Some parents at a local school expressed concern when they found that their children had been walking to a sacred site and possibly unwittingly damaging that site. They were concerned how the custodians, who they had been building a relationship with, would feel.

The Ingkenteme coordinator was able to liaise with custodians and find a way of healing this worry and also to help continue the relationship between the school and Arrernte people and promote understanding between the school community and Arrernte people.

While a private school not traditionally attended by Arrernte children in the past, some Arrernte children have begun attending recently and the school is keen to learn more about the culture and landscape where it is situated.

The Ingkenteme coordinator sees this work as important, as raising awareness respect and understanding of Arrernte culture amongst the general community can only lead to positive benefits for Arrernte children and help build a stronger more cohesive community for all the children.

This story was written with help and guidance from Apmereke-artweye and Kwetungurle, and was recited to the children by Kngwarreye at the first school assembly of 2016.

**Little Spirit People (Irrernte-arenye)**

The little spirit people have been looking after Arrernte sacred places since the beginning of time.

The little spirit people are helpful to people who do the right thing in sacred places, but can be dangerous to those who do not.

Once upon a time, the Founders of the Alice Springs Steiner School were looking for a place to build a school. They did the right thing and spoke to the old Mparntwe people.

The Founders said:

*Old people, we would like to build a Steiner School on your Country.*

*At our school, teachers will teach the children with love to look after their spirits.*

*Our teachers will nurture strong learning roots and the children will learn to look after themselves, each other, and the world around them.*

*Our teachers and children will learn: on Country, from Country and with Country.*

*We promise to take good care of your Country.*

*Do you think there might be a place, on your Country, where we could build our school?*

The old Mparntwe people looked at a few places on their Country.

*"This one is too close to that Man's site" said Peltharre*

*"This one is too close to that Women's site" said Ampetyane*

When they came to look at this place there was much discussion:

*"There are some sacred places around here, but they are not too close" said Peltharre*

*"It is good that the Steiner children will learn on Country, from Country & with Country" said Anale*

*"This place is South of Ntirripe (the Gap). The children will learn to respect our Country and go back through Ntirripe with love in their hearts" said Kngwarraye*

*"This is the right place for the Steiner School" they all agreed*

The little spirit people watched as the school was built and filled with teachers and children

One day a class of children went walking to a sacred place with their teacher

The little spirit people heard the children singing as they approached

The little spirit people were worried.

"*What are those children doing here in our sacred place?*" they wondered.

The little spirit people watched the children playing

They saw that the children had pure hearts

The children returned to the sacred place week after week

The little spirit people played beside the children

The children could feel the little spirit people around them

The children built houses for the little spirit people

The little spirit people played tricks on the children

Moving rocks around while the children were not looking

The children and the little spirit people played together for many years

One day the little spirit people sent a message to the Custodians of Mparntwe

*The children are ready to learn* *how* *to look after this sacred place.*

Kngwarraye and Ampetyane talked for a long time together then spoke to the children.

All of the children listened deeply:

'*When you children visit our sacred place you should announce yourselves to the little spirit people.*

*You should say:*

*'Irrente-arenye, we have come to visit:*

*We come with love in our hearts*

*We promise to walk carefully so that we don't disturb the ground*

*We promise to talk quietly to respect the spirit of this place*

*We promise to check your houses and move only the stones that have fallen*

One of the children responded:

*We thank you for sharing your Country with us and helping us to learn*

*We recognise your sacred place and will help Irrente-arenye protect this place*

*We will share this story with our parents, teachers and friends*

*When new children and teachers come to our school we will introduce them to Irrente-arenya*

And from that day on:

all of the children at the Alice Springs Steiner School sang out to Irrente-arenye when they went to visit

they went with love and respect in their hearts

they looked after the little houses

They carried this story with them

And they all grew stronger, on Country from Country and with Country.

A contemporary Mparntwe story by Kngwarraye & Ampetyane