

# Raphael House

celebrating 25 years

1979 - 2004

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## A Community Debate: Integration vs Independence

By 1989, the school was facing a crisis. The roll was shrinking and costs were rising.

- ◆ Whole families were leaving and taking their children to Hastings, where there was an upper school
- ◆ Some families could not afford the fees
- ◆ Each year every teacher was asked to nominate how much they needed to be paid. To keep the costs down, each asked for little. In consequence, their salaries were ridiculously low and needed to increase.
- ◆ The Education Ministry which had funded private schools with the C-grant, was withdrawing it by 1/3 every year until it reduced to nothing.

The school was facing a choice. Growth or contraction: which was it to be?

Phillip Green - lawyer & Raphael House parent - came and spoke for the Federation of Steiner Schools: Auckland & Christchurch had solved the same financial dilemma by taking advantage of the new Integration Act.

This was a landmark meeting and an Integration Steering Group was formed.

*Initially it started with widespread concern and the fear that under integration the school would lose its special character. It was a long, slow and sometimes painful process. Yet we all agreed on the issues. (1)*

The question bounced backwards and forwards. "Can Raphael House offer Waldorf education more effectively by remaining independent, or by integrating into the state system?" (2)

*We could pay teachers properly, keep fees low, and get money for buildings! (1)*

But the school community was polarised. Under integration, what would happen to the spiritual impulse?

Submissions were written. Meetings were held. Then Hastings, who had also been reticent to integrate, stunned everyone by going over.

Other expected decisions were also being made for the life of the school. October 1989: "The Management Committee has decided to proceed with full school development, targeting 1991 as the year for the first class 8".

"We are keenly aware of the anxiety some families face about the financial stress they would face with a sharp increase in fees, and we will be examining all possible alternatives in fees. . . . such as integration." (4)

Again the discussion. "Was this financial relief worth more than the relative freedom from state interference currently experienced?" (2)

*In the end people made the jump. The community eventually decided we would be more compromised by not integrating. (1)*

Now the Ministry delayed. The other Steiner Schools had received suspensory grants - building development loans - which were wiped off if the school stayed integrated for 25 years. In the new Act this provision was deleted.

Our buildings were to remain being built the old-fashioned way - by fundraising!

Finally, in February 1992, Raphael House Rudolf Steiner School became an 'integrated area school'.

"Integration is primarily a financial agreement with the crown. The Proprietors (Rudolf Steiner School Trust Wellington) agree to make the land and buildings available to the Board of Trustees who act on behalf of the state for the children's education."

"Both parties are bound to acknowledge the 'special character' of the school, namely that it is a Rudolf Steiner/Waldorf school, and the proprietors have the right to withdraw from the agreement if this is jeopardised."(3)

Although it had taken time and toll, a decision had been reached.

*It was a new path, a positive direction for growth, family, curriculum & upper school. (1)*

The school stood ready for growth.

BY JILL HEMMING

(1) an interview with Sarah Gaitanos May 2004

(2) questions posed by Sarah Gaitanos in a letter to parents on behalf of the Integration/ Independence Steering Group August 1991

(3) Frameworks. Fundraising Group Bulletin Nov 1992

(4) letter from Paul Denford & Sarah Gaitanos for the Management Committee, Oct 1989

## The Laying of the Upper School Foundation Stone



For the dedication of the Upper School, a wooden pentagonal dodecahedron was covered in copper and lined in felt. Each of the 12 students in the first class 8 wrote a wish for the new school, and these wishes were placed inside small test-tubes. A list of signatures of those present and the Parsifal verse, were also placed in test-tubes.

These test-tubes were put inside the shape and it was sealed. Michael Caris knelt (seen above) and placed the copper shape in an opening in the ground outside the Petone West main doors. A concrete slab was laid on top, and the area was concreted over. A small brass plaque can be seen above the slab - the writing has been rubbed off by the many footsteps using the entrance.