

**Wednesday 23 July 2014**

**Investigation into allegations of racism at Te Ra Waldorf School**

The Ministry of Education has today released a report on the findings of an independent investigation into a complaint regarding the school. The investigation was initiated by the Ministry in December 2013 when the Minister of Education received a complaint alleging racism at the special character school. A new board took over governance of the school in June 2013.

The basis of the complaint was allegations of racist aspects in the Steiner belief system, as espoused in anthroposophy, the philosophy underpinning the special character of the school. The complainants claimed that the curriculum, learning and teaching at Te Ra Waldorf School are racist and that parents concerns were not dealt with appropriately.

**Ministry of Education comment**

**Attributable to Katrina Casey, head of sector enablement and support**

We treat any suggestion of racism in schools very seriously and always take action to investigate if a complaint is made.

We initiated an independent investigation that found no evidence of racist elements within the Te Ra Waldorf school curriculum or in the delivery of the curriculum. We are satisfied that the school is operating as it should be.

The investigation did identify that further clarification is needed regarding the appropriate focus for each of the groups involved in governance, management, teaching and the special character of the school so that any future concerns or complaints from parents are appropriately dealt with. The report also stated that the school must continue regular communication with the school community regarding the ongoing work being undertaken to address the issues raised and noted that the board has proactively sought support to do this.

We have discussed the report with the school and the board is in the process of compiling a formal response to the findings. We will support the school to ensure all issues that were identified in the report are addressed and the school community can be confident in the teaching and learning at Te Ra.

Separate to the investigation, we have been working with the new school board for the past year on governance, management and delivery of the curriculum. The new board has been proactive in seeking support to ensure their curriculum and teaching embraces and

promotes the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand. There have been no complaints or concerns brought to the Ministry from current parents about staff, the curriculum or teaching in the past year and we have found them to be very open to feedback.

We want every child in New Zealand to have access to a good education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We also want to offer parents choices about how their children are educated.

Parents may choose to send their children to state integrated schools, such as Steiner Waldorf schools, which have a special character that is central to their philosophy. Irrespective of their special character, all schools in New Zealand must comply with established educational and ethical standards and operate within the law. It is our role to ensure they do so.

Steiner Waldorf schools are established all over the world and many parents see this as a preferable style of teaching and learning for their children. Many aspects of the original philosophies of special character schools have evolved and are no longer relevant in today's society. Steiner Waldorf schools would not be part of our education system if racist views underpinned their curriculum. We are regularly in contact with the governing bodies of all special character schools, in this case the Federation of Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand, to ensure consistent practices are in place across all state integrated Steiner Waldorf schools in New Zealand.

We are proud that our education system is underpinned by the Treaty of Waitangi. Prejudice has no place in our schools and racism is not tolerated. As the founding document for New Zealand, The Treaty of Waitangi is significant for all aspects of state and state integrated education. The Federation of Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand is the umbrella group for all Steiner schools and its equity statement acknowledges that the schools are responsive to *Aotearoa New Zealand's bi-cultural heritage*.

An Education Review Office review was undertaken at the school recently. The report has been published on the school's website: <http://tera.school.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/1613-Te-Ra-School-confirmed-report-2014.pdf>

The investigation also highlighted a need to work with the Steiner Federation to engage in a wider debate regarding an appropriate response to racist writings / beliefs in anthroposophy. Ministry staff will meet with the Federation next week to discuss this recommendation.

**Te Ra Waldorf School comment**

**Attributable to Sylvia Madden, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Te Ra Waldorf School**

We acknowledge the findings of the independent report into complaints that were made by parents under the previous board. We are pleased that the report did not find any instances of racism in our school and that it acknowledges the progress we have made in improving communications with parents and our community.

We are committed to taking the views of parents very seriously and are open to discussions. The report acknowledges that we listen and are responsive when questions or concerns are expressed.

Like any school we want the best for the children we teach and we want parents to trust us with educating their children appropriately. Racism has no place in our school and the recent investigation found no evidence of any racist practices or teachings. Our school is inclusive and made up of a diverse range of students – 18% of our students are Maori. We are working with our community, other schools, the Federation and the Ministry of Education to ensure our curriculum recognises the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand.

Steiner Waldorf education has proved to be very successful across the world and millions of children have benefited from a Steiner Waldorf education. Like most Steiner Waldorf schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we do not accept anthroposophy or Rudolf Steiner's words as dogma, and disagree with some of his views.

The investigation and the work the new board, staff and parents have undertaken in the past year have been very worthwhile. They have given us an opportunity to review what we do and refresh who we are, and to work on developing better ways to engage with our community and properly explain the ethos of our school. I am very happy with the progress we have made and look forward to continuing our conversations with the community. We are very open to suggestions for how we can adapt our curriculum to more explicitly integrate Te Ao Māori, and reflect our place in 21<sup>st</sup> century Aotearoa New Zealand, a Pacific Nation.