

Education is not the
filling of a pail, but the
lighting of a fire
WB Yeats



Annual Report 2014

Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School

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Our school

Nestled in the heart of the Southern Highlands among rolling hills, with stunning natural displays of the best of each season, stands Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School.

Our school, while still young, has sprung into new growth in the past year with the addition of new families, programs, and staff, while also establishing itself as a very exciting option for independent education in our region. Our aim is to provide a living, inspired learning environment which strives to foster the qualities of goodness, beauty and truth through the research and implementation of the principles in the educational approach of Rudolf Steiner.

Our learning community and its physical, soul and spiritual needs are the focus of our school. We constantly strive for a respectful, safe and loving environment between all who work and learn at the school. We reach for the best in each student, and our joy is to meet the children through their burgeoning discovery of life, earth and humanity. Our school recognises that without the respect and understanding of who we are as individuals, the needs of our planet and all life on it, new forms of culture suited to the healthy advancement of humanity will be limited. So on we walk, hand in hand, making history as we go...



Our education

Rudolf Steiner once said the following regarding the need to understand the inner nature of the growing child:

Once we can understand those we are to shape, we will be able to educate and teach, just as painters must understand the nature and quality of colours before they can paint, and sculptors must first understand their materials before they can create, and so on. If this is true of the arts that deal with physical materials, isn't it all the more true of an art that works with the noblest of all materials, the material that only the human being can work with—human life, the human being and human development?

Our education focuses on more than the simple application of curriculum as prescribed by methods given to us through a set of standards. We recognise that as teachers, the way in which we educate children sinks deeply into the physical, psychological and spiritual nature of the child standing before us. The ways we teach in early childhood continue their work in the children over their entire lifetime, often appearing at different stages of their lives. For this to be a positive influence, it is essential that we seek to understand the subtle nuances of teaching, harboured in warmth in the growing relationship between teachers and their pupils.

Our teaching program begins with early learning, through our playgroups and Kindergarten. In this initial phase of learning, up until around age 7, our focus is on helping the children to develop their foundation - a healthy body, a healthy will. We do this through our understanding that rhythm is the grounding force of all life. Therefore, our educational program for this age is tailored around rhythms and repetitions in learning, from the small to the very great. Healthy physical development depends upon movement and play. These foundations are beautifully paved in our school, with our natural environment, our large grounds, and beautiful resources for open-ended creative play.

In the second phase, we recognise that children, after 7 and up until the early teenage years, develop most strongly in their life of soul, and what is most important here is the understanding that children learn academically much more effectively when they are engaged in warm relationship with their teachers, whom they look up to as a loving authority. During this middle phase, everything musical in quality, whether it be singing, playing a musical instrument, or learning to speak poetry with musical expression, brings nourishment and balance to the literacy and numeracy lessons.

Even though Aurora is still too young to offer a High School program, we recognise that from 14 years onwards, now that the physical foundation has been laid in the first seven years, and the basis for a healthy feeling life has been born in the second phase, the intellect is now stimulated in such a way that the teenager engages in the life of thought, questioning the world, interacting with technology, and developing a true basis for scientific thinking.

In this triad of the developmental stages in childhood, a harmonious chord can sound which is carried through the stages of life beyond the school years.

Below are the elements which play through the structure of our educational program:

Main Lesson and storytelling is based upon a historical developmental perspective which gives a sense of timeless values - that we are all a part of humanity, each having qualities to value, share and contribute meaningfully. The archetypal richness speaks to the feeling experience and awakens feeling for beauty, truth and wisdom. This feeling engagement, engaging the life force through a deepening, balanced experience of the senses, is always considered in the learning process and encouraged through physical experiential expression, advancing the use of imagination and initiative.

Creative arts and craft: Expressive movement and dramatic and poetic language, verse and song are integral to the daily rhythm of the school day. These elements deepen their experience through the living arts such as dramatic playmaking, creative movement and language and the exploration of colour. These create dynamic nurturing experiences building on the life forces. Children learn about natural resources and how they become the material for making useful utensils, containers, props and aids in their developing lives. Practical application of a variety of crafting skills develops their confidence and abilities contributing to their sense of wellbeing.

Caring for our environment: Outdoor class room, nature walks, the nature table, building the garden, reaping and preparing foods for community soup and bread, engaging with “green time not screen time”: all are activities which deepen our connection to the natural world and a sense of reverence for life. This in turn develops a sense of responsibility and care for the future and a feeling of empowerment to effect change.

Group and self directed play in particular engages the children in social and emotional education. The children negotiate many levels of relationships such as experiencing responsible leadership/ cooperation, consensual agreements, independence and self-reliance.

Guidance and modelling by the teachers through their values, including a restorative justice style practice, means that their interventions and modelling are always aimed towards respect, equality, health and wellbeing. A weekly focus for discussion at College meetings is based around aspiring values and student social/emotional welfare. A three weekly in-depth Child Study also builds on nurturing and restorative processes.

Sharing circles with the whole class are founded on values of equality, community and an ability to negotiate and accept differences. Strengthening the sense of connections such as daily circles including group mealtime are a form of communication and engagement, deepening an attitude of care and respect for each other. This in turn encourages a safe and secure balance in personal relationship and group dynamics.

Caring for others and visitors to our school: Teachers promote caring from older to younger children at transition times in the day. They instil procedures such as greetings and acknowledgements and bring attention to inclusive behaviours and changes that assist conscious integration and a sense of rhythm. This in turn adds to a sense of security and self-reliance - of self-respect for the child.

Seasonal festivals and community events are community building with a global and historic perspective. They celebrate multicultural presence and contributions from within our community with aspirations for social renewal. Attending special indigenous nature days encourages respect for Aboriginal heritage and a deeper sharing of values for our environment.

In summary: “The curriculum provides an implicit social and emotional education, nurturing a sense of reverence for life, feelings of wonder and awe and a love of learning.” (Gidley, 2009)



The living organism of our school

We call our structure 'a living organism', as this is the most appropriate way to think of our entire concept and practice of education. The 'place' of education is more than the physical structure of the classroom, the grounds, and buildings. For within these grounds and walls, life happens, and it happens in a lively way because of all that holds it together.

