

HELENA'S

private schools

— A GUIDE —

Every school day more than 300 local students — about the population of one Helena elementary school — attend school in one of six private schools operating in the Helena area. Each school attracts parents and students based on its unique educational philosophy. Get acquainted with the schools, their students and the parents who pay to educate their sons and daughters outside the public school system.



Peter Nistler, a seventh-grader at St. Andrew practices his calligraphy by copying verses from the Psalms. The school tries to incorporate the fine arts into every subject.

Fast fact

Some private schools in Helena offer partial

St. Andrew

By LORI CAREY
IR Staff Writer

Students at St. Andrew School do things a little differently.

Dressed in traditional uniforms, students learn Bible verses by writing them in calligraphy and they learn science along with Catholic tradition.

Fine arts and Catholicism are integral parts of the school's education, administered by principal and teacher Teresa Rose.

"It's open to really anybody. Any child who wants to be here should be here," Rose said. "We interview older children closely; they have to want to be here."

Currently enrolled are about 95 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. About two-thirds come from Catholic families, Rose said.

A few years ago, a group of Catholic lay people, including Rose, began discussing the idea of a classical private school in the Catholic tradition. With the help of some Carroll College professors, they designed a curriculum to prepare students for Catholic colleges, like Carroll.

The school rules maintain a high level of expectation for students' behavior and academic achievement.

"I think kids like a really high standard and it's amazing what they can do," Rose said. "We want them to say please, thank you and be courteous, and we hold them to that."

It seems to work. When a visitor comes into a classroom, the children rise from their desks and stand attentively.

The staff takes pride in

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St. Andrew

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their high standards and discipline, which is another reason the school was started.

"We're free to educate the soul here," Rose said.

The students' uniform policy has been a positive tool for character development, according to physical education teacher and secretary G.G. Grotbo.

Girls wear plaid jumpers and skirts with white shirts and navy sweatshirts or sweaters. Boys wear navy pants and white shirts with collars, or turtlenecks, and dark shoes.

"Once the kids all dress alike, it takes away all the competition out of what they wear. We want them to be focused on what they're learning and not what they're wearing. We want them to put all of that aside," Grotbo said.

"I think it's been really, really healthy," Rose agreed.

Rose serves a double-duty as the school's principal and English teacher. She believes that language is the key to success for the 21st century.

"It takes four years of language

Name: St. Andrew School
Date started: Fall 1996, founded by Catholic lay persons, not affiliated by the Catholic Diocese of Helena

Enrollment: 85, according to county records

Tuition: \$195 per month for 10 months for the first child in a family, \$165 per month for the second, \$120 per month for the third and children after the third one attend for free.

Philosophy: "St. Andrew School is a classical school in the Catholic tradition. Our twin commitments to classical learning and to Catholicism play equal roles in our formulation of mission, programs and policies at St. Andrew School."

to get out of high school here," she said.

Foreign language is also an important part of the school's course work. Children begin learning Spanish in the primary grades and in fifth or sixth grade — depending on the individual children — they learn Latin.

"Latin is a foundation for critical thinking and English skills," Rose said.

Expressive skills are taught through the fine arts, which play a

large role at St. Andrew.

"We like fine arts a whole lot. We ask that the fine arts be woven throughout, both old and modern art," she said.

Art classes are available outside of art in each classroom, as well as music, which includes band and choir. Students also have a physical education class and are able play team sports through the YMCA and with Rocky Mountain Christian High School.

And although the school is not affiliated with the Catholic diocese in Helena, Catholic religion is another big part of the curriculum.

"Everyone takes religion, but religion is weaved into every subject," Rose said.

The school, however, teaches from secular text books.

Tuition for an education at St. Andrew School is \$1,950 for the first child in a family and decreases with each additional sibling.

"Tuition does not begin to cover expenses," Rose said of the school's budget. "We do fundraisers and we beg."

St Andrew employs a staff of eight full-time teachers and four part-time teachers, who see their jobs as a religious mission, not a

money maker, Rose said.

To save money, the faculty is creative with saving costs during day-to-day work. And, parents are required to volunteer, putting in at least two hours per month at the school.

"We start teachers at about one-third less than public schools," she said.

The high school science and religion teacher, Dr. Bruce Fender, holds a doctorate degree from Montana State University.

Rose hires teachers based on whether or not they love to study and learn. She seeks those with a strong liberal arts background.

St. Andrew School hopes to get accreditation from the National Association of Private and Independent Catholic Schools. For accreditation, however, some of the teachers would be required to receive state certification.

"We have really, really qualified teachers here. Their dedication is just astounding," Rose said.

The school's board is made up of parents and others in the community, in order to maintain a balance. Members of the board focus preparing students for the next century.

"I like to think that they (the students) are training for leadership," Rose said.

A TASTE OF HELENA

