The Launceston Preparatory School

Enrolment Policy

Philosophy and Practice

The Launceston Preparatory School is an independent and non-denominational school catering for 140 students from Early Learning to Grade 6.

In a warm and homely environment, we aim to provide for the individual and collective needs of our students, fostering the skills they need to meet the demands of work, the duties of a citizen and lead a rich and fulfilling life.

The Launceston Preparatory School has adopted its own brand of the Paideia philosophy, originally developed by a group of American educators and philosophers.

The Paideia philosophy is founded upon one essential principle – that the same course of basic schooling should be provided to all students. This objective is based on the premise that what is common to all human beings is more fundamental than the ways in which they differ. We share a common humanity, personal dignity, human rights and aspirations. Therefore, in terms of the content and practice of a Paideia program, all students share in the same opportunities and experiences.

This principle is not in conflict with our school’s focus on the individual, but rather is supported by it. Equality of opportunity for all arises from our equality as human beings. However, this does not mean that there will be equality of results. Indeed, inequality of results is the natural consequence of our individual differences. Though all students are given the same quality of schooling, this does not mean that every child will go proceed along the track at the same time or at the same pace and the ultimate outcomes will differ accordingly.

“If the differential capacities of the children are likened to containers of different sizes, then equality of educational treatment succeeds when two results occur. First, each container should be filled to the brim, the (one litre) container as well as the (four litre) container. Second, each container should be filled to the brim with the same quality of substance – cream of the highest attainable quality for all, not skimmed milk for some and cream for others.” (The Paideia Program, Mortimer J. Adler, 1984, p.3)
The Paideia Method pursues its objectives through three streams of teaching and learning:

- didactic instruction
- coaching
- Socratic questioning.

Didactic instruction is the “chalk and talk” method of teaching and learning, where the teacher has a body of knowledge to convey and the students learn by listening. Under The Launceston Preparatory School’s Paideia philosophy around 20% of schooling time is spent on this mode of instruction.

Consistent with the Paideia method, we spend most of our time in coaching, believing that children learn best by “doing”. This mode allows teaching to be most constructive and learning to be most lasting, because children are actually practising the skills they need under the eye of a ‘coach’ who will refine, support, and re-teach each student as necessary. About 60 – 70% of our time is spent in this column of teaching and learning, which allows us to most effectively focus on individual needs.

In the third strand of the Paideia method, the “Socratic” strand, children are encouraged to consider issues and develop values by exposing them to ideas and drawing from them their own opinions through carefully constructed questioning.

There are other features of our school that we have developed independently, that do not form part of the original method of Paideia. These modifications have been developed to further foster the understandings and personal qualities that we believe are important to young people today.

The first is our use of multi-age groupings. Whilst Early Learning and Kindergarten students are kept as a homogenous group (for their comfort and stability) all other children are grouped as 5-7 year olds, 7-9 year olds and 9-12 year olds. We have found this to have benefits in individual achievement but it also most effectively supports the self-esteem of each child, promotes their interest in learning and focuses teaching and learning practices upon the particular needs of students. Children in these groups are not streamed by ability, but more by social factors, such as who works well with whom.

As children are vertically grouped, they get many opportunities during each lesson to tutor others. This strengthens the family approach we encourage and focuses teacher planning on the individual child or small group rather than on the assumption of grade-level ability. Cross-age tutoring allows needy children to re-visit content as much as they need to without labels being attached, as they tutor another child. It encourages self-respect and confidence and gives each child a chance to be a leader. It also brings the children working together closer and gives everyone a sense of belonging as a school family.

The second important organisational factor that distinguishes our school is our active maintenance of small class sizes. We believe that the optimum size for a class is 15-18 students and so that is the maximum range for our students in their multi-age
groupings. Within that class size, however, children will be coached in even smaller groups according to their particular skill needs at the time and not necessarily confined by a preconceived and often artificial idea of what a child of that age should be covering.

A third characteristic feature of our school is that students do not stay in one room with one teacher throughout their day (except Early Learning and Kindergarten students who remain with one teacher throughout the day). Younger children move between two and three teachers during the day and, as they get older, the more changes children have in the structure of their school day.

This approach has several benefits: a variety of teachers is stimulating, children learn to get along with different people, physically moving between lessons and seeing the results of other children’s work in other rooms can be refreshing and stimulating, and it facilitates the students’ transition to high-school.

The Launceston Preparatory School works upon a spiralling curriculum where skills are introduced and reviewed at each level from Early Learning to Grade Six. Our curriculum is designed sequentially with Year Six as an endpoint.