School Governance Board – Southern Highlands Association for Steiner Education Inc (S.H.A.S.E)

S.H.A.S.E was developed in 2009 for the advancement of Steiner education in the Southern Highlands. The vision and purpose of the school board is to ensure that families in the region have access to Steiner education if they choose it for their children. The school board carries and upholds the school's vision, ensures that the school's practices are both lawful and secure, and that the whole organism of the school is overseen. Through the governance of SHASE, the school can continue to grow into a learning workplace that reflects accountability, responsibility, transparency and inclusivity. It has been the board's vision in 2014 to continue to support the existence of the school and its place in the highlands. The board further developed strategies to lead into the future and consolidate the gifts of our first year.

Educational management

The Education Manager in our school is the responsible manager who co-ordinates the task of running the school, of ensuring that the College of Teachers has the support of content, study and professional development to maintain and grow the quality of the educational program. The Education Manager also is responsible for the liaison with BOSTES, the school board, Steiner Education Australia and all other organisations that the school is in contact with. The Education Manager forms the bridge between staff and students on the one hand, and the school board on the other. While the school was getting started in 2014, the Education Manager was able to fulfil both educational, as well as business management tasks with the aid of the school board, the College of Teachers, a casual administrator and the finance support team (called the 'Housekeeping Team') as delegated by the school board.

College of Teachers

The College of Teachers is a group of dedicated lead teachers in our school who undertake to develop education programs to deepen the experience of teaching and form a vision of what next needs to be achieved on an educational level. The College of Teachers undertakes studies to further their own practice, but also central to the work of the college is the development of Child Study, where each individual child can receive a time of focus. Parents were often welcomed throughout 2014 to this college activity, in support of their child's education. Our teachers are constantly developing their teaching practice in accordance with the needs of students at the school.

Children

The children continue to be 'the heart of the school'. All of our work is circling around the needs of our children's education, and how to best meet requirements for their strong and healthy development. The children bring not only their bodies and minds, their joy and anticipation to learn about the world, but also they bring the seed of their destiny, which informs the future of the world. Our children also bring us the challenges which enable us to overcome our own limitations, and compel us to develop capacities we didn't have before, which in turn offer the best of human example and role modelling towards their education.

Parent body

The parent body is the grounding element in our young school. Throughout 2014, much of our active work in the outer community through marketing came from the gifted and dedicated efforts of our talented parents. Our parent group is diverse and active, celebrating the fruits of what the education brings to their children, and in turn, being celebrated in the school for their valuable contributions. The school also recognises that the value of our school is supported by parents through the payment of fees. Financial support contributes to the success of growing this school by giving it a stable and secure foundation. Our parents offer an active voice in the wider community. Our vibrant parent group works tirelessly to create our newfound presence in the Southern Highlands.



From the Chairperson of the Board

As at December 2014, we have just completed our second year of Steiner education at our beautiful school in the Southern Highlands.

Highlights of the year from the board's perspective are:

- membership of our association increased, with the addition of three new members;
- from January 2014, we commenced the leasehold of another beautiful classroom and decorated it in readiness for the Year 1-2 students;
- we increased enrolments;
- we continued kindergarten in the existing classrooms;
- we obtained approval to run class 3 in 2015;
- we consolidated and established the school's policies and procedures;
- we undertook active succession planning for the acting education manager/principal;
- we engaged a visioning expert and undertook a visioning process that led to the naming of the school as "Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School" (abbreviated to Aurora Steiner School) and associated branding strategies and tasks;
- we encouraged all staff to undertake training and development specifically in the area of Steiner Education; and
- we focused on future enrolments by:
 - moving the operation of our playgroup to the school; and
 - starting a part time playgroup for children of pre-school age.

We have also been fortunate that our commencement as a school in 2013 coincided with the introduction of the new model of education across Australia, and sweeping changes in funding arrangements have in fact assisted us to establish ourselves as a school. It must not be forgotten, however, that we would never have commenced at all if it weren't for those foundational staff and board members who gave of themselves and their time tirelessly and for no financial gain whatsoever, providing the school with a solid financial basis and avoiding the need for the school to seek start up loans.

The parent group is to be acknowledged, particularly those parents who so generously gave of their time and energy in the visioning, naming and branding process that was undertaken towards the end of 2014. This process focused us as a group on what is most important to us as an educational facility and underscores our belief in Steiner education as the education that will take our children to adulthood with resilience, responsibility and respect for their world and everything in it.

For this and for the multitude of other tasks undertaken by parents of the school and for entrusting your children to Steiner education, I thank you as you truly have the higher intentions of the school in mind.

To the staff, Acting Principal and board members, thank you all for your tireless dedication to your roles, for all the late nights preparing for the following day/week and for all your time spent in meetings, and in planning, and in all your extra-curricular activities designed to enhance the educational experience for the children and maintaining and strengthening the quality of our beautiful school.

Jane Button
Chair of the Board

From the Education Manager and College Chair

When I reflect on 2014 I am astounded by the transformation our school has undergone in such a short space of time. When we undertook to found a new Steiner School for the Southern Highlands, we could not have foreseen the amount of time, challenge, dedication and joy that would arise from this project. I committed myself to lead the school for a period of three years, and the end of 2014 has brought this period to an end. I give over the leadership of the school to the future, confident that we have founded something real in the lives and hearts of children, parents, teachers and friends.

Just like the children finding joy in every discovery, we too have been in the position to witness the gift of life and learning.

2014 marked the year that Aurora Rose Kindergarten, a one-class school, suddenly became Southern Highlands (Aurora) Steiner School, with the addition of Class 1, and with Katherine Koch as our first Class teacher.

During the holidays leading up to beginning the year, members of the school community were busy preparing what was to be the first classroom of the Primary school. The feelings living in the hearts of teachers and parents on that first day of transition into Primary will stay with us for many years to come. We have learned that in a world where we are more and more disabled from creativity through bureaucracy, if we work together and persevere in our vision, we can both create the school we wish for, and stand strongly and successfully in the state in which we reside.

