



Ghilgai Steiner School Performance Report 2010

Introduction

In response to the Federal Government's requirement that all schools report on performance in a number of areas, we are pleased to have this opportunity to present this report. We have layered the required information into an overall view of school operations to give a comprehensive picture and make it more meaningful for all concerned. This report is available at the School, via the Education Coordinator, and also as a .pdf file that can be downloaded from our website at <http://www.ghilgai.com.au>.

Ghilgai School holds regular school tours and education evenings during the year. These occasions are an opportunity for enquiring parents to discuss the school ethos and teaching practices in some detail.

Staffing

At Ghilgai Steiner School the Class Teacher moves through the class levels with the children in order to provide a stable and secure environment for the child. This continuity from year to year allows the teacher much insight into the whole nature of the child and deepens the teacher/student relationship. Class teachers make a firm commitment to accompany the child throughout the six primary school years. This is always freely given – with an understanding that life's circumstances could unexpectedly change and necessitate departure. Should this happen, the transition is carefully managed by the College of Teachers.

Class Teachers at Ghilgai have generally achieved this span. Of our current group of teachers, several are very experienced, while others are becoming well-established in their work.

At the end of 2010 our treasured Music Teacher had to leave Ghilgai due to necessitous circumstances; however, we were able to find a well-experienced teacher to replace her. She has joined our team of specialists in Eurythmy, Craft, and Physical Education.

We also have specialist teachers who give one-to-one guidance to students in need of extra support in Literacy and Numeracy. A classroom aide gives students extra support within the class setting in Literacy and Numeracy as part of a Government Targeted Funding programme. Our PE teacher also works with individual children on coordinative activities. An experienced art therapist visits weekly when needed.

In 2010 we appointed a Guidance Counsellor under the Secular Pastoral Care Worker provisions of the National School Chaplaincy Programme, offering a network of care and support in Ghilgai for families and staff.

Our Bursar and our Education Coordinator are part-time administrators — the latter is an experienced Steiner teacher who can also offer support to teachers, parents, and children. Support is also available from our valuable ancillary staff member who covers first aid, library, reception duties and general assistance for teachers.

Teacher Qualifications and Professional Development

At Ghilgai School, on our fulltime staff, there are 2 teachers specialised in early childhood education, 2 teachers with primary teaching qualifications, and 3 teachers with secondary teaching qualifications. Our specialist teachers are well-qualified and experienced in their respective fields. All teachers at Ghilgai are VIT registered.

Professional development opportunities renew and enrich practising teachers. At Ghilgai, some provision has been made for funding support and replacement teaching to enable teachers to attend PD workshops and courses during term time.

Ghilgai School provides an ongoing Professional Development programme for teaching staff on a weekly basis, in addition to regular in-house in-service days, often with a visiting speaker, and often open to teachers from other Steiner Schools. Ghilgai is strengthened by the presence of a number of highly experienced teachers, who are involved in a formal mentoring programme. Through an internal PD Support scheme, teachers are also enabled visit other classrooms to observe lessons.

Besides these formal PD structures, teachers also constantly network with each other informally and share experience and skills. This diversity of qualifications and experience enriches the basic professional foundation.

Learning and Literacy and Numeracy

The Steiner curriculum unfolds to meet the child's developmental stages. Lesson content cannot be arbitrarily placed within a class context. Teaching matches the "optimum time" — ie when the child is developmentally ready, in both intellect and inner life, to take the next step in learning. This approach provides fulfilment for the child, and engenders confidence. It is truly wholistic.

Our curriculum is carefully structured in the way it introduces and develops Literacy and Numeracy. We do not call upon analytical skills until there is an appropriate ripeness in the older classes. Both Literacy and Numeracy in the early years are grounded in reality, rich language experiences and visual imagery. Abstract concepts are avoided in these early stages.

Ghilgai School does not overtly and formally test children before Class 6 because we are striving to build confidence and joy in the learning experience itself. Overt testing situations imposed in the primary years negate this striving and weaken the confidence of many children — not necessarily via "failure", often just by the comparisons that the child inevitably makes of him/herself with others.