We aim for a degree of mastery in all subjects and skills proportionate to the individual student’s capacity. To achieve this, we are less concerned with just touching on a wide variety of experiences and instead are more ambitious about every student’s active engagement in learning.

The curriculum

- develops the whole child as much as is possible within the short time at school.
- encourages all students to be active explorers and make worthwhile contributions as effective participants in our democratic society.
- gives all children the opportunity to study in enough depth to satisfy curiosity and to develop individual potential.
- sequences learning activities, within specified disciplines of knowledge, enabling the students to progress at their own rate.

To foster students’ interest in and understanding of the curriculum, we use a thematic approach. Each term, the staff decides upon a theme to act as an “umbrella” for the content and skills to be taught across the school. There are many reasons why we develop a thematic approach in this way. Foremost among these is the way it has proven to capture and sustain the interest of the children. The thematic approach also helps build a collegial atmosphere among staff, where resources and ideas are shared and different groups of children often brought together to learn in ways that are more meaningful. It also facilitates our teaching to an integrated and spiralling curriculum where subjects are linked together in our teaching and concepts and skills are periodically revisited, perhaps at a more sophisticated level, to consolidate and extend understanding.
Citizenship is a cornerstone of our philosophy and practice at The Launceston Preparatory School. The Paideia method explicitly regards “civics” or preparation for citizenship by knowledge and understanding of the institutions of this country, as the second of the three main objectives of basic schooling. To this end our children are explicitly taught about the history and growth of social institutions and the people’s roles in those.

But in addition, children at The Launceston Preparatory School are constantly provided with opportunities for the practice of good citizenship, not just the theory. This encompasses informal instruction and support for inclusive practices as well as more formal teaching about social justice.

Criteria for enrolment

Offers for enrolment are made on the basis of the date of receipt of written application forms. However, priority is given to siblings of students currently enrolled within the school. Efforts are also made to maintain an approximate gender balance within each group and across the school so occasionally priority may be given to students of a particular gender.

The enrolment process

The parent/guardian applies for enrolment at The Launceston Preparatory School, using an “Application for Admission” form.

If the applicant answers “Yes” to the question on this form: “Does your child have any special needs of which this school should be aware?” he/she completes the supplementary “Questions to guide the enrolment process” form.

The school’s enrolment criteria is applied and procedures instituted as follows:

1) application for entry into Early Learning – Grade 6:

- if there is a place for the applicant, a letter of offer is sent with the appropriate “Enrolment Form” to be completed, “Terms and Business Conditions of Enrolment” and “Standard Collection Notice”

- if special educational needs have been identified for a student to whom an enrolment offer has been made, the program of support that The Launceston Preparatory School is able to offer is discussed with the parents/guardians. If the enrolment is to proceed, the support to be offered by the school is outlined in writing and signed by the school Co-Principals and the parents/guardians.
• on receipt of completed forms, admission fee and enrolment deposit, the family/families are sent a “Data Collection Form” and associated explanatory letter from Co-Principals

• the student is invited to attend the orientation session/day for new students (in December for Kindergarten – Grade 6 and the Monday prior to the commencement of first term for Early Learning students) and newsletters are sent to the student’s family/families throughout the term preceding entry.

2) application for entry into Early Learning:

• if the application is one of the first 10 received for that year, receipt of completed Application form is acknowledged by a letter confirming the holding of a place for that student and advising that Enrolment forms will be sent out in May/June of the year preceding the student’s proposed date of entry

• if the application comes after the first 10 received, receipt of completed Application form is acknowledged by a letter advising that the student will be waitlisted for the group, for which enrolments will be finalised in June/July of the year preceding the student’s proposed date of entry

• if the application is for a child turning 3 during the school year, the application is acknowledged by letter advising that the student will be waitlisted for the group, for which enrolment will be finalised one term prior to when the child is eligible to commence Early Learning.

• a child who has only completed part of the Early Learning year is not automatically eligible to commence Kindergarten the following year. The child must be 4 years of age on the 1st of January in the year they are entering Kindergarten.

3) application for entry into Kindergarten:

• if the application is one of the first 18 received for that year, receipt of completed Application form is acknowledged by a letter confirming the holding of a place for that student and advising that Enrolment forms will be sent out in June/July of the year preceding the student’s proposed date of entry

• if the application comes after the first 18 received, receipt of completed Application form is acknowledged by a letter advising that the student will be waitlisted for the group, for which enrolments will be finalised in June/July of the year preceding the student’s proposed date of entry

• once a letter of offer for enrolment has been sent by the school, the process follows as for (1) above.