

Dandenong Ranges Steiner School

Strategic Plan 2021-2025



Working vision

Learning for life: head-heart-hands with nature, diversity and inclusion

How to use this document

The purpose of this document is to provide a map to imagine what each strategic area can look like when we are well on the way to achieving our vision and can see the fruits in sight. It is not intended as a work plan in *how* to get there. Various working groups will work with the *how* according to our agreed priorities: what to do first, by when, developing mandates to do the work, and monitoring and reviewing milestones along the way, and so on.

This document provides rich data from everyone who has contributed. It will guide the working groups, in ensuring that work plans that emerge from the Strategic Plan are coherent with the original intention of the vision, purpose and strategic thinking behind each Arrow.

The metaphor of an *arrow* depicts each strategic heading. The strategic plan is a series of *arrows* in our quiver, to make the invisible visible and guide our direction, with the directness of an arrow. The relationship between the archer, the landscape, the arrow, the destination and the quiver is an imagination to invoke the relationship between role, competency development, environment, inner work and direction.

This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Governors on December 14, 2020.

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Arrow 1: Telling Our Story

Evidenced in solid statements of our educational provision, our philosophy and our principles, and which are coherent with explainable sound practice.

Focus Area 1. 1: Coherent story we are proud of

- a) Provide a coherent, well-grounded story we are proud of: A solid philosophy statement and principles that apply Anthroposophy in the sphere of Steiner Education, coherent with sound, defensible, explainable practices.
- b) We present our unique features, which are a resilient anchor to sustain values, trust and innovations, in adapting to whatever comes towards us.
- c) Our website and marketing materials reflect our strategic direction, culture and story.

Focus Area 1. 2: Philosophy and purpose statements

Provide clear, strong statements:

- a) For prospective and current families – who we are, what we excel at, what we offer educationally and what we do not offer, and our unique points of difference as DRSS, in relation to our neighbouring Steiner schools.
- b) For Board, leadership and management roles, all staff and stakeholders – our core purpose, core focus on educating the child, and clear plans on teacher development and evidence-based practice.

Focus Area 1. 3: Diversity and inclusion

We present a clear stance on the role and importance of diversity and inclusion in our school, in our curriculum and our behavioural norms encompassing ethnicity and culture, religion, gender and gender identity, festivals and festivities, language, food, learning styles and abilities, socio-economic access.

Focus Area 1.4: Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge that we work, learn and play on Wurundjeri country and we are in a new learning phase to connect with our indigenous elders, culture and reality. This new learning is reflected in how we present ourselves.

Focus Area 1.5: Care for country and nature

We showcase our approach to integrating nature and the unique local bushland in our curriculum and culture.



Arrow 2: Focusing on student-centred learning and self-agency for all

Evidenced in innovative learning experience and practice, purpose-driven role performance and evidence-based evaluation.

Focus Area 2.1: Educational leadership

We have a purpose-driven leadership structure and function focused on pedagogy and *distributed* pedagogical leadership:

- a) Strong core education values, principles and business, where leaders are allowed to lead, leadership is distributed, which fosters an enabling, collaborative culture with teachers, aides, subject specialists, and staff who engage with students on a regular basis as part of their work.
- b) Purpose-driven consistency and coherence across all classes and learning environments with a required baseline of student-centred practice. Curriculum experience that enables students to develop a rich inner life and the freedom to transition to any school of choice after DRSS, carrying the capacities and love of learning gained here with them through life.
- c) Coherence of philosophy and practice in engaging with nature and working with parents (inspired by DRSS Early Childhood model).
- d) Robust, reliable and flexible remote learning and teaching capability coherent with innovative Steiner education *praxis*, to provide security, consistency and continuity in times of individual, regional and global disruption.
- e) Staff attend meetings and participate relevant to their role, function and purpose, to ensure representation and inclusion of relevant views and critique, and unified pathways in interactive exchange, decision making and follow up.

Focus Area 2.2: Teaching and learning

Purpose-driven, innovative and accessible learning and development framework that is coherent with principles, is appreciative of strengths and evidence-based:

- a) Focus on student-outcomes for dynamic self-agency in learning and collaboration.
- b) Focus on teacher outcomes in deepening and strengthening understanding and practice of anthroposophical meditation; interaction skills; student-centred learning design; working well with power; diversity awareness skills; and facilitating group- work with ability for individual flexibility.
- c) Clear, in-depth and transparent, student-centred assessment and age-appropriate self-assessment framework and practice for student. Provide parents with enriched understanding, enthusiasm and guidance to back up at home.
- d) Clear, transparent, in-depth teacher performance appraisal and self-appraisal pathways to guide engagement in personal and professional learning, growth and measure effectiveness.