Overt testing moves the child's focus away from personal growth and personal "best" and promotes a subtle competitive element within the individual. No longer is the learning process experienced as a natural process of growth that will continue for life; it is altered by the testing mechanism. Results are valued above experience and striving. Then, as the challenged child struggles towards this new point of external acceptance, confidence is eroded. On the other hand, capable children may shine because they have been accepted in a new way — ie their test results are above the norm and/or above those of other classmates. Their focus shifts then to "good results", and the wholesome learning experience is for them subverted.

And yet each teacher needs to know whether a child has retained previous learning and is independently able to demonstrate particular essential skills. Teachers are accountable to parents, and schools are accountable to various government agencies that need to overview the effectiveness of the education provided in each school, on behalf of future generations and society as a whole.

Some form of structured evaluation of learning is necessary. At Ghilgai School this is multifaceted:

1. Minimum Standards for each Class Level – student profiles from Class 1 through to Class 6. There are benchmarks for each class level in Numeracy and Literacy.

Checklists for each level detail the developmental sequence within each domain so that achievement can be monitored via Class Assessment Tasks.

These records belong to the School and are updated by the Class Teacher each term, using a standard code that reflects the stages of Understanding, Consolidation, and Independent mastery.

2. Observational notes about each child – from time to time, as they appear noteworthy, teachers record individual children’s strengths and challenges.
3. Ghilgai has Standardised Assessments for children in Classes 1, 3 and 5 in both Literacy and Numeracy. These are given to children gradually from June to November in discreet and informal ways during our Practice Lesson times. They appear to the children to be simply another revision exercise and therefore do not have the hallmarks of a test. (See Appendix A)

Ghilgai offers NAPLAN tests annually at Class 3 and 5 levels in accord with Government policy. As in past years, in 2010 Ghilgai had 100% withdrawal of students by their parents, who in choosing this education do not want to place their children into formal testing situations in these early years. The parents do so because they see that, if the school were to restructure the teaching of Literacy / Numeracy to accord with NAPLAN progressions, this would breach the Steiner curriculum that unfolds stage by stage in relation to the pedagogy of ongoing child development. The child must have time to grow within each stage, and each stage is foundational for the next. Also, parents see that by the end of Class 6 Ghilgai students are strong in all aspects of Literacy / Numeracy, and well-equipped for secondary schooling. For these reasons they value Steiner’s wholistic view.

4. Parents and teachers have a scheduled conversation time around mid-year, following the issuing of the first semester reports, when teachers are available to share and comment on student work. Parents are also able to make appointments to discuss their child’s development and progress at other times. Ghilgai encourages this close and effective liaison between parent and teacher.
5. Our end-of-year reports are meaningful and broad, providing a multi-layered profile of the child’s achievement throughout the year.

School Well-Being

Vision Statement:

Ghilgai School reflects the values of Steiner Education. We endeavour to educate the children wholistically via a balanced curriculum in a safe and nurturing environment, one which fosters clarity in thinking, depth in feeling and strength of will, so that as adults they will be able to contribute to society as creative, ethical and responsible citizens.

At Ghilgai we strive to build confidence, initiative and responsibility, seeking to maintain a balance between the growth of the individual and that of the group entity. We actively work towards an accepting and compassionate community, founded on an harmonious union between school and home.

A vibrant and healthy school tone must be maintained by all members of the school community — teachers, children, and parents. Our comprehensive Codes of Conduct for teachers, students and parents lay down clear guidelines for all parties, presenting pathways for clear communication in any challenging situations, and effective procedures for the resolution of differences.

We have a maximum of 22 students per class, so that we can nourish each child and cater for individual differences. At times the College of Teachers may close enrolments into a class with fewer than 22 children for pedagogical reasons.

The children daily give us joy. There is a high level of care evident in the student community, and the occasional instances of bullying are addressed immediately. A child in need will be discussed at staff meetings and a support group may be formed for him/her.

Student attendance is regular. Absenteeism is limited to the usual patterns of childhood illness, or to special circumstances regarding which we liaise closely with parents. (See Appendix B)

The teachers' committed and generous participation in school life is probably a model for the students' behaviour, as they too have relatively few days of absence.

Our parent body is supportive in diverse ways. In everyday living there are many parental contributions that will enrich the lives of the students (eg practical assistance with a project, or the sharing of knowledge or skills). A community is a living and growing organism that requires ongoing sustenance. Parent evenings address the children's development, and foster dialogue about education and the challenges of parenting.