This was shown to us when, following the BOSTES Inspection in May, the fruits of our education and the strength of our administration to support it enabled us to be given a five year approval for Class 1. We also gained a provisional registration to offer Class 2 in 2015.

The year also brought a consolidation of our aim to form a school community where parents are enabled to participate in the life of the school. This has come to expression in many ways - the forming of a parent-based marketing and communication team, for example, was one of the year's successes. What better marketing team than the parents who can see best the value of the education offered at Aurora? Their professionalism and drive were inspiring.

Looking back to Term 1, we celebrated an Autumn Open Day, where visitors and prospective families were invited to gain an insight into our school. There were excursions to Moonacres Farm, where children and parents gained first hand experience of the importance of organic food. In line with our holistic approach, children picked the ripe apples from the trees, and in the week following the apple-picking, they participated in kitchen adventures, transforming fresh fruit into delicious cooked food.

We have been further consolidating our aims to strengthen the school community's connection with local indigenous culture through excursions with Platypus Dreaming Cultural Learning. Here the children have learned hands on about bush tucker and medicinal plants. They have also learned to make damper by grinding native seeds into flour and making dough, and roasting it on sticks. The children have listened to, and enacted, local creation stories important to the Southern Highlands. Through these activities, we have been making ecological education a focus of our school ethos.

Our festival life forms a spiritual focus throughout the year. Our school is dedicated to educating all aspects of the child - spiritual, soul, and physical. Our festival life enables families to come together and celebrate the spirit common to all humanity, and through these festivals children can give expression to their natural reverence for the spirit, and through their participation, children have been warmed by offering their creativity and focus to a worthy human need - to celebrate the giving of life in all creation.

We have celebrated an Easter Harvest Festival, where the archetypes of life and death are expressed in nature, through the dying away of nature in autumn. Through offering the gifts of nature, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, we are reminded of the inner harvest also: in order to uplift inwardly what appears to die outwardly in the season. Here we are reminded that the spark in each human being is eternal, even when the leaves fall to the ground and nature falls into her sleep.

Next came our Whitsun Festival, where the fire of our individuality is celebrated amongst the unity of our community, expressed so beautifully through the lighting of the many Whitsun flames.

Then came our Midwinter Festival, the longest night of the year, where the children walk the winter spiral and find the light in the darkness. The gift of the light reminds children, and indeed ourselves, that where there is darkness, if we seek it, we will find the light that enables us to walk onward into the future.

Further along in the year, as spring came to grace us late in Term 3, we were reminded of the Festival of Michaelmas, where the qualities of courage and strength that we have gleaned through the winter can be distributed amongst our community in the spring. The shooting of seeds, and the planting of 'words' which can become courageous deeds in life was our focus.

In spring we also celebrated the 'Spring Picnic', a school event that again invited visitors into our school to experience first hand what the school has to offer.

And finally, as the year came to a close, our school opened its doors to new visitors as we celebrated the four weeks of advent leading up to Christmas. Up to 12 new families joined us in these celebrations, where we prepared, through story, craft, and song, the celebration of the star being born to earth in the baby born at Christmas. We were reminded of the inherent human need to love, to experience grace, even as 'outside' the world bustled about in the frenzy that accompanies the lead-up to Christmas.

It is heartening to know, as I complete my final words for this report for Aurora Steiner School, that there exists a school which brings the balance of academic education through the manyfold activities that nurture children in their feeling life, their spiritual life, as well as their intellectual life, so that they grow to become human beings that are innovative, creative and, most importantly, loving - of each other, of humanity, and of our planet. What more could education give to the continuation of culture at large?

With these thoughts in mind, I farewell Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School, I give thanks to all who have made and continue to make its existence possible. I acknowledge the parents who place their trust in us, and who help us in our task. I acknowledge the teachers in their never ending efforts to support the children, and the teachers who reach for more, who search deeper in their work. Their developing quality as teachers forms the bridge of learning for life. I welcome James Goodlet, who will take over the Principalship of the school from 2015, and hope his time with Aurora will be invigorating and fruitful.

And last of all, I thank the students under our care, and I wish for them every gift and blessing on their life path. I am certain they will grow to be shining individuals, with loving and generous hearts.

Joanna Panagiotopoulos
Board of Directors
Education Manager and College Chair 2012-2014

From the parent body

Aurora's second year saw the flourishing of our parent body's commitment to promoting the school via community festivities.

Alongside the rhythm of our school festivals, the parent body and marketing team worked to organise a calendar of events showcasing the school to the public – including to interested families and the highlands community at large. The aim of these festivals was to offer meaningful events with seasonally inspired themes that provided an opportunity to gain an experiential understanding of Aurora school life.

In March, we hosted our second ever autumn open day. The day proved to be a very popular event for school families, local families and visitors alike - featuring activities such as felt making and bread baking, parent talks and puppet story for the children. It was a delight to see our kindergarten crammed full of children pounding their bread dough and joyfully collecting their fresh baked rolls at the day's end. While in the class one room, children learned how to wet felt their own creations; and teacher Kate Koch presented on the Aurora educational approach.

The chilly highlands offer the perfect winter conditions for that most renowned Steiner school event, the midwinter festival. Our little school wanted to share the unique joy of this reverential celebration, so in June the parent body hosted a public midwinter event for highland preschoolers and their families. The event was widely publicised throughout the region and enjoyed great attendance from families from far and wide. Our visiting families were hosted by school parents, teachers, and our school's pupils themselves. From making the paper lanterns, to a midwinter tale and wending through the darkening grounds in a magical lantern walk, the evening ended with hot soup our parents had made, shared round a bonfire with convivial singing. The event was captured in an online slideshow by local paper the Southern Highlands News and generated a deeper appreciation of school life and the Aurora community.

Our final public event in the year was the spring picnic in November. Due to the success of this event in the school's first year, the spring picnic has become Aurora's ode to this heady time of year – a chance to revel in the full glory of a highland spring. This year's picnic featured fresh flower garland making, delicious cakes and outdoor games and dancing, alongside parent talks and other seasonal activities.

Further enhancing school life and supporting the school community, the parent body also hosted a range of parent education events featuring resident and visiting experts in anthroposophical approaches to parenting, art, education and more. These events aimed to deepen the school parents' appreciation of Steiner's wide-ranging philosophy, as well as provide an opportunity for people from the wider community to be enriched by the experience.