Focus Area 2.3: Coherence in curriculum

Integration of approved Steiner Education Australia curriculum documents and updates into classical Steiner curriculum as a whole school foundation to embed in practice.

These are:

Core principles of education, National Steiner Curriculum Framework (includes numeracy and literacy), indigenous curriculum, literacy innovations, learning support, technology curriculum, remote virtual learning opportunities, remote experiences such as camps, and trauma-informed practices.

Focus Area 2.4: Learning diversity and adaptations

Purposeful oversight for individualised learning interventions:

- a) Cross-disciplinary, flexible allied health and ILP (learning) teams for students with (mixed) diverse abilities
- b) Integration of anthroposophical and current, evidence-based neuro-diversity and trauma-informed practice, coherent with DRSS philosophy statement and principles.
- c) Research-based approaches to learning variations such as autism and sensory processing.
- d) Adaptation and coping strategies, with and for, students, teachers, parents and families.
- e) A practical outdoor syllabus with purposeful, sensory, physically active and nature-based learning experiences for all students, and for those who thrive better, beyond the walls of a classical classroom environment.
- f) Opportunities for gifted students across the learning spectrum; in the creative arts, sciences, mathematics, languages and physical education.

Focus Area 2.5: Coaching and mentoring

- a) Purpose-driven and strong teacher coaching and mentoring practice as an aspect of professional development.
- b) Building capacity for coaching and mentoring across the school to enable Class teachers, specialist teachers, teacher aides and *service staff* to learn, share expertise and work freely with the richly evolving Steiner/Waldorf curriculum.



Arrow 3: Learning in our environment

Evidenced in curriculum and community engagement in our natural environment, our built environment and landscape, and our social environment.

Focus Area 3.1: Nature

Love for the natural world; gardening for health, beauty and nourishment; and engagement in natural bushland, is integrated into the curriculum:

- a) Integrated bushwalks, accessing local parklands, forests and lakes.
- b) Embedded practices as custodians of our bushland area – herbicide-free regenerative plantings, walking tracks, food program, bush crafts, and working with council on the bushland areas on our boundaries.
- c) Outdoor creative play spaces and classrooms.
- d) A seed to table process embedded in the learning journey, growing biodynamic food, herbs, fruit trees, with harvesting, food preparation and social enjoyment of eating and celebrating together.

Focus Area 3.2: Built environment and landscape

- a) New master plan aligned with strategic directions.
- b) Current spaces and needs are reviewed with a fresh perspective, for creative solutions to current space limitations.
- c) The entire physical, built and sensory environment and landscape is imbued with beauty, colour, warmth, simplicity, calm, using natural and environmentally friendly materials and design.
- d) Opportunities for students, staff and families to contribute to the school property functionality, enjoyment and aesthetic as a place of evolving and living art, as part of the master plan.
- e) Sound resource principles, practices and ownership ensuring all staff and students take personal responsibility for: waste management (RRRR), energy and water-saving, materials and equipment, order, cleanliness and beauty.

Focus Area 3.3: Working with conflict

- a) School-wide, skill-based conflict engagement approach coherent with DRSS philosophy and principles.
- b) Skill and capability development in understanding mindsets, emotional states and triggers that are likely to result in poor use of power and authority. Ensuring all staff have an understanding of power and influence and are mindful in their use of power/influence within the school community, in relating to staff, children and parents.

- c) Regular, well-facilitated open forums to raise and process topics of importance and concern with clear information, inclusive and frank exchange and brave decision making
- d) Skill-based practice framework to work with power wisely and creatively, including mandatory reporting; embedded preventative practices; mistreatment of any kind addressed in real time; and responsiveness to disclosures in the aftermath of *abuse* no matter how long ago.

Focus Area 3.4: Health, safety and risk management

- a) Occupational Health and Safety framework is practiced, taught and regularly updated.
- b) School-wide safety policies, protocols and practices are up to date, well managed and monitored.
- c) Safety incident reports are tracked, managed, analysed, findings reported and recommendations implemented, with clear ownership and accountability for improving practice.
- d) A school-wide risk management framework that is realistic and achievable, and covers camps and excursions, reputation, liability, property, work health and safety, worker's compensation and cybersecurity.



Arrow 4: Vitalising community connections

Evidenced in successful partnerships with families, partnerships in the local community and in professional networks.