Our Open Day each year is a celebration of this community life. It is organised and run by the parents. The children's music items enliven the day and the teachers transform each classroom into a rich world of experience manifesting the fruits of the year's work. It is a nourishing point for all in our community. Our Autumn Market is another community day for all, and celebration of seasonal festivals brings rhythm to the year and fosters community sharing.

The school as a whole gathers together every Thursday morning to sing and to share. Parents are welcome to attend.

History

Ghilgai began in February 1982 in a private house in Mt Evelyn with a handful of children spanning Foundation Year, Class 1 and Class 2. We moved to our present site in September 1982 and continued as a multi-age group in our first room. By February 1983 we had another room ready — we were then a dual stream Kindergarten/Foundation Year with Nila Chambers, and multi-age Class 1 – 3 with Ruth Wittig.

Each year we built a new classroom and received a new intake of Kinder/Founders children. Nila moved on to Class 1 and so our new class teaching programme began to unfold. The first multi-age group increased in numbers and continued on.

Today Ghilgai is a vibrant school for children from playgroup to Class 6.

Ghilgai is an aboriginal word meaning “water hole in a dry-ish country”. We interpret this image broadly and hope that our school may indeed be a watering hole for our students, teachers, parents and the wider school community; recognising that in each one of us there is a space — a “hole” — that is able to receive the nurturing rains that replenish body and soul and spirit.

Rudolf Steiner gave a contemplative verse to the teachers of the first school; we reprint it here because we feel it reflects the striving of our community towards the ideals articulated in the Vision Statement:

May there reign here spirit-strength in love;
may there work here spirit-light in goodness;
born from certainty of heart,
and from steadfastness of soul,
so that we may bring to young human beings
bodily strength for work, inwardness of soul and clarity of spirit.
May this place be consecrated to such a task;
may young minds and hearts here find
servers of the light, endowed with strength,
who will guard and cherish them.

Landmarks in 2010

This year began with our annual Teacher’s Day of nourishment and renewal on Wednesday 27th January, with Benjamin Cherry, an internationally-renowned Steiner teacher who presented wonderful insights into ways in which we might sustain ourselves throughout the year.

Two of our In-Service Days in 2010 were open to colleagues for other Steiner schools, including the Steiner Streams in Victorian Government schools. In May we hosted "A Day of Song" - working towards the curriculum in music, with Judith Clingan, noted choral conductor and composer with a long association with music in Steiner schools. In August we hosted "A Day of Maths" - working with place value and fractions, with George Booker, a national authority on mathematics in schools.

Teachers also attended a number of external PD opportunities, supported by our PD provisions.

Ghilgai's approach to assessment has aroused considerable interest in the past couple of years. Accordingly, in March 2010 Ruth Wittig presented a 1½ day workshop for Steiner teachers under the auspices of Mt Barker Waldorf School in South Australia, "Journeying with the Child in Literacy and Numeracy" - an approach to assessment.

Ghilgai offered a comprehensive range of Parent Education events for parents and enquiring families in 2010. We inaugurated "Open Classrooms" tours - an opportunity for enquiring families to visit several classes at work, and then sit together with the education Coordinator to discuss what they had seen. There was also the annual Introductory Evening for enquiring parents, and evening for new Kindergarten parents.

Teachers presented Ghilgai's approach to literacy on two evenings - "Journey into literacy" and "Literacy and assessment".

Two talks by our Education Coordinator addressed important turning-points in development - "As children turn nine" and "As children dive into adolescence". We also provided several conversation opportunities in the mornings - "Talking about resiliency" and "Guidance and support" with our guidance counsellor Stacey Joyce; "Creative discipline" with Lou Harvey-Zahra; and "Nurturing the little child" with Bettye Palmer.

We were delighted in the fourth term to begin using our new community room, Yoogali (= "Rejoice"). Projected activities for this space include a playgroup, craft activities, Open Day and festive occasions, and adult / parent education. The Gabriel Group for mothers and babies was established in Yoogali during the latter part of 2010. This group was facilitated by Bettye Palmer who has continued the foundational work of Joan Salter, providing vital and inspirational support for young families.

Ghilgai children raised a substantial contribution for the orphanage we support in Mexico. We again had a 'PJ' (pyjama) day and donated the proceeds to the Wesley Mission for the homeless. Our gifts of food to the Salvation Army at both midwinter and Christmas are always appreciated.

