



Wild Cherry Steiner School

ABN 67 979 556 082

PO Box 416

28 McKean St

Bairnsdale VIC 3875

Telephone 03 5152 1966

Email wildcherrybairnsdale@gmail.com

Web wildcherrysteiner.com.au

Annual Report 2013

2013 was the first year of operation of Wild Cherry Steiner School after 18 months preparation work for the school's opening by a parent committee. The school started with 13 children in Prep and Class One and ended with 15. Of those, 14 had attended Wild Cherry Kindergarten.

We started with two staff members, Julia Karas, teaching Class One in the mornings, and Wendy Worner, teaching Prep in the morning and taking Prep and Class One in the afternoons for craft. We felt very fortunate to have two such fantastic teachers bringing such a depth of knowledge and experience in Steiner education, anthroposophy as well as having strong art backgrounds.

It was quite amazing to me that within two weeks of the school starting the teachers and children were totally settled and it felt like the school had been going for years, there was such a strong rhythm to the day and curriculum. Administratively things went smoothly too; having been through the rigorous school registration process meant that we were well set up and prepared from day one.

Attendance at school in Semester One was 90% for Prep, and 92% for Class One; in Semester Two it was 87% for Prep and 91% for Class One. The Prep attendance rate was lower than we would expect as two families chose for health reasons for their children to regularly stay at home. In Class One there were several children with a high absentee rate, mostly due to ill-health. Absenteeism is something we follow up daily if a child is not at school. We are required to ensure that children are at school full-time and parents are required to contact the school stating the reason for absence and we have a strong commitment to following through on this.

We started the year with a deficit of approximately \$25,000 and ended the year with a surplus of \$43,989. This was a strong financial position to end the year. The independent school industry average is 11.5% of income as profit. Our profit is approximately 20%. This profit level was due to careful spending during the year and underspending in many areas of the budget, as well as the fantastic effort of \$13,689 fundraising. As a new school we are being watched carefully by the VRQA (school registration board) to ensure we maintain our financial viability, particularly given the closure of three independent schools in 2012, so a strong surplus in our first year was important. This profit of course all goes back into the school.

At the end of the year we had assets of \$67,638 – being \$30,947 cash in the bank and \$36,691 in improvements to the building. Although we don't own the building the improvements are counted as assets as they were necessary for the establishment of the school. The school was able to start with the generous loans of families in the Steiner community, and at the end of the year \$11,000 was owing in loans. We also had \$6,802 of tax and superannuation payable, leaving us with a total equity (assets minus liabilities) of \$49,833.

We received \$230,840 income in 2013, which came from the Commonwealth Government (50%), State Government (21%), Fees (17%), Fundraising (10%) and the remaining 2% being from building levy, donations, and bank interest.

Our main area of expenditure was wages which accounted for 67% of expenses, primarily on teaching staff. We employed 1.7 classroom teachers, and a specialist language teacher, with the children learning

Mandarin. All administration work was done voluntarily until June when we employed office staff for 10 hours per week. The cleaning was done by parents who either cleaned one hour a fortnight or paid a cleaning levy each term for someone else to clean.

We spent 2% of our budget on staff professional development which included seminars on restorative justice and behaviour management, and attendance at Steiner Education Australia's annual Governance Leadership and Management (GLaM) conference.

The GLaM conference in September was a significant turning point in terms of our governance and management with the realisation that most Steiner schools in Australia were no longer managed by committee as per our constitution but had a principal or leadership team. In addition to the committee of management, we had already established an advisory board so that we had additional expertise in management, education and legal matters and these two committees met to consider a new model of leadership whereby a leadership team would be responsible for the day to day management of the school, and the governing body responsible for the school's strategic direction and have overall legal and financial responsibility. We also established a College of Teachers comprising school, kindergarten and playgroup staff which now meets weekly to study anthroposophy and deal with relevant administrative matters. The leadership team is comprised of the School Administrator and College of Teachers Chair. We advertised for a School Administrator in December and I was successful in gaining this position and Julia Karas is Chair of the College of Teachers.

There was an enormous amount of parent involvement in the school in 2013. In addition to doing most of the administrative work and the cleaning, the committee of management was comprised mostly of parents. This group met monthly making decisions on the running of the school. We also had a very active fundraising and marketing committee - which was a combined school and kindergarten sub-committee - which organised a series of events including a highly successful Art Auction in March. This event in which local artists donated work to be auctioned and put on a gourmet barbecue and music was a fabulous night and raised \$7,000 for Wild Cherry - our Steiner community's most profitable event ever.