Focus Area 4.1: Parent engagement

- a) Ownership, accountability and pathways for engaging and mentoring new parents, and formalised ways for parents to learn and integrate into the school community.
- b) A strengths-based coaching approach to up-skill teachers and staff to engage with parent requests meaningfully, and to facilitate grievances and difficult conversations.
- c) School carer functions operate under the educational leadership umbrella, to facilitate cohesive parent engagement in student learning, as well as grievances.
- d) A school-wide mechanism for parent engagement, facilitates mentoring, projects, initiatives and planned, co-ordinated involvement aligned with existing leadership and governance bodies.

Focus Area 4.2: School community

- a) A volunteer program that utilises, co-ordinates and recognises contributions, skills and expertise within and around the community.
- b) Vibrant whole community festivals and events that bring the entire community together. Festivals and events that represent the diverse cultural and family backgrounds of students and their families.

Focus Area 4.3: Care for country

- a) A school wide Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that integrates awareness, principles and community connections in caring for country.
- b) SEA's indigenous direction is embedded in the curriculum with local context and stories.
- c) Proactively learning from local Wurundjeri elders and traditions and following a shared understanding of permissions and relationships, in regular rituals to acknowledge and care for country.
- d) A learning attitude is deepening relationships with local elders and *BIPOC* to participate and contribute to relationship building, in our natural environment, and community.
- e) Environmental risk strategies and know-how for crisis prevention and management such as bushfires, other weather/climate events

Focus Area 4.4: Local community

- a) Enjoy key relationships and presence in the local community that strengthen to gain strategic partnerships and become known, valued, trusted and wanted as an enriching resource in the local community. For instance, involvement in Landcare, public events, PAVE festival, Belgrave lantern festival, markets in nearby localities, traditional craft fair with a child focus, Chestnut festival, local biodynamic wineries, etc.
- b) Recognised as a significant and valued supporter of local businesses, and a contributor to the social, financial and environmental wealth of the region.
- c) An established identity in our local community in which attempts to acquire property to expand in the future will be highly valued in our locality.

Focus Area 4.5: Professional community

- a) A foundation for capacity building and succession in utilising Steiner Education Australia (SEA) resources and pathways for leadership delegates, long-term relationship building and networking, national Steiner education curriculum development, leadership development, mentoring and coaching qualifications as well as new initiatives that arise.
- b) Developing professional relationships with non-Steiner schools in our area for specific, fruitful collaboration and resource-sharing, such as music events, bushfire management strategies, swimming pool access etc. and build relationships with state secondary schools that our students are transitioning to.
- b) Strengthening communities of practice and resource sharing among neighbouring Steiner schools and like-minded institutes in Victoria, and now with on-line possibilities, worldwide.
- c) Teachers and staff are equipped with the necessary devices, IT skills and technical support to meaningfully participate in online events.

Arrow 5: Governing and leading for organisation-wide interests



Evidenced in good decision-making, successful navigation in our strategic direction, accountability aligned with purpose, and succession planning in place.

Focus Area 5.1: School-wide Leadership

- a) Accountability linked to purpose, role and team performance.
- b) Multiple interests, conflicts of interest and role overlaps in any given situation, are declared.
- c) Functional leadership and accountability structure which acknowledges education as our core business, implemented by the Board of Governors, Management Team, Business Manager and Educational Leadership function.
- d) Parents have a transparent and user-friendly process for concerns and grievances within the leadership structure.
- e) A clear set of principles developed school-wide, that guide innovation, practice and decision making by the College of Teachers and other decision makers, led by the relevant teams.
- f) Decision making framework, robust inquiry and multi-viewpoint interaction skills to ensure purposeful, high quality decision making.
- g) Early Childhood and Primary Faculties form a cohesive leadership function.
- h) Risk management framework is owned, monitored, regularly reviewed and updated

Focus Area 5.2: Leadership for education functions

A cohesive, collaborative leadership ensures educational strategic goals are met with purpose, oversight and accountability:

- a) Accreditation expertise for school registration
- b) Educational administration
- c) College of Teachers and Primary and Early Childhood Faculties: meetings and decision-making aligned with school-wide principles.
- d) Educational innovation, coaching and mentoring function

Focus Area 5.3: Teacher and staff hiring

A transparent set of principles are implemented in practice for teacher and staff hiring, induction, training, and renewing of contracts:

- a) Robust, fair and timely processes for facilitating changing roles such as long service leave, class cycle return, and exiting DRSS, that are transparent, purpose and performance-driven, and role-based.
- b) Diverse staff enables students and families to recognise their own diversity and aspirations in the staff's gender mix and gender identity, skin colour, and cultural and personal backgrounds to name some examples.
- c) A proactive teacher recruitment strategy is used to hire for specialised skills required to implement strategic direction (Steiner education *praxis*, nature, diversity and inclusion). Building networks to pursue new teachers in teacher-training settings and professional settings.
- d) A well supervised practicum teaching program for student teachers and professionals studying/working in areas of interest for instance: therapeutic practical education, the arts, outdoor education, biodynamic gardening and farming, food and nourishment as a social art.

