by the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand, who accredit schools to deliver the programme and award the Steiner School Certificates at Levels 1, 2 and 3. The certificates were developed to represent and honour the Special Character of Rudolf Steiner education.

These qualifications are approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and are registered on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. This means that there is a public profile of the qualifications, which assures the users of the certificates that the qualifications meet the New Zealand Qualification Framework Levels 1, 2 and 3 (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011).

The Steiner School Certificate Level 3 endorsed with University Entrance has ad eundum status for entry into all New Zealand Universities.

The qualifications have also been devised for use in other countries or educational sectors and Steiner graduates are using SSC to gain university places overseas.

A detailed, rigorous and credible external moderation system to provide and ensure national consistency and robustness to this qualification has been established and approved; it describes the requirements and processes of standardising, controlling, managing and assuring the quality of assessment against New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) levels, as well as assessment procedures, coherence and consistency between the schools.

## **Taha whānau (parent-school partnership)**

Positive, active support and participation by parents in the educational process and in the cultural life of the school is considered a fundamental element of the child-whānau-school support triangle. To ensure the best outcome for their child's learning and wellbeing, parents are encouraged to provide a home life that supports and fosters the learning environment of the school and kindergartens.

Parent and whānau interest in and understanding of, the holistic nature of Steiner Waldorf education and of what is conducive to healthy child development strengthens the partnership between home and school and gives congruence to the child's life experience. This is made explicit in any enrolment interviews or talks that are held in order to promote and establish the parent relationship to the Special Character.

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<sup>4</sup> Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools Aotearoa New Zealand (2012) Learning Steps for Reading, Writing and Mathematics (Revised November 2014)

That the class teacher accompanies a child for up to seven years of their schooling gives the possibility for a deepening relationship with parents and of forging a strong alliance centred on the needs of the child. Regular class parent evenings give the opportunity for an active and supportive class community to develop.

## Values

*It was ... out of a profound instinct that Truth, Beauty and Goodness were held to be the greatest ideals of human striving. Yet they have faded away into shadowy words, and it is only our present age that can bestow concrete reality upon them*

(Steiner, 1986, p. 3)

The question of human values and how these are nurtured is at the heart of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. They can be expressed as virtues or as moral qualities and are critical to the development of character. Values give us our moral compass. It is through values that we experience spiritual wellbeing and find our place to stand with certainty in the world.

At the highest level values are a representation of what it means to be human. Values can also be expressed in the social, cultural and aesthetic realms. Values permeate every aspect of the way human beings meet and interact and it is incumbent on the teacher to model appropriate values and imbue their teaching and development of classroom culture with an understanding of values.

In Steiner Waldorf schools we work actively with the Platonic foundations of humanity as a central guiding motif for each of the seven-year phases. They are not exclusive to these periods in the life of the developing child but find their deepest resonance within these phases.

The young child up until the age of seven needs to experience that the world is essentially good. The adults that surround them need to affirm this experience through living in gratitude and with reverence and devotion to their tasks. For the child between the ages of seven and fourteen the teacher will cultivate a disposition of openness and wonder to the beauty of the world and a sense of reverence which allows the inherent beauty and goodness of things to be recognised. Fundamentally this is about seeing beyond the material value of things to the spirit that stands behind them. For the adolescent on the journey from fourteen to twenty-one, the quest for truth, the discernment of truth and the integrity to stand for truth is of paramount importance. This also requires courage and conscience.

These values should be evident in the school's philosophy, structures, curriculum, classrooms and relationships. Teachers work actively to model and instil a disposition of wonder, reverence and gratitude that will accompany all teaching and learning. The reverence of the young child for the natural world and for the spirit in nature manifests as responsibility for the environment in the adolescent. Reverence for the human spirit transforms into conscience and compassion for humanity. From wonder springs a disposition of openness and interest, healthy enquiry and lifelong learning. Gratitude leads to the will to be of service to the world.

These values are embedded in and stand alongside all those articulated in the New Zealand National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 8-9). Each school community will develop these further and find expression for them in their local charters and curriculum documents.

## **Key capacities**

The choice of the term “capacities” rather than “competencies”, as used in the National Curriculum, is a conscious expression of Special Character where education is seen as a process of enabling healthy soul development.