This year also saw the formation of the first parent craft group, with mothers and fathers alike meeting weekly at a parent's home to hand make toys for school fundraising, with loving care. Much tea, laughter and cake was had

Our tireless school parents also provided support for the kindergarten orientation days – an initiative offered for the first time at the school – along with many other school festivals, meetings and gatherings. It is with much gratitude that we acknowledge the central and vital place of the parents in all aspects of Aurora school life.

Ellen Stuebe

Parent

Marketing and Communications Strategy

Teaching staff

We are indeed fortunate to have a dedicated team of teachers forming our College of Teachers, all of whom are fully qualified and accredited, with additional training in Steiner education.

Annabel Brown

Kindergarten Teacher 2014

Annabel Brown holds a Bachelor Degree in Social Inquiry from UTS and Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning from Charles Darwin University. Formerly Kindergarten Teacher at Chrysalis Steiner School in Bellingen, Annabel returned in 2013 to her hometown in the highlands with a fiery commitment to bring a new school to life - a school that truly serves the needs of children today.

Annabel says: "In our rapidly fragmenting and evolving world, it is connection that matters most for our children. Connection to the earth, to ancestors and community, connection to self, connection to cosmos and life. Without this we are so easily lost. If we can surround our children with rich meaning, with mindful presence and beauty, and unhurried trust, then that connection - which is in fact their natural inheritance - can unfold as a lifelong gift. From that gift springs the resilience, the resourcefulness, the initiative and courage, and heartfelt intelligence that are so essential at this time.



"I'm deeply thankful for my own experience of Steiner education as a child, and every day I come to understand more about its relevance and wisdom. Taking a stand for the value of childhood, forming new ways of being in community, preparing tomorrow's adults for whatever comes: Steiner education is one way - and the best way I know - of doing these things."

Of the initial period of the school's life, Annabel says: "We are all so fortunate to be playing a part in the formation of this school, this educational community. Every day has brought so many challenges and so many joys. And every day we have done something for the very first time! Children and adults side by side, we are forging a way that is vibrant and unique and really very special. The children are learning what it is to build something new, to be part of something we all care about, and I believe they will carry this experience powerfully into their futures."

Kate Koch

Class1/2 Teacher 2014



Kate Koch began teaching at the previous Bowral Steiner School in 1998. She initially worked in the Kindergarten part time and ran playgroups. Kate did casual teaching in the primary school and went on to teach Health and Personal Development and English and Drama in the high school. Kate was co-class guardian for the composite Year 9/10 class with Benjamin Cherry and at that time introduced the Year 10 School Certificate. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a Graduate Diploma in Teaching, and a Masters in Art Psychotherapy.

"In Steiner education we respect and value of each child and what they bring to the world." Kate says, "The Primary years are a magical time.

We aim to meet the child where they are at developmentally. The world of childhood is a

participatory, imaginative world and so it is through stories and artistry that academic learning is introduced.

“The early years of a child’s education are vital,” she says. “They form the foundation on which their future lives are built. So it is an honour and a great pleasure to be bringing Steiner education back to the children of the highlands.”

Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Speech and Drama, Movement

Joanna graduated as actor and speech artist at The School of the Living Word in 2006. Since then she has been teaching Speech and Drama at Sydney Rudolf Steiner College, as well as guest tutoring in various places including the NSW Writer’s Centre, Wesley University, Metavision Institute, Orana Steiner (High) School, Armidale Waldorf School, and Gibgate Primary School. Joanna helps to co-ordinate Harmony Foundation, a centre to support education and arts based on Steiner’s work. Since 2012 she has been active in the founding of Aurora Steiner School.



This year, Joanna has been working with the students to develop freedom and expression in their speech, supporting the English program. She has also worked with the students to bring fairy tales to life through movement and improvisation. The Speech and Drama program for Aurora in 2014 culminated in a performance of ‘The Gifts’, a Christmas play about the gifts that the sun, moon, stars, crystals, flowers, animals and children offer Mary for her child at Christmas.

Jennifer Lloyd

Craft Teacher and Relief 2014



Jennifer’s initial teaching experience was as a Junior Primary/ Kindergarten Diploma trained teacher in country and urban South Australia for 4 years with complementary training as a specialist teacher in Music through Movement (Dalcoze Eurythmics) and Children’s Art classes. Since 1972 she has been studying and practising as an artist with a focus on personal development, gaining a Graduate Diploma in Social Ecology as well as an Honours Degree in Visual Arts. Registered as a relief teacher with the NSW Department of Education over the years she conducted a variety of arts projects in schools. As a parent at Eukarima/Bowral Rudolf Steiner School Jennifer offered silk painting workshops and assisted in costume making for several school productions including Mozart’s “The Magic Flute”.

In recent years Jennifer volunteered as secretary for the Vietnam Children’s Project, which sponsors an orphanage and three Steiner-based kindergartens in Vietnam. This renewed her interest in the philosophical basis for Steiner education. She is now working towards contributing in a rich and worthwhile way to our new and developing Steiner school, teaching Craft and training as a Play Group Leader.

Jennifer says: "Through the pursuit of living a life motivated by inspiration and joyful loving engagement, through seeking personally meaningful fulfilment, I find myself involved in the extraordinary experience of being a part of this creative growing school community. There are challenges to encounter (we are on an adventure after all) but also many precious moments to cherish. I am the one being educated..."



Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives. The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility—these three forces are the very nerve of education.