Focus Area 5.4: Leadership development

Ongoing professional and personal leadership development using SEA resources as a foundation for capacity building, supplemented by relevant professional development in:

- a) Leadership development
- b) Mentoring, coaching and conflict training
- c) Community of Practice across Australia among professional colleagues in various disciplines and interest groups

Arrow 6: Sustaining viability



Evidenced in financial health mirroring desired enrolments, energised staff and succession capability.

Focus Area 6.1: Enrolment strategy

- a) Financial analysis and planning with sound demographic projections, and advice from ISV specialists and ISV's robust research data.
- b) Exit interviews provide data from every family who leaves, planned or unexpected, to learn lessons and apply any necessary changes to prevent unwanted and unhappy departures.
- c) Our marketing plan provides strategies for retention of current families and attracting new families.
- d) The feasibility of a school bus pick-up and drop-off run is examined and decided upon and after school care provision is available, onsite or in Emerald, for those families who need it..

Focus Area 6.2: Economic and business management

Short and longer term economic and business management strategy:

- a) Board and organisation-wide capability in economic literacy using the Somerset Education budget model as endorsed by SEA, ISV and VRQA. Provides relevant and accessible reporting and oversight based on reliable and consistent data, for both short term accuracy and/or longer-term projections.
- b) Insulation from the "Covid-19 recession" and its impact on school fee payments using expert advice from ISV.
- c) Robust, reliable and adaptive remote operations capability provides security, consistency and continuity in times of individual, regional and global disruption.

Focus Area 6.3: Investment in leadership and succession

Financial investment in pedagogical leadership, personal and professional development of all staff, builds capacity to thrive in our focus areas: Steiner pedagogy, diversity and inclusion, and nature and outdoor classrooms.

Focus Area 6.4: Research culture

A vibrant **research culture** is valued and invested in:

- a) Continuous inquiry to deepen learning and performance, on the question: What does it mean to be a Steiner teacher, in 2020, at DRSS, in Australia, and in today's world?

b) Succession planning active in all roles and collegial practice.

Focus Area 6.5: Student leadership: our future

Transparent and creative student peer-to-peer mentoring and leadership roles, in age-appropriate ways, for leadership skills as collaboration role-models, coaches and co-learners and school community citizens, for instance: cross-class collaboration, opportunities to excel for advanced/gifted students, peer mentoring, and unique opportunities for students to shine in a valued role at school and in the broader community.

Glossary

Abuse: This includes psychological and emotional misuse of power, bullying, physical, sexual violence in overt and subtle forms, of any kind, towards anyone, and in all settings.

BIPOC: Acronym for black, indigenous, people of colour

Distributed leadership: Term from the field of education, organisational leadership and field theory approaches. Leadership roles and functions are stretched across the organisation or team with a designated person occupying the assigned role. At the same time, the role is fluid and nonlocal. Different people might pick up the role at various moments in an interaction, depending on awareness in the moment and context.

ILP: A formalised Individual Learning Plan

In-depth: Three levels of information in the field of experience (threefold) – factual and measurable; subjective and relative; and unified wholeness momentarily.

Power:

- **Contextual power:** The potential influence and rank that comes with an assigned formal role.
- **Rank:** The potential advantage that comes with a particular role, whether assigned or earned.
- **Personal power and rank:** An innate capability that can be learned and developed, such as centredness in difficulties, ability to flow between sides of a polarised situation, knowing one's own emotional triggers that create low power states such as feeling a victim of the situation, moods etc. Detachment to stay related to the situation and help move things forward to strengthen common ground.
- **Wise use of power:** The awareness to be connected with one's personal power as the foundation for using assigned power well.

Praxis: The reflective practice cycle of applying a particular theoretical framework in practice, learning and harvesting lessons, and integrating lessons back into the learning cycle.

School-wide: Interests are taken from a broad perspective, with input from all stakeholders, coherent with school vision and strategic priorities.

Service staff: Includes business, administration, cleaning and maintenance

Student agency: Plain language for Steiner's quote: "Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives."

Student-centred: plain language to indicate that pedagogical activities and decisions prioritise student's adaptations and variations over generalised behaviours and rules, when signals indicate clearly that these are not working for the person or the group, to allow for an enriching educational experience and personal well-being.

Trauma-informed practice: Trauma-informed practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that

emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild predictability, self-agency and coping capabilities.

Whole school: inclusive of all aspects and people.