

SILVER TREE STEINER SCHOOL



# Learning Support Policy

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2019

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## LEARNING SUPPORT POLICY

### Reasons for Learning Support

“As teachers.....we learn to observe human beings: to observe the bodies of the children, the souls of the children and the spirits of the children” *R. Steiner*

“Our rightful place as educators is to (do our utmost to) be removers of hinderances....Each child in every age brings something new into the world from divine regions, and it is our task as educators to (do our utmost to) remove bodily and physical obstacles out of his way; to remove hinderances so thst his spirit may enter in full freedom into life.” *R. Steiner*

Where learning is impeded or accelerated for some reason, our Learning Support provides both the learner and the teacher with the support required to enable a child to learn alongside their peers, participating in the Steiner curriculum that is developmentally appropriate.

This Learning Support Policy outlines the steps by which objective indications and subjective experiences can be investigated to ensure the best learning outcomes are achieved for each student, in the timeliest, most respectful and resource efficient way.

### The Outcomes of Learning Support at Silver Tree Steiner School include:

- Interventions that are respectful of everyone’s dignity
- Identification of students with additional learning needs
- Liaison with parents and learning specialists to meet student needs and implement any recommendations that arise from assessment
- Individual Education Plans written in conjunction with the Class Teacher, Education Support Teacher and Parents
- Providing in-class support
- Providing out-of-class support either as individual or in small groups, and
- Referral of students to appropriate external agencies.

### Rudolf Steiner’s Indications concerning Education and Learning Support

Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) provided a number of key insights relating to child development and education. These provide indications about the value of an age appropriate curriculum, the importance of not applying grading to a child in a way that impacts on their self-perception or motivations around learning, and the importance of integrating studies through the Main Lesson format, the use of practice lessons for numeracy and literacy, and developing skills in handwork, music and art.

Steiner education is developmentally based. Ideally the Class Teacher stays with the students for all primary years. This can advantage a student, in enabling a teacher to identify learning deficits or gains, and continue to track progress throughout the school journey, in ways that might otherwise go unnoticed or be noticed much later in any year.

From the beginnings of Steiner Education (including the first Waldorf School), it was recognised that sometimes a child would need to leave the class for extra support.

Steiner also indicated a range of curative approaches to learning and well- being. From this a number of disciplines have arisen, including Anthroposophical Medicine (including the trained occupations of Anthroposophical Nurse, Doctor and /or Therapist) Bothmer Gymnastics, Camphill Communities, Curative Eurythmy and Extra Lesson. In Australia many of these disciplines are still in their infancy, and not yet found extensively in Steiner Schools. However, Silver Tree Steiner School continues to explore ways to bring these to students, providing some Extra Lesson support and Bothmer, which is integrated into the Physical Education curriculum.

## Rationale

In a Steiner School the emphasis is on the development of the whole child: Thinking, Feeling and Willing. The development of the child is seen in phases. From 0-7 years, the emphasis is on the physical development, from 7-14 years, the feeling realm is paramount and from 14 years on, abstract thinking development is emphasised. Students may have a range of special needs depending on their age, stage of development and relevant environmental factors. Their need may be intellectual, physical, psychological, emotional or social. The school endeavours to meet these individual needs both in the classroom and by providing extra assistance wherever possible. In collaboration with parents and class teachers, referrals to outside agencies, therapists or specialists may be made to assist a student's development or general well-being.

Children may be referred to:

- Pediatrician
- Optometrist
- Extra Lesson Practitioner
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health service
- Speech Pathologists
- Association of Independent Schools Psychologist
- Private Psychologist
- Audiologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Osteopath
- Reading Specialist
- Other health professional
- AISWA Inclusive Education Consultant

Silver Tree Steiner School Learning Support approach is founded on:

- The indications of Rudolf Steiner
- The initiative and care of Kindergarten / Class Teachers and our Education Support teachers
- Inclusive education
- Addressing particular learning issues, through a collaborative approach with our own professionals, other professionals in the field and necessary Professional Development to further assist our teachers' knowledge and understanding.
- The preparedness to employ evidence-based research and standard assessment tools where appropriate

