



16th March 2018

Dear Parents and Caregivers

Thank you to those parents who were able to make our Expo afternoon. It was a great opportunity for us to meet some of you and to hear your questions about sending your child to St Brigid's.

As life is very busy, I know many of you were unable to attend and so I thought it might be helpful to release the answers to some of the questions raised on the night.

1. What is The Flame of Learning and what does it mean for HSC students?

As a NESAs registered and accredited school, we follow the NESAs curriculum to meet the learning outcomes of the HSC syllabus.

The Flame of Learning is the name of our teaching and learning framework: that is, it is our method of teaching the curriculum, based on inquiry-based learning. Basically, it means that we encourage deep thinking and understanding of concepts instead of superficial rote learning. We want to make sure that students not only learn concepts, but that they truly understand them.

Students learn the skills (or 'Toolbox') they need in order to learn deeply in small groups depending on the needs of students. We call these lessons 'workshops' or 'Toolbox lessons.'

The most recent HSC syllabus now expressly includes inquiry-based learning, giving us great confidence that this is the right approach. The HSC examinations are also changing from knowledge-based to a more conceptual understanding. We believe that our students have an advantage over other schools as we have been taking this approach since the college began, meaning that by the time our students are in Stage 6 they are fully experienced in inquiry-based learning and well-equipped to meet the demands of the new syllabus.

We also believe strongly in educating our students not just for their final exams, but also for their life post-school, so that they leave school with the skills to function as modern adults.

2. How does the classroom work with all students in a year group together?

While our students in each Year 7-10 cohort are in one learning space, our learning spaces are much larger than average classrooms. Within each learning space, there are break-out rooms for small group instruction and quiet learning areas. Students are also able to take their learning to the verandahs if they have teacher permission.

Within the year group there are four subgroups according to the student House. These House groups are assigned a tutor teacher who is responsible for monitoring the learning of each of the students in their group. Any teacher in the room can assist any student. Depending on where students are in their learning journey, they can be grouped and regrouped. For example, if a group of students needed extra explanation they could be taken to a break-out space by a teacher while those students who have full understanding of a concept can continue with their classwork.

Our staff to student ratio is very high. At present the highest is 1:16 and the lowest 1:22. This means that in comparison to some other schools, our students have more access to teachers and they are

not confined to the same class of students for the year. Some schools stream students according to ability, but Australian and overseas research tells us that there is no benefit at all to doing so.

For Years 11 and 12, students have far more choice in the subjects they study, and so the group size is determined by this. Being a relatively small school, we are also able to offer high staff to student ratios for senior classes.

3. What electives are offered for the students from Year 9 -12?

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO) has staffed us so that our students do not miss out despite our being a growing school. As in any secondary college, electives are offered subject to numbers and staffing. However, we also offer some online electives, significantly expanding student options.

To give an example, this year we offered 36 different courses for Year 11, while Year 9 have a choice of 10 different electives alongside their core subjects.

4. Is TVET (studying at TAFE) offered to the students?

Students can study at TAFE, and we even offer some TVET courses on site in Hospitality and Industrial Technology.

Students in Years 9 & 10 have the opportunity to start their Certificate 1 Hospitality course rather than waiting until Year 11 as in some other schools.

5. What are some of the new facilities planned for the school? Will a library be built?

The next building planned for construction this year includes a full commercial kitchen for senior Hospitality students and another learning space upstairs for general subjects.

The traditional library facilities are located on-site within our Resource Hub. We are growing our fiction and non-fiction sections in the library.

Within the Resource Hub, there are also green screen areas for video production and stop-motion as well as a Maker Space and robotics. Students have access to the Resource Hub during lessons when appropriate, as well as during every lunch time. Other activities, such as board games, are also available.

6. What activities are available to students during the co-curricular time called Inflamm?

Inflamm is a co-curricular time offered on Friday afternoons, in which staff offer a variety of activities based on students' interests. Students can change activities each term or continue in the same activity if they so choose.

In the Resource Hub, those students interested in a particular project (or Passion Project) can pursue this interest. For example, some students are interested in robotics, and so spend Friday afternoons in the Maker Space.

Other activities include excursions to the beach, music, mountain bike riding, photography, art, and sport. This year, we are also interested in the talents that our parent community may wish to share with our students. Eventually, I'd love for students to offer their own workshops to younger students.

7. What sporting opportunities are offered by St Brigid's?

We are already part of the Broken Bay Secondary Schools Sport Association and regularly compete against other schools in the Diocese. We have a football field at the back of the town square and covered basketball courts, as well as handball courts under construction.

8. How does the school cater for higher ability students?

Because of our Flame of Learning inquiry approach to learning, there is no limit on how far students can go with their learning. In fact, one of our newer staff members recently commented that some of the work Year 8 are producing is well beyond what he has encountered in his previous schools.

Because of inbuilt student choice in project work, students can deepen their knowledge and understanding to whatever degree they are capable. Because our classrooms are dynamic, students can be grouped for extension if they require this. Other opportunities, such as those provided in Inflammation and through the Resource Hub, also meet the needs of high-achieving students.

9. Are all rooms air conditioned?

All buildings have air-conditioning. The large demountable spaces are cooled or heated by the eight air conditioners in the side rooms and fans circulate the air.

10. How are students with special learning needs catered for?

We have a wonderful group of professionals in our Learning Support department who assist teachers to work with families to ensure that students' educational needs are met.

We engaged a clinical psychologist to ensure our dynamic learning environment suited students of all learning needs. She said that she had expected to find that the environment might not suit those with diverse learning needs, but instead found that the choice and flexibility of the environment was actually very effective in meeting the special needs of students.

11. What is Restorative Practice?

Restorative Practice is an approach to discipline in schools which is closely aligned to positive behavior for learning or PBL, a practice commonly used in primary schools.

In instances where discipline is required, Restorative Practice brings together the perpetrator and victim and empowers the victim to communicate the ways that they were affected by the behaviour. We believe that teenagers are still learning, both socially and emotionally. Most will make mistakes and each mistake needs to be seen as an opportunity to educate the student on better behaviour.

Restorative Practice was first initiated in the USA when it was found that young people placed in detention were highly likely to reoffend. This approach has had outstanding effects in ensuring young people had learned from the experience and increased their empathy for the victim.

In instances where a behavior has caused harm, we enforce consequences for that behaviour. Sometimes this could mean that a student will be supported by a teacher to analyse what happened and learn a better way of behaving. There are also penalties, such as a student missing Inflammation activities or attending our Lesson 5 Thursday after school to catch up on missed learning.

If the issue involves other students, then they may participate in mediation. We work hard to ensure that consequences fit the deed, which has far more impact than forcing a student to attend a detention.

Recent advice from the Bullying No Way government initiative for anti-bullying affirms our approach in terms of a supportive way of assisting both victim and bully.

I look forward to seeing you at our Enrolment Information Evening tomorrow (20th March) at 6pm. If you are unable to attend please don't hesitate to contact the office to request an Enrolment Pack.

Yours sincerely
Julie Terry