Rudolf Steiner

Professional learning summary

In 2014, staff participated in the following professional development activities:

Child Study Sessions X 16

Throughout 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch; Annabel Brown; Jennifer Lloyd

College of Teachers meetings with Artistic Development & Book Study

Weekly sessions throughout term time 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch; Annabel Brown; Joanna Panagiotopoulos; Jennifer Lloyd

Study module: The Art of Speech

January 19-23 2014

Attended by: Annabel Brown

The Quest Retreat - Deepening Anthroposophical Content

Goethean Study Group

January and June, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos; Annabel Brown; Jennifer Lloyd

Biodynamics weekend at Harmony Village

February, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Leadership development with Benjamin Cherry

February, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Spiritual Development Retreat - Harmony Village

March, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

New Isis Conference - Artistic Development

March, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

AIS Child Protection Training

March, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

AIS Work, Health and Safety Training

March, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Child development 0-6 years: lectures By Renate Long- Briepohl

15th - 17th April, 2014

Attended by: Jennifer Lloyd

SEA: Governance, Leadership and Management Conference

9th 10th May 2014

Attended by: Annabel Brown; Jennifer Lloyd; Joanna Panagiotopoulos

SEA: NSW Steiner Schools curriculum meeting

16th May, 2014

Attended by: Jennifer Lloyd

Spiritual Development Retreat with Bastian Baan, international speaker from USA.

June, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

World Environment Week Wingecarribee Shire Council Schools Forum

June 3 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch; Annabel Brown; Jennifer Lloyd

Spiritual Development Retreat - Harmony Village

July, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Mentoring Session with Shirley Bell

August 4 2014

Attended by: Annabel

Classroom Observation & Feedback Session with Alison Barnfield

August 20 2014

Attended by: Annabel

Natural Beekeeping with Timothy Malfroy, Sydney

September, 2014

Attended by: Joanna Panagiotopoulos

Classroom Observation & Feedback Session with Sue Cairns Educational Consultant A.I.S

September 11 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch

Aurora Curriculum Day

September 22 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch; Annabel Brown; Jennifer Lloyd

Platypus Dreaming Consultation Session with Wendy Lotter

November 5 2014

Attended by: Kate Koch; Annabel Brown

The student cohort

Kindergarten

In 2014, the Kindergarten class was made up of five children - three boys and two girls, all aged 5-6. The families of both girls moved to the area in the summer of 2013-14 in order to be part of this new school, and their daughters had attended Steiner early childhood programs elsewhere. Of the boys, one had his second year in the Aurora Kindergarten, having started as part of the founding group at the beginning of 2013. The other two boys had their early years in the Southern Highlands and attended the Steiner Playgroup at Harmony before starting school. Thus the children all had familiarity with many aspects of Kindergarten life and participated keenly in our range of learning activities and classroom routines.

Of this Kindergarten group, none had particular special needs, and though one boy had occasional asthma, there were no other medical conditions to be considered. All students spoke English as their first language and all but one of the parents were Australian born. Three of the children were from single-child households, and two had younger siblings.

Special characteristics of this group were a love of dramatic play and immense enthusiasm for handwork. Socially, the children functioned well as a Kindergarten class yet identified primarily as part of the whole-school student group, and formed close and egalitarian relationships with the Year 1-2 group.

As teachers, we worked to create a sense of unity and equality between all the children. Our shared times included greeting circles and games at the beginning and end of each day, outdoor sessions, lunchtimes and regular nature walks. In addition, we devised a range of small group activities that included students from both classes in order to widen their social group and build a cohesive school culture.

Class 1/2

In 2014, the primary class was made up of five children - three boys and two girls all of whom were in Class 1. The five class 1 students had completed kindergarten at Aurora Steiner School in 2013. All five students were members of the founding student group. Thus the children had a familiarity with many aspects of the school life and overall participated keenly in our range of learning activities and classroom routines. Mid-year saw the arrival of the school's first Class 2 student. Additionally, a new Class 1 student spent Term 3 with us before moving interstate. The new students starting in Term 3 were two girls. One student from Class 1 left at the end of Term 3. Four students completed Class 1 and one student completed Class 2 at Aurora School in 2014.

Of this composite Class 1/2, one boy had a documented anaphylaxis allergy to dairy. Appropriate safeguards were put in place. One of the students who came to the school mid-year was diagnosed ADHD. A student with emergent learning difficulties, in consultation with the child's parent, was referred to a pediatric learning consultant, (Dr Richard Hart). All students spoke English as their first language. Three of the children were from single-child households, and one had a younger sibling. Two of the children have significantly older siblings.

Special characteristics of this group were a love of language, enthusiasm for the natural world and demonstrated skill and interest in design and construction. Socially, the children bonded well as a class group, identified as part of the whole-school student group, and formed close and egalitarian relationships with the kindergarten group.

As teachers, we worked to create a sense of unity and equality between all the children. Our shared times included greeting circles and games at the beginning and end of each day, outdoor sessions, lunchtimes and regular nature walks. In addition, we devised a range of small group activities that included students from both classes in order to widen their social group and build a cohesive school culture.

Student achievement

Five students completed the kindergarten program in 2014. A range of formative and summative assessment methods were used to track the children's learning and development, including day-to-day teacher observations and anecdotal records, tracking via regular skills and outcomes rubrics, and formal Class 1 readiness assessments.

End-of-Year reports indicated each student's development across all six Key Learning Areas, plus Social & Emotional Development and Play Skills. In English, students consistently achieved the accomplished grading in Talking and Listening and, as anticipated at this stage, scored satisfactory or working towards gradings in Reading and Writing. Across the various sub-strands of Mathematics, the satisfactory grading was prevalent. Student achievement was particularly strong in the area of Science & Technology, owing to the group's keen interest in handwork and design and the natural world. In Creative Arts and also Personal Development, Health & Physical Education, students achieved similarly high levels of competence. Around Social & Emotional Development and Play Skills, each student demonstrated accomplished and working beyond levels in relation to many outcomes, yet were working towards or in need of support in certain areas specific to each child.

Class 1 is the beginning of the class teacher period and the threshold of a new world of adventure and learning. The class 1 children were genuinely eager to enter a wider world and experience a new and more organised group experience. For the Class 2 student the adjustment was not so much into the formal classroom environment but rather an adjustment to a more inclusive and heart-centered approach to learning. The parents of our Class 2 student reported that before coming to Aurora their daughter didn't want to go to school and now she doesn't want to stay at home!

Five students completed the composite Class 1/2 program in 2014. A range of formative and summative assessment methods was used to track the children's learning and development, including Main Lesson books, day-to-day teacher observations and anecdotal records and tracking via regular skills and outcomes rubrics.