## Supporting Learning Difficulties and Learning Disabilities

### Definitions

"The term **learning difficulties** is a very general one, used widely and without much precision to refer to the general problems in learning experienced by some 20 percent of the school population. Usually the term is applied to students whose difficulties are not directly related to a specific intellectual, physical or sensory disability, although some students with disabilities often do experience problems in learning and in social adjustment. Students who have been referred to as 'slow learners', 'low achievers', or simply 'the hard to teach', certainly fall within the category 'learning difficulties' ....."

Peter Westwood, Commonsense Methods for Children with Special Educational needs:

Strategies for the regular classroom, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Routledge Falmer, Abingdon, 2003, p.6

A student with a **learning disability** "exhibits chronic problems in mastering the basic academic skills of reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. Some students with LD may also have problems with

social skills, and a few have minor difficulties with physical skills.” (Westwood, *Commonsense Methods*, p.8)

### **Enrolment of Students with special needs**

- Applications from students with special needs are welcomed at Silver Tree Steiner School. If information on the enrolment form indicates that a child has special needs, or if it becomes apparent during the interview with the Class Teacher or during the child’s pre-enrolment classroom visit, then parents will be invited to meet with the Class Teacher, Education Support Teacher and/or Education Co-ordinator to discuss the students learning needs.
- We encourage the sharing of information between home and school and across agencies.

### **Students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds**

- Students from Non-English speaking Backgrounds / English as a second language, will be supported in the classroom according to the need and time available. Some funding may be available for ESL students who meet the quite stringent selection criteria as described in AISWA application guidelines.

### **Specific Disabilities**

- When a specific disability is identified, the Kindergarten or Class Teacher will be diligent in seeking professional development opportunities, (training, briefings from health professionals, attendance at a disability association events, etc.), and our school will strive to support this.
- Some children with disabilities may be eligible for Supplementary Inclusive Education funding available through AISWA.

## **Gifted and Talented Students**

### **Giftedness and Talent: What do they mean?**

While every student has personal strengths, giftedness is recognised as those students who achieve in the top 10% in any subject area or on tests of intellectual potential (Gagne, 2000)

Some people confuse *gifts* and *personal strengths*. Not everyone is gifted. A person who is *gifted* is someone who has the potential to perform at a level significantly above what we would expect for their age. Everyone has a *personal strength*. A personal strength is something that we do better than we do other things.

Gagne (1995) argues that the terms *gifted* and *talented* should not be used synonymously and states that *giftedness* is defined as the possession of natural abilities or aptitudes at levels significantly beyond what might be expected for one’s age, in any domain of human ability. Giftedness defines outstanding **potential** rather than outstanding performance. This model, therefore, recognises all identified groups of gifted children, including the gifted underachiever. The gifted underachiever is the child who may have well above average ability but who has not yet been able to translate this into above average performance. *Talent* is defined as **achievement** or **performance** at a level significantly beyond what might be expected at a given age.

A child’s life experience becomes the catalysts that hinder or promote the transformation of a gift into a talent. See Gagne’s ‘Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent’ on the next page.

The characteristics of what is defined as gifted and talented can be applied to approximately the top 10% of the student population. These children would be considered mildly to highly gifted. Those students, who fall into the top 2.5% or above, are more likely to require specific individual planning to enable them to achieve to their potential and may be more likely to require acceleration in one or more subject areas. (Source: AISWA Guidelines 2010)

For those who show special gifts or talents, sometimes inexplicably from a very young age, there is a question of how they can best be provided for.

Silver Tree Steiner School does not have a specific add-on program for gifted and talented children. In general, we believe the curriculum (eg age appropriate Main Lesson format) and delivery (lively, integrated teaching) provides rich opportunities for children to extend themselves while working within the class as a whole. The Teacher will note and monitor when a child shows special abilities, but avoid drawing undue attention to this, so as to help develop the child as a whole person, well-balanced, integrating head, heart and hands.