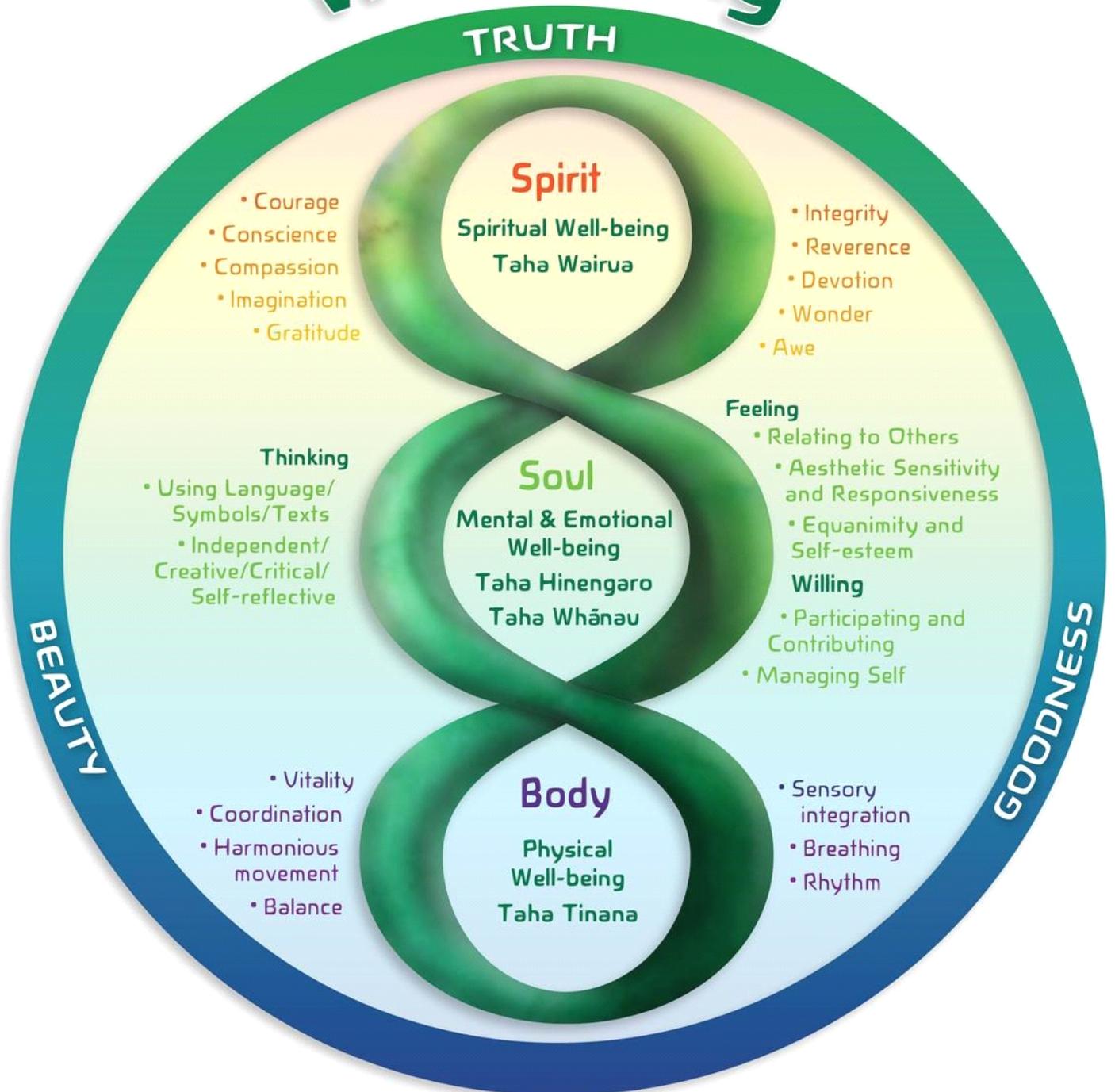
Competency highlights the observable and measurable. The development of the competencies is described as both an end in itself (a goal) and the means by which other ends are achieved. Capacity on the other hand emphasises that which has the potential for ongoing rather than “finished” development. We speak of “opening up” or “unfolding” capacities; this implies growth, receptivity, discovery and aspiration and the possibility of always going further. By developing capacities we can strive for and gain competency in the skills necessary for living and lifelong learning.

We have chosen to contextualise these capacities within the anthroposophical and Māori understanding of the human being as a being of body, soul and spirit and of the soul faculties of thinking, feeling and willing (Boland, 2014). They are aligned closely to a picture of health and well-being. A healthy body provides home for a healthy soul life. For this reason, alongside the capacities of thinking, using language symbols and texts, managing self and participating, contributing and relating to others, Steiner Waldorf Schools recognise that physical capacity is fundamental to overall well-being. Although Health and Physical Education form their own learning area in the National Curriculum, from a Steiner Waldorf perspective they also are seen to be key enablers for all learning and an integral part of the whole.

A seventh capacity we have identified is that of “aesthetic sensitivity and responsiveness.” This recognises the importance of the arts as a means of soul development and a vehicle for the human spirit to find expression. Again, this goes beyond the learning area of the arts. Aesthetic sensitivity and responsiveness connects the children to both the sensory and spiritual world while enlivening their creativity (James, 2002; Richter, 1985).

We also recognise spiritual capacity and this is described above in our values. In the diagram on the next page we have tried to create a picture that weaves the values and capacities into an integrated whole.

# Well-being



# Waiora

## Summary

The Steiner Waldorf curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of a child's development and has been likened to an ascending spiral; subjects are revisited several times, but each new exposure affords greater depth and new insights appropriate to the child's maturing and awakening consciousness. The curriculum seeks to recognise the individuality of the child and, through a balanced education, to allow each child to go into the world with confidence.

In creating this document we have drawn on a range of curriculum materials from within and beyond Aotearoa New Zealand. It has not been necessary to recreate these effective documents and schools are encouraged to draw on them and the wide range of other Steiner Waldorf literature that is available to support and deepen understanding and teaching practice.

*Our highest endeavour must be to develop individuals who are able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives.*

(Rudolf Steiner, quoted in Ogletree, 1979, p. 18)

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