End-of-year reports indicated each student's development across all six Key Learning Areas, plus Social & Emotional Development. In all subjects, students consistently achieved the accomplished grade, with individual students exhibiting occasional areas where they achieved the working beyond grade and some occasionally working towards. In Creative Arts and also Personal Development, Health & Physical Education students achieved similarly high levels of competence. Around Social & Emotional Development, each student demonstrated accomplished and working beyond levels in relation to many outcomes.

Looking back at 2014: goals

Deepening student learning

- *Establishing a composite class that functions well as a cohesive school group and maintains the integrity of the Steiner curriculum, at the same time as serving the diverse learning needs of the students.* This aim has been achieved through the appointment of a Primary classes support teacher who interacts with the various students and builds support lessons for each year level.
- *Working in partnership with families to ensure that the children receive the greatest possible benefit from this education, through offering a continuing parent education program, regular parent-teacher communications, and opportunities for parents to experience aspects of classroom life.* This year we have continued to implement healthy communication with new families, with regular updates on their child's education. We have also continued to include parents in their child's child study sessions, which help to build together health-giving insights into children's personal growth.
- *Professional development and mentoring support to enhance teachers' capacity to serve students' special learning needs.* This year we have begun a mentorship to support the early childhood work in our school, through Early Childhood educator Thahn Cherry. Thahn, apart from bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge of Steiner education through her lifetime of teaching, is also responsible for the continual growth of Waldorf Early Childhood Education in China, Thailand and Vietnam.
- *Protecting classrooms from disruption by creating school tour dates and an orientation program as suitable occasions for prospective families to visit.* This has been achieved, as we hosted two successful school tour days in 2014.
- *Strengthening the school community's connection with local indigenous culture through sessions with indigenous educators, staff professional development, and the integration of indigenous perspectives through our curriculum.* Children, teachers and parents alike experienced Indigenous cultural learning through our local teacher Wendy Lotter of Platypus Dreaming Cultural tours. It is our plan to continue this learning and connection well into the future.
- *Making ecological education visible as a key aspect of our curriculum, central to our school ethos.* In 2014 the school took on to consciously celebrate world environment day, making a gardening and planting excursion, with visitors from local council who support the protection of the environment in the Southern Highlands. Ecological education is also visible in our school on a day to day basis through our ongoing outdoor classroom.
- *Further establishing Chinese and German as additional languages in our school.* While both classes engaged in Mandarin for the duration of the year, with great success, we are reviewing our second language for 2015.
- *Supporting student wellbeing through clean and punctual transitions at the beginning and end of the school day.* This has been achieved through greater awareness of the importance of starting our day together, with the children ready to begin their day's work as a school community.
- *Embedding quality music in our school culture by further integrating it in our curriculum, and including parent and teacher musical contributions at festivals and special events.* We are now implementing a conscious music program in our school, and this task is ongoing.
- *Undertaking a Child Study process for all Kindergarten students.* This goal is ongoing as we welcome new Kindergarten students into our school.

Strengthening our community

- *Strengthening the flow of communication between the parent body and the school's management and teaching staff through regular meeting opportunities and exploring the establishment of a parent communication conduit role.* The parent conduit role is still under discussion and review.
- *Animating the school community through regular parent craft groups and working groups that harness the key skills and passions of parents in support of school endeavours.* Many hands were busy throughout 2014 in the making of crafts to sell at our open days.
- *Promoting the wellbeing of staff and parents as fundamental to the children's optimal health and*

learning - this is an ongoing aim that we include in our goals for 2015.

Running the school in light of emerging needs

- *Attracting new Association members, including potential board members, with the appropriate skill sets that are needed to serve in the governance of the school into the future.* This aim was achieved as throughout 2014 we attracted new Association members.
- *Achieving Board of Studies accreditation for the school to expand to Class 2/3 in 2015.* This has been successfully achieved.
- *Deepening the quality and effectiveness of regular College meetings.* Our school College has been experimenting with new ways of engagement. Throughout 2014, we decided to alternate, term by term, the responsibility of chairing the meetings. Through this we gained the skills and insights of all College members who offered a variety of content for study and contemplation to enhance our working together.
- *Creating a volunteer role for an enrolment enquiries coordinator.* This task is not achieved, as the school increased its administration in the second half of 2014, which fulfilled this task without needing to seek for a volunteer.
- *Creating a paid office support position.* This was successfully achieved.
- *Actively preparing for the smooth handover of key areas of responsibility to future administration and management staff.* This was achieved and implemented in December 2014.
- *Furthering positive relationships with staff and tenants of Kazcare facilities.* This area is under review as there have been some management changes at Kazcare.
- *Utilising Edumate and other web-based systems to streamline all educational and administrative documentation.* This has been achieved with success by our Office Manager.

Growing our school

- *Developing a cohesive communications & marketing strategy to guide all promotional activity over the coming years.* This was achieved by the energetic engagement of a professional parent team, mandated by the school board, with great success. The strategy was achieved and already partly implemented by late 2014. A new website has been launched, with a 1 minute video promoting the school. Branding has been completed with a vibrant school logo which reflects our school's vision. Our visioning process led us to formally adopt the name 'Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School'.
- *Attracting new enrolments for 2014 and 2015 so as to reach more families with this education, expand the students' peer group and ensure the financial health of the school.* This aim is still under process as we advance our marketing strategy.
- *Making the school more accessible for more families by moving towards a new fee structure.* A new fee structure was introduced in 2014 which provided access to the school for more families.
- *Offering a range of public events that promote the school to potential families, convey the essence of the education we offer, and contribute to the vitality of the wider community.* This aim has been placed on the back burner for the time being, until a time when there are more hands on deck that can dedicate the time to create public events.
- *Building a strong foundation for our future school community by strengthening ties with the Harmony Steiner Playgroup and exploring ways to offer anthroposophically-based support and inspiration to the parents of babies and young children.* This task was achieved by moving the Harmony Playgroup and placing it under the facilitation of the school. This occurred in December 2014, which immediately boosted both the playgroup enrolments and the pre-kindergarten enrolments for 2015.
- *Consolidating our financial position as well as forward planning.* Structures have been put in place for the financial stability of the school.