When necessary, gifted and talented children may have enrichment within the class or out of class with the Education Support Teacher.

Any parent wanting to explore this aspect of policy further can request an interview with the teacher.

### **Profiles of gifted and talented students**

Betts and Neihart (1988) developed six profiles of gifted and talented students. These can be used to understand gifted underachievers.

#### **Type 1: Successful**

These students are bright, motivated achievers. However, they are more motivated by teacher acceptance than by fully developing their abilities.

#### **Type 2: Challenging**

These students can be bored, angry and resentful and they are likely to take it out on teachers and other students. They feel frustrated that the school system hasn't recognised their talents. Teachers often fail to recognise this group as gifted.

#### **Type 3: Underground**

These students have often chosen group acceptance over academic achievement through the forced-choice dilemma. They then become afraid that they will lose acceptance with their peers if they drop this camouflage.

#### **Type 4: Dropouts**

These students may be intellectually and emotionally removed from what is happening in the classroom. They are angry with adults and themselves as they feel their needs haven't been met and they feel rejected. They may withdraw into themselves and refuse to participate or they may act out and respond defensively.

#### **Type 5: Double labelled (or 'twice exceptional')**

These students are gifted but they also have a physical or emotional disability or learning disability. These students are doubly disadvantaged as the school often only focuses on the disability and ignores the gift.

#### **Type 6: Autonomous learners**

These students have learned to work well in the school system. They are academically successful, can work cooperatively with the teachers and have strong positive self-concepts. They are liked and admired by staff and students and often take on a leadership role in the school.

## Sources of Information and Early Indications of Need to Address Learning Challenges

- Information from student enrolment process
- Parent interviews
- Poor self-management, low motivation, misbehaviour or absenteeism from class may include redirected student learning problems
- Performing below age level academically
- Diagnosis from other professionals, including visiting school nurse
- Late speech development
- Reversals of writing/reading of letters or numerals which persist longer than peers
- Disorganised / loses things
- Inefficient learning strategies
- Learned helplessness
- Anxiety and low self-esteem
- Difficulty with social relationships
- Difficulty remembering or following instructions
- Difficulty in quickly naming familiar objects
- Weak lateralization (no strong preference for left or right handedness, directional confusion)
- Clumsiness, poor motor co-ordination, accident prone
- Easily distracted, short attention span
- Difficulty learning new task

## Additional Support

Options for providing support include:

- Adapting the physical environment
- Modifying curriculum or outcomes
- In-class support by Education Support Teacher and Assistants
- Out-of-class support by Education Support Teacher and Assistants, either individually or in small groups
- Consultation with outside professionals, especially where there are learning disabilities
- Peer tutoring
- Small group work

**Kindergarten / Class Teachers** are encouraged to be

- Evidence-based in coming to working conclusions about a child's learning needs
- Using the Child Study as an observational tool to inform thinking about acting on a child's or class' needs
- Open to bringing in expertise (eg Non-Governmental School Psychologist) or specific assessment instruments to help in the identification of issues and the development of an Individual Education Plan
- Maintain an open, professional communication with the Education Support Teacher
- Open to the possibility that a learning difficulty has been identified early by a parent, whether or not the parent has specialist knowledge in the area
- Appreciative of the actual knowledge and expertise a parent of a child with a specific learning need can sometimes offer
- Exercising equanimity and a spirit of curiosity

Class teachers are asked to be courageous in making a reluctant parent aware that their child may have a learning issue.

### **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**

Greatest success is achieved when school, family and external agencies work together. All students doing Learning Support will have an Individual Education Plan.

An IEP helps:

- Identify ways to help a child experience success in learning
- Develop a partnership between school and home
- Formalise, record and implement programs designed to meet the identified learning needs of specific students

Essential components of the program will include:

- Time to fully assess / gather information
- Prioritising learning goals
- Planned learning and teaching activities
- Roles and responsibilities
- Report back schedule:  
Education Support Teacher meets with Class Teacher each week  
Education Support Teacher shares with parent each term