

Special Character Articles

A place to share information to deepen our understanding of our Special Character as a Steiner school

Food for Thought from the RSST

Opinion piece: On special character

By Sara Mole, RSST Co-Chair

At the RSST, we often reflect on definitions of 'special character', and it is tempting to try to reach for a list of things that we expect should be done or experienced by each class in order for them to receive what we perceive to be a Steiner Education. However, over time, I have come to understand that performing a specific task in a particular class is not really what this education is all about.

During the school holidays, I read an article by Martyn Rawson, one of the editors of the 'Yellow Book', titled 'The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum'.

<https://www.waldorf-resources.org/en/single-view/waldorf-education-a-continuous-cycle-of-renewal>

This resonated with me, and I'll try to summarise some of the points for you here.

"The Waldorf curriculum ...provides children and young people with learning contexts in which they can form and shape themselves, school their abilities, cultivate their feelings, define and re-define their relationship to the world and others and above all, to develop new ideas."

Martyn goes on to explain that the quality of the Waldorf experience draws on the knowledge of teachers observing, studying and reflecting on the pupils; their teaching practice; and the context that we find ourselves in - in time and place. This knowledge interacts with our understanding of the insights into human development given to us by Rudolf Steiner.

Among other points, the article makes a series of suggestions as to how teaching supports learning and development that include:

- Learning is understandable,

manageable and meaningful

- Learning is artistic, aesthetic and interdisciplinary
- Students learn in and through the world by first recognising the physical or phenomenon and later the meaning or process
- There is a balance in craft, artistic work, projects and academics
- Providing rich informal learning for life in life

Reflecting on these ideas in the context of Michael Park School in 2025, I believe we can continue to value cherished traditions and rituals while also allowing for growth, creativity, and curriculum development that respond to our changing world. To me, as a parent, my main concern is whether our teachers deeply connect with this philosophy so that they can draw on it daily in their observations of and responses to our students. How well supported are they to nurture this knowledge and respond adaptively to the developmental challenges that our students face today? And yes, can we as parents see these core principles reflected in student learning and in the community, even if that looks a little different over the years?

My personal view is that our role as parents is to educate ourselves, to reflect these ideals in our parenting and to ask our teachers to help us understand how their lessons are designed and adapted to respond to their students' needs. This reflective cycle of communication and co-learning on the part of parents and teachers may require our time and commitment, but it is a key element of 'special character' that we all have agency over.

Do you have thoughts or readings to share on special character Steiner education? Feel free to get in touch with us at RSST@michaelpark.school.nz