The festivals are a highlight of each year. At Easter, after a whole school gathering, paired classes meet together in a chosen classroom to share a story, offer each other a handmade gift, and break Easter bread together. At midwinter, a whole school gathering in the darkness becomes light with

community singing before lanterns are lit and the community walks around the school. Spring is a festival of flowers, and Christmas takes place as a time of joyful sharing.

In 2010 we completed a comprehensive installation of energy-efficient solar-powered hydronic heating in our classrooms. They are now cosy and warm in the cooler months. We also installed a system to reduce summer heat build-up in the classrooms, through solar-powered extraction fans which draw warm air from the cathedral ceiling spaces.

These are some aspects of the broad, deep life of Ghilgai School – steps along the way towards our vision. We would, in conclusion, like to share a verse written by Rudolf Steiner for a 10 year old child. It brings together in a deeper way the essence of our education.

Bell Ringing

To wonder at beauty
Stand guard over truth
Look up to the noble
Resolve on the good:
This leadeth man truly
To purpose in living
To right in his doing
To peace in his feeling
To light in his thinking
And teaches him trust
In the working of God
In all that there is
In the width of the world
In the depth of the soul

This report is presented by the College of Teachers and the Directors of Ghilgai School, June 2010

Appendix A: Literacy and Numeracy Accountability 2010

Ghilgai Steiner School Standardised Assessments

The table below provides a simple overview of essential learning areas that are targeted by our standardised assessments, progressively in Class 1, 3 and 5.

	Reading	Writing	Maths	
CI 1	Reading Foundations	Three letter words: - write and - sound Blends Phonograms Writing Foundations	Recording numbers Counting Skills Simple problems	
CI 3	Reading ability (June-October) Comprehension - oral - pictorial	Written expression (Mar / June / Oct) Spelling Dictation (June / Oct)	Oral Number system Money Establishing tables Mental maths	Written Number system Addition Subtraction
CI 5	Reading (June / Oct) - ability - comprehension - text - comprehension - maps - vocab development	Written expression (Mar / June / Oct) Spelling Dictation (June / Oct) Editing (June / Oct)	Money Time Weight Length Capacity Mental maths	Number facts Place value Counting Equations Fractions Spatial Basic operations

Notes on Ghilgai School's Standardised Assessment Procedures:

The Class One Teacher gives Common Assessment tasks in Writing and Maths and records observations on Reading Foundations. A record of the tasks given is stored with the student records of achievement.

The Class 3 Standardised Assessments do not cover all areas of Class 3 maths; the following areas are consolidated with further practice and only assessed during Class 4: length, weight, capacity, time, multiplication and division, extended equations, and graphing. Achievement in these areas is recorded in our Minimum Standard profiles for each child. These areas are evaluated again in Class 5 via our Standardised Assessments.

We do not believe it is a true picture of the children's accomplishments nor an accurate representation of our success as a school to lay out the results of these Class 3 and Class 5 Standardised Assessments in a percentile format. We have just one class at each level and the constitution of each can vary considerably from year to year.

Ghilgai includes and supports children needing Literacy or Numeracy Support and we would find it a breach of privacy to see their scores reflected in lowered class percentiles. We value our class community and treasure the gifts that each child brings to it.

The class teachers have an ongoing relationship with their students; in thus accompanying them in their learning over a number of years, they converse directly with parents on a needs basis. Any extra requirements needed to consolidate development (for instance, through one-on-one learning support) are discussed in detail and strategic action plans made for specific individuals.

The College of Teachers is responsible for improvement in student learning outcomes at Ghilgai. It supports the class teachers who carry the essential responsibility for this learning and assessment process. The College reviews the results of each year, and evaluates the needs of each child at risk with the Class Teacher concerned.

A true picture of results extends beyond the students' aggregate scores presented in some numerical or statistical way for easy comparison from year to year. A detailed analysis of outcomes is a professional task appropriate to the College of Teachers – a task that is multi-layered and confidential. For these reasons the College of Teachers presents a Statement of Accountability annually.

Statement of Accountability for Literacy and Numeracy Results 2010

The College of Teachers at Ghilgai Steiner School has reviewed the results of our Class 1 Common Assessment Tasks and the Class 3 and Class 5 Standardised Assessments in Literacy and Numeracy, and is satisfied that each class group has attained the benchmarks set for that year level.