The annual Spring Fair, which had been held at the kindergarten for the previous two years, was held in the school grounds. It was a glorious Spring day, and the event worked really well in the school space. It was a great day socially and financially, and the crowd enjoyed the music, food, crafts, stalls and children's activities. A big thanks to Amelie Boucher for coordinating the committee of 12 which organised the event.

The weekly Wild Cherry playgroup continued to be popular with Daya Jepsen running two sessions on Mondays at the kinder. The playgroup in Metung continued running fortnightly. The Kindergarten continued to be managed by Uniting Care Gippsland and had a good year with approximately 18 children in the 4yo program and 13 in the 3yo program.

We undertook Independent Schools Victoria's LEAD (Listen, Evaluate, Act, Delivery) surveys of school staff, committee of management and parents and kindergarten staff and parents. Although the parent response rates were lower than we hoped, particularly in the kindergarten, it was a useful tool to look at how we were tracking in terms of staff, parent and board expectations and how we compared with other independent schools.

The strongest areas for the school, and above industry average, were:

- The school provides an excellent environment in which to learn (94%)
- Teachers at this school are keen to help students of all abilities (95%)
- The school does a good job of developing the thinking and reasoning skills of students (93%)
- Students from different background and cultures are treated equally at this school (100%)
- School staff are approachable when parents want to talk about their children (98%)
- Students look forward to their next year at the school (97%)
- Overall, I am very satisfied with my decision to send my child to this school (95%)
- I am happy to recommend the school to other parents (92%)

The areas identified as weaker were:

- The school is open to new teaching strategies (75%)
- The range of co-curricular activities is excellent (58%)
- The behaviour of students at this school is excellent (71%)

These are areas we will talk with further about parents. In relation to the perception of 25% of parents of the school not being open to new teaching strategies it would be great to get feedback on what parents had observed and what was missing. We consider ourselves a Steiner school that is particularly open to new strategies, and are using and changing teaching strategies on a weekly basis, so it's interesting to explore how a mismatch of perceptions develops.

In regards student behaviour, poor behaviour does stand out in a small school, and it is something that is monitored tightly. The introduction of restorative justice practices has been one positive approach. The beauty of Steiner schools is the cross-curricular program that is offered. In both these areas, we will seek parent feedback in relation to these issues so we understand the concerns.

We were an Associate Member of Steiner Education Australia for 2013 and in October, CEO Tracey Puckeridge visited our school to consider our application for Developing School Membership. Tracey was very positive about our teaching staff and facilities.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who served on the Committee of Management and Advisory Board in 2013. The interest, engagement and commitment of those people during our first year of operation was amazing and strengthening. Committee of Management members for all or part of the year were Amelie Boucher, James Eckersley, Scott Dullard, Robyn Lynch, Karen Graham, Wendy Worner, Julia Karas, Catherine Mullens and Alison Wisby. Our Advisory Board members were Robyn Browne, Chris Walker and Martin Poeder.

2013 can be considered a great foundation year with excellent staff, strong student engagement, a supportive parent body, an effective governance model and ending with a solid financial position.

*School Administrator
Cath Lanigan*

Curriculum

Wild Cherry follows the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework, whilst incorporating the standards set by VRQA (School Registration Board) and AusVELS. As with any curriculum, to have relevance and meaning it has to be flexible and adaptable to best suit the needs of its social context. This varies with the socio-economic environment, and the make-up of ages and nature of the children within any class. The teachers use their professional judgment concerning the needs of their year.

We easily meet current educational standards through incorporating skills based lessons that cover the more explicit aspects of AusVELS, whilst developing the creative, artistic, and rhythmical elements through the main lessons. Music and movement play an important part in everyday activities and prepare the children well for more formal aspects of festivals and performances.

The children, due to a later starting age, are usually a little slower than mainstream in the first year or two in learning to read and write. In saying this however there is always a significant proportion of each class that are reading to standard by half way through Class Two, and by the end of Class Three they are often above the required standards. At the end of 2013, Class One children were identifying everyday words and some were reading simple texts.

In regard to maths the children are often ahead of the expected standards by the end of Class One and in Class Two are often working toward the level accepted at Grade Three. This is largely due to the hands on learning and working with concrete materials which begins in Prep. Wild Cherry's Class One in 2013 was definitely consistent with this and had developed a real love for maths.

One of the major issues discussed in contemporary education is one of engagement. “How do we engage the children more?” This is one area that Wild Cherry excels in, by having such a rich and creative curriculum. It has been wonderful to see the children so happy and engaged in learning.

Julia Karas

Chair, College of Teachers