Aurora's goals for 2015: key targets for improvement

Deepening staff and student learning

- To prioritise and implement further training and skills in Steiner education, including an optional parent program
- To oversee the acquisition of further resources for the Primary school
- To acquire more space for extra curriculum needs and office space, staff room and amenities
- To increase staff to support the primary composite class
- To further establish successful playgroups, including a babes-in-arms group, a 1-3 years playgroup, and a 3-5 years playgroup, thus streamlining the education and getting parents involved from the start
- To deepen our understanding of the anthroposophical view of child development within Steiner education through study, training, and discussion - and implementing our learning through a balanced curriculum which reflects the children's developmental needs.

Strengthening our community

- To developing adult learning programs that highlight the Steiner approach and foster confidence in meeting children's needs in today's world
- To establish an 'Open College' section of College work where parents are invited to join us in our work of nourishing the school.
- To share our understanding and practice of the celebration of festivals. To foster the cycle of the year as a modern approach to understand the universal spirit of humanity
- To continue to foster interest and insight into the individual members of our school community.

Running the school in light of emerging needs

- To appoint a school principal, while still maintaining a collegial structure in the school, to enhance management processes
- To implement ways of reviewing governance, management and staff performance, with the aim of supporting areas where growth is needed.
- To expand the administration, moving towards a business management role in the school
- To consolidate our structure and communicate it to relevant bodies in the school
- To further expand the membership of our Association and board - selecting people with diverse skills for appropriate governance in the school
- To develop a new strategic plan, for 2015-2017, with clear directions for the growth of the Primary school

Growing our school

- To consolidate what has already been accomplished through the marketing strategy
- To further find ways to showcase the school and what it does well - environment, artistic capacity, spirituality, ethical intellectual learning methods that support true humane development
- To develop new signage reflecting the school branding and making us visible to commuters on Kirkham Rd
- To develop a new entrance / waiting area for pick up and drop off, with a weather shelter
- To expand the children's vegetable garden

Attendance and retention rates

Attendance

The average student attendance rate in 2014 was 94.46%

How the school manages non-attendance

The school recognises that a child's school attendance is compulsory. Parents are provided with the school attendance policy at orientation or soon thereafter and this is also discussed with the parents at the child's enrolment interview.

The school has in place a policy, reviewed annually, regarding non-attendance. An attendance register is maintained on a daily basis.

Parents of students are required to report their child's absence as soon as practicable after the absence is known. Where absence has become frequent, meetings are conducted with parents to ascertain whether any difficulties have arisen that the school and parents can work through together.

Mandatory reporting procedures apply where absences are extended or the student may be at risk of significant harm through school absence.

Student Retention

Year	Start Year	Finish Year	Out during Year	In during year
Kindergarten	5	4	1	0
Class 1	5	5	1	1
Class 2	0	1	0	1

Respect and responsibility

The Southern Highlands Rudolf Steiner School intends that all students feel they are valued. Parents and teachers work together to provide care and support, thus engendering self-esteem, mutual respect and responsibility.

The board has developed policies and procedures within their 'Safe and Supportive Environment' and 'Student Welfare' goals, to ensure that respect and responsibility comes through clearly for students, teachers, parents and the community in which the school resides. These policies are publicly available to parents and are reviewed annually.

In addition to regular parent teacher meetings, the board and College hold regular meetings for parents to discuss the basis for these policies and the framework in which the policies have been created, so as to educate the school community in how these are to work. These policies are developed with the aim of promoting respect and responsibility among students, parents, teachers and the wider community.



Key school codes, policies and procedures

Student wellbeing

Pastoral care at the Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School is based on the philosophy and core values underpinning Steiner education and the school. It is holistic in nature, recognising that the social and emotional wellbeing of young people needs to be addressed along with intellectual and physical wellbeing. The promotion of wellbeing is integral to young people’s schooling outcomes, their social development and their capacity to contribute to their families, the community and the workforce. The creative, artistic and imaginative aspects of Steiner education provide opportunities for participation, communication, engagement and expression that can increase student’s self esteem and build a protective connectedness to the school community.

Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School seeks to provide quality education for all students, taking account of their age, background, ability and interests. As a Steiner school, we believe:

Our highest endeavour is to develop individuals who are able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives

Rudolf Steiner

We follow the ‘Three Golden Rules for Teachers’ to: *Receive each child in gratitude from the world they come from; educate each child with love; lead each child into the true freedom that belongs to human beings*

Rudolf Steiner

A comprehensive body of formal documents serve to guide many aspects of school life. All are available to parents of the school. Each year, they are reviewed and updated to ensure that they are in true alignment with the school’s values and practices. Below are excerpts from a range of key documents relating to student wellbeing, the conduct of all school community members, complaints and grievances, and enrolments.



Student rules and Code of Conduct policy and procedure

This policy provides a framework to guide students and parents on the school's approach to acceptable behaviour to ensure that a positive and productive learning environment is maintained for all students. Descriptions of behaviours that are acceptable and not acceptable are provided in areas such as respect towards others, completion of homework, care for the environment, care of personal belongings and public behaviour. School rules are also set out in this policy.

Policy and Code of Conduct for Parents, Guardians and School Community

In addition to the Code of Conduct for Students, a Code of Conduct has been developed to encompass all community members who may contribute to the development of the child's education or be associated with the school. The Policy and Code of Conduct for Parents Guardians and School Community is developed on reasonable community expectations of behaviour encompassing mutual tolerance, respect and personal safety of all with the goal of making the school a safe and pleasant environment for all our community.

Promoting positive behaviour and discipline

Bullying conduct is not tolerated in our school. Anti-bullying policies concerning staff are located within the Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement for Employees, Contractors and Volunteers.

Anti-bullying policies concerning students are located within the Behaviour Management and Discipline Policy as well as the Codes of Conduct for Students, and for Parents, Guardians and the Community.

Discipline policy

Under the school's discipline policy, students are required to abide by the school rules and Codes of Conduct and to follow the directions of teachers and other people with authority delegated by the school.

Where a student disregards rules, disobeys instructions or otherwise engages in conduct, which causes or may cause harm, the student may be subject to disciplinary action and required to engage in considered restorative practices.