We acknowledge that within each group there are some students who are challenged in Literacy or Numeracy and whose achievement falls below the class level. We know that in each case the class teacher is supporting their development and striving for ongoing improvement for each one. This occurs in consultation with the parents concerned. The student's progress is monitored regularly, and we expect all students to improve their skills considerably across a year's work.

The College of Teachers
Ghilgai Steiner School

Appendix B: Student Attendance 2010

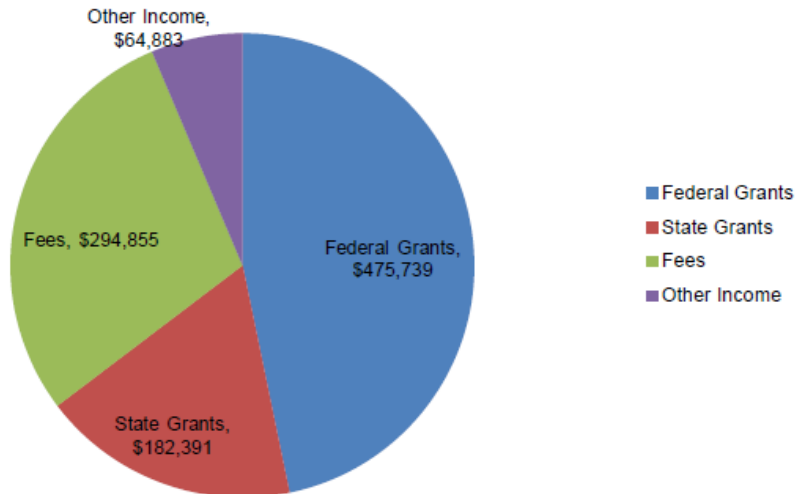
Class	First semester attendance	Second semester attendance
Average	94.3 %	93.7 %

Class Teachers have oversight of attendance patterns in their class, and are in contact with students' families to follow-up any unexplained absences. The College of Teachers reviews the annual figures.

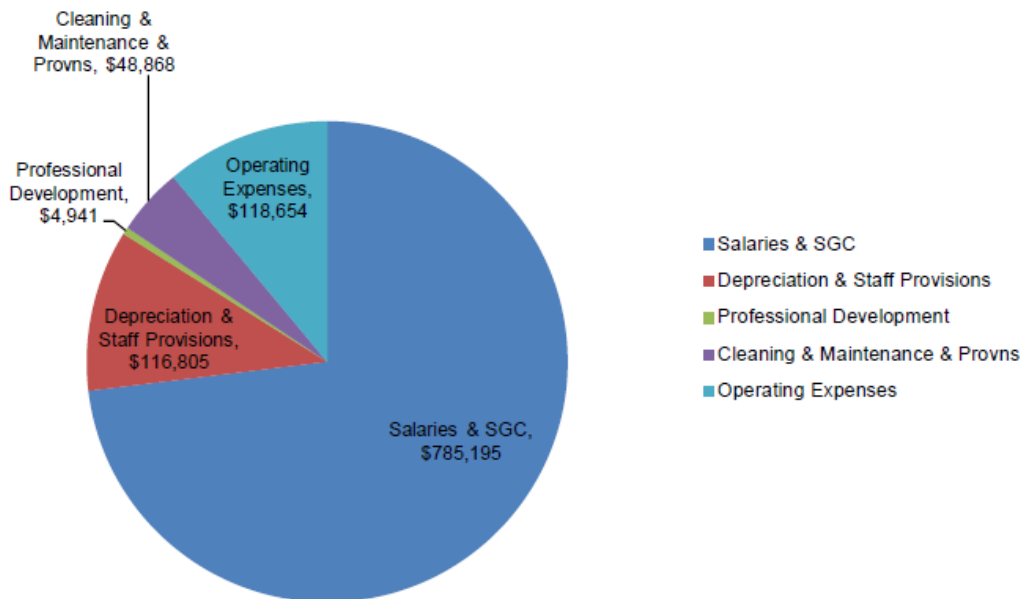
School Attendance is monitored by the Education Coordinator, who liaises with teachers and parents regarding any attendance concerns, and reports regularly to the College of Teachers.

Appendix C: Summary of Income and Expenditure 2010

Income 2010



Expenditure 2010



Ghilgai has received \$850,000 from BER Funding for a Community Room. The building began in August 2009 and this funding has been fully expended in 2009 through 2010

Appendix D: School Structure (based on notes from a talk)

We are a Steiner School and our management structure reflects this. Steiner Education addresses the whole child and directs teachers towards the nurturing of thinking, feeling and willing, through activities that involve the head, heart and hands, over the day, over the term, over the years.

A healthy organism — and organisation — has very similar constituent parts.

The Teachers

The teacher who makes a commitment to the task is called upon to immerse his/her whole being — thinking, feeling, willing — into his/her work, to travel and grow with the children across the years. Teaching is more than “just a job”. Our teachers need dedication and vision, and so one may more appropriately speak of a “vocation” or a “calling”.

Every day we live with the children and share their scene. The to-and-fro contact with you, the parent body, is also stimulating. Daily we see the needs of the school around us and feel its energy moving through us. We do not hibernate or migrate to a staffroom away from the ebb-and-flow of the school community life.

Individually we spend long hours in preparation in order to enable our vision for each class to be realised, and together we share a common vision for our school and work hard to uphold it, and cooperate out of shared values. We nourish and support one another as we journey through the class levels. We meet regularly as a staff to deal with practicalities, to consider issues, to grow in education.

The College of Teachers

The College of Teachers is more than just a collection of teachers in discussion on school issues. It is a strong entity with the responsibility of principal-ship, where the capacity of each person is expanded in the climate offered by the potential of all the others. The life of the school, its classes and its class community weaves through it and therewith life from the parent body too.

The College of Teachers at Ghilgai School meets fortnightly — and otherwise as frequently as necessary when urgent matters arise. Decisions arise from consensus. When working on a difficult or delicate issue the College may have to meet on several consecutive days in order to gain resolution and at times we may have to work on a major issue over several weeks — treading deliberately with love and care and respect, secure in confidentiality.

One can look upon the College of Teachers as the sensing heart of the school — the place where responsive energy is generated. This pulses through the individual teachers and revitalises — it also moves throughout the school and into the school community.

The Parents

The role of the Parent body is in the first place to nurture the children, and to sustain the true image of childhood within the community, in partnership with the teachers. We ask parents to support the College of Teachers, to co-work with the College and with the individual Teachers, and thus enable Ghilgai's vision for Steiner education in ever-widening and deepening ways. We invite you to companion us in this task with good will and understanding:

with practicality; with suggestions; with contributions of time and work.

This requires more than the usual parent / teacher liaison which in a general way benefits the individual child. The results of your work will spread beyond your family and that of your friends — it will nourish "all the children" who are gathered in this school and placed in our care. These children in whose hands the future lies.

Rudolf Steiner's vista was broad and comprehensive when he spoke of the potential of the teachers and parents co-working to seed the future. There are various parent activity groups who meet regularly to follow through on their allotted area (eg working bees, open days, autumn market).

The Parent Seed Group consists of representatives from each class. It nurtures the school community and provides the foundation for parent co-working in hosting events and raising funds.

The Board of Directors

The fourth entity in our school is the Board of Directors whose role is foundational. In a Steiner School the Board supports the College of Teachers and like the parent body also contributes in practical ways to sustain the vision of Steiner education that is to be realised / enacted by the College of Teachers.

The Directors are responsible for the legal and financial accountability of the School.

College of Teachers 2010: Veronica Cooney, David Hubbard, Sue von Hesse, Ruth Wittig, John Allison.

Board of Directors: John Allison, Veronica Cooney, David Hubbard, Margaret Waspe, Ruth Wittig, Roger Hollard (as Bursar).

A Living Entity

The four bodies (the Teachers and Support staff; the College of Teachers; the Parent body; the Board of Directors) together form a living whole; and at the centre are the children – the adults of the future. These four bodies should be bound together by the cords of Love. Love for the children here at present, and also for those who will pass through this school in coming years – these children and their potential for the future of the Earth.

It is a free and fluid management structure and it is also a strong firm structure. Many people can move through its structures and enrich it. It is self-sustaining. The School cannot lose its identity. It can grow and evolve over the years whilst at the same time maintaining constancy in its ethos.

An Overview of Ghilgai School's Structure