The disciplinary procedures undertaken and restorative practices required by the school vary according to the seriousness of the alleged offence. When advised of an allegation the student and parents will be informed of the procedural steps to be followed in dealing with the matter. In relation to all matters to be investigated, the student will be informed of the nature of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

The school's Complaints and Grievances Policy

Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School is committed to providing a work and study environment that is safe, fair and free from discrimination for all members of the school community. The school has a responsibility under State and Federal legislation to ensure staff and students are not subjected to behaviour that may constitute discrimination, harassment, vilification or victimisation.

An essential part of developing that environment is ensuring that students and parents are encouraged to come forward with their matters of concern and grievances in the knowledge that the responsible staff will take prompt and effective action to address these concerns. Grievances that are not addressed have the potential to grow into major problems that can cause tension, low morale and reduced learning and academic achievement.

In line with this aim, the school has developed a Grievances Framework, which is publicly available. This framework was developed so that parents, students and other members of the community know to whom to take their particular concern and how they can expect their concern to be addressed.

Enrolment policies and pre-requisites for continuing enrolment

Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School is a co-educational primary school providing an education based on the philosophy and values of Steiner education and, like all NSW schools, we are approved by the NSW Board of Studies. All applications will be processed in order of receipt and consideration will be given to the applicant's support for the ethos of the school, siblings already enrolled in the school and other criteria determined by the school from time to time. To maintain their enrolment, once enrolled, students are expected to act consistently with the school's ethos and comply with the conditions and terms of enrolment. Parents are also expected to be supportive of the ethos of the school.

Enrolment procedures information

We offer all prospective parents the following information by email, fax or mail:

- Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School Prospectus
- Relevant handbooks and/or access to school policies
- A current newsletter
- An invitation to attend the next school tour. Tours are held regularly through the year.

Enrolment procedures for Kindergarten in the current year and Classes 1 - 6

Application for enrolment

Parents are to complete the Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School Enrolment Application Form.

Receipt of application form, documentation and application fee

Receipt of the application form, application fee and attached documentation will be acknowledged by telephone, email or mail. If a place is available, the school will forward an invitation to attend an interview with the Class Teacher and Education Manager or their nominee. If a place is not available, the child's name will be added to the Waiting for Interview List. Prospective parents will be informed of this, and contacted for an interview once a place becomes available.

Interview with Class Teacher and Education Manager

Both the parent/s or guardian/s and the student are required to attend an initial interview with the Class Teacher and Education Manager or their nominee at which all aspects of the student's education at Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School will be discussed including the financial requirements of the school regarding fees and charges. It is expected that parent/s or guardian/s

and the Education Manager or their nominee will have some private time during the interview. Parents are to make arrangements for younger students to be cared for while this happens. During this interview a start date may or may not be nominated and subsequent interviews may be requested.

Letter of offer

If a place is available for the nominated start date, a Letter of Offer will be forwarded to the applicant.

Acceptance of Offer Form and enrolment fee

The Acceptance of Offer Form together with a non-refundable enrolment fee of \$625 must be returned to the school within 14 days of receipt of the offer. Payment of this fee reserves a place for the applicant's child to commence at the nominated time. If the offer is not accepted, then it will lapse. Upon receiving the Acceptance of Offer Form, parents will be required to read and accept the school's policies and procedures. After reading the policies, parents will need to fill in the Conditions of Enrolment Form to indicate that they have read and understood the school's policies, and return this checklist together with a non-refundable enrolment fee of \$625.

Payment of fees and charges

The first term's fees, consolidated charges and other charges are to be paid prior to the student's first day at school. For families with children already enrolled in the school, the required fees, consolidated charges and other charges for the newly enrolled child will be added to their existing account and invoiced accordingly.

Overview of school policies and procedures

- Safe and Supportive Environment Policy
- Child Protection Policy and Procedure
- Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Statement for Employees, Contractors and Volunteers
- Privacy Policy
- Policy and Code of Conduct for Parents, Guardians and School Community
- Risk Assessment Procedure
- Work, Health and Safety Policy
- Communications Policy and Procedure
- Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Critical Incident Management Policy and Procedure
- Student Wellbeing Services Guide
- Student Wellbeing, Pastoral Care and Leadership Policy
- Emergency Lockdown Procedure
- Excursions Policy and Procedure
- Health Care and Medical Treatment Policy and Procedure
- Security and After Hours Access Policy and Procedure
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Use of Email and Social Media
- Enrolment Policy and Procedure
- Student Attendance Policy and Procedure
- Exemption from School Procedures
- Compulsory School Attendance Guide
- Homework Policy
- Student Rules and Code of Conduct Policy and Procedure
- Board of Studies Returns Policy
- Educational and Financial Reporting Policy
- Board Manual (includes all Governance Policies)
- Staff Absence Policy and Procedure
- Premises, Building and Facilities Policy
- Overview of Process for Reporting Student Achievement to Parents
- Assessment and Reporting Guidelines
- Staff Induction Policy and Procedure
- Procedure for Employment of Casual Teachers
- NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

Parents, teachers and students are involved in many aspects of school life. This involvement is welcomed and encouraged. A host of parent and student initiatives occurred throughout 2014 including market days, cultural days, fundraising events, marketing and communications, parent information and education, parent involvement in classes and more.

One key example of parent-student-teacher interaction is the Friday lesson which involves the children preparing lunch for their parents, and after lunch, going on a nature walk as a group.

Another initiative for parent consultation is the instigation of Friday parent meetings. This is an initiative of the Education Manager who has created this fortnightly opportunity for parents to meet her, either individually or as a group, and have their questions answered, raise concerns or give feedback on their child's education.

Parent testimonials

"My daughter's expression and creativity have just flourished at the school. It's been truly remarkable to watch. It's rewarding as a parent to know we are giving our children a childhood experience like no other, with strong foundations for life."

"Ever since we have joined this school, not only have my children simply thrived but our whole family is seeing the benefit of this school and its philosophy. Such a wonderful community to be a part of; we are very grateful to all the other families and the staff for creating this nourishing environment in the Southern Highlands."

Income and expenditure

