

# ENGLISH



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Director of English

## Overview

The study of English is a critical component of every child's education. Literacy skills are a key determinant in student success not only across the range of courses studied at school, but in life.

ACARA (2010, Draft Consultation Version 1.0.1. Australian Curriculum English) states:

"Participation in many aspects of Australian life depends largely on effective communication in standard English.....English plays an important part in developing the understanding and capabilities of young people who will take responsibility for Australia in the future."

It is, therefore, of paramount importance that the Christian College English program provides a course in which all students across every school level can engage with interest, and work to develop their skills to the maximum of which they are capable. Achievement of this aim is contingent upon a number of key considerations:

- engagement and passion of teachers
- accommodation of differences in learning styles and levels of ability to promote active interest and engagement of students
- continual review and refinement of programs to ensure appropriate level of academic rigour
- consistency in understanding, language and expectations
- consistency and explicitness in assessment, acknowledgement and celebration of student achievement in the elements of English.

In view of these considerations, 2010 has seen the commencement of a number of initiatives within the English Faculty.

## Engagement and Passion of Teachers

Through the course of 2010, an interview was held with each teacher of English (Years 5 to 9) across the Senior, Middle and Bellarine campuses. The aim of these consultations was to learn from those at the 'chalkface'; to discuss their ideas for improvements, to find out what frustrations they faced with current practice and where they saw there were opportunities to grasp. These discussions provided an enhanced understanding of the 'issues' within the English faculty and a number of suggestions for ways improvements can be made. This process has also given teachers the opportunity to contribute and take ownership of some of the future decisions and directions of English at Christian College.

## Professional Development

In response to teacher feedback, procedures have been put in place to both advise teachers of opportunities for Professional Development of particular interest to them, and to gather information about their professional development experience to share with other interested teachers.

During the year, teachers across the Senior, Highton and Bellarine campuses participated in a range of professional development offered by the College; English teachers also participated in workshops in which they were introduced and provided feedback on the structure and detail of the draft National English curriculum.

## Different Learning Styles and Levels of Ability

Work has begun at Years 8, 9 and 10 to critically review each student unit of work with the intent to include more learning activities accommodating a range of learning styles and ability levels. This has

been a collaborative effort of teachers and has resulted in a program that is significantly more dynamic and diverse in its offering, allowing students much greater choice in their response while still addressing the learning outcomes required.

Work with other levels will commence as soon as possible.

### **Ensuring Appropriate Level of Rigour**

Ongoing teacher review of student units of work has promoted discussion of appropriate levels of expectations. Development of task specific assessment rubrics at Years 5 to 10 levels and modifications to the end of semester examinations to include extended writing tasks at Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 have enhanced the academic rigour of the program.



### **Consistency in Understanding, Language and Expectations**

With the physical segregation of campuses at Christian College, it is more difficult for teachers to have a sound understanding of the English program at other levels of the school. In 2010 time was given at cross campus meetings for teachers at particular levels throughout Years 5 to 12 to make presentations on what the English program 'looked like' at their level. This provided insights into expectations on students at each level and opportunities for teachers to share and discuss important elements for the preparation of their students.

These presentations also highlighted the importance of student confidence and understanding. Teachers across the levels must be consistent in their expectations and understandings of particular tasks and texts, and use the same language to describe them. With this in mind, programs and

resources have been introduced to promote consistency amongst teachers of English.

### **Spelling**

The introduction of the DIPL (Doorway Into Practical Literacy) at Years 5 and 6 has dictated a consistency in teaching approach to spelling, grammar and punctuation at those levels. Although reporting some observations about the 'dryness' of the program, teachers have generally been pleased with the DIPL approach. With some amendments to the timing of the DIPL units and the integration of the DIPL writing component, teachers are looking forward to their second year using the program.

In 2011, the rules and spelling strategies of DIPL will be translated into the Year 7, 8 and 9 English program to reinforce prior learning and promote a single approach to teaching spelling throughout the Middle Schools.

### **Comprehension**

In 2010, a program for the assessment and teaching of comprehension was introduced across Years 5 to 9. This program provides, at each level, a simple means for diagnostic assessment (CARS) of each of the twelve components of comprehension as well as targeted teaching and learning activities (STARS) for each component.

This enables teachers to identify each student's specific areas of strength and weakness and to provide explicit targeted teaching of each component as appropriate.

### **Text Types**

In any written response required of students in any subject area, there are two demands: their ability to record knowledge of content, and their ability to meet the structural and language demands of the particular text type required. Frequently at school, regardless of a student's level of content knowledge, he or she can be disadvantaged by the ability to meet the literary demands. Students can be confused by differences in teachers' terminology and expectations for particular written responses. It is therefore, critical that teachers across all levels and all faculties share a common understanding of the purpose, structure and language requirements of each text type and the

procedures of planning, drafting, editing and publishing.

A 'Christian College, Teachers' Guide to Text Types' document is being produced as a guiding document for teachers across all school levels and all faculties to promote consistency amongst teachers in their understanding and expectations of text responses from students.

### **Assessment Consistency and Explicitness**

To reflect the changes in the assessment system, the English faculty have created explicit assessment rubrics for each major English task. These rubrics outline the criteria being assessed and describe the standard required for achievement at each level. They can be used effectively as a means of Assessment 'For', 'As' and 'Of' student learning. Throughout the year, teachers have gained confidence in the development of these rubrics, but have identified that further refinement is required particularly in terms of making the language more student friendly and providing for greater teacher discretion in some areas. These will continue to be refined on an ongoing basis. To enhance consistency in assessment, a 'moderation' process has been introduced at some English meetings. Teachers are asked to bring samples of student work with the appropriate assessment rubrics. Each piece of work is circulated amongst teachers for marking. This has proved an effective means of ensuring consistency in marking and has promoted valuable discussion about appropriate expectations and relative 'weighting' of criteria.



*Middle School Drama performance.*

### **Acknowledgement of Student Achievement**

This year a number of small but significant steps have been taken to publicly acknowledge students who have skills in the area of English.

Public Speaking competitions were held at Highton and Senior School campuses with winners receiving generous awards from the College. A Year 11 student from Senior School participated in and came runner up in the regional VCAA Plain English Speaking Award. Five Senior School students participated in the Lions Youth of the Year Awards run by three different local Lions Clubs; two of these students won at this level and will go on to compete at the next level in February.

Three Highton Middle School students competed in the Legacy Public Speaking Competition in Geelong; one of these was awarded second place. Students from Years 8 and 9 at Highton competed successfully in the Victorian Debating Association Interschool Debating Competition and a number went on to participate in the Middle School Public Speaking Club. It was very pleasing to see the Middle School Highton Annual Presentation Evening include two 'speaking' performances by talented students in Years 8 and 9.

Students at Bellarine participate in a Book Club and both Bellarine and Highton students competed in the Victorian Readers Cup and Premiers Challenge Reading competitions. Writers' Workshop electives were greatly appreciated by Year 9 students at both Bellarine and Highton.

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*Book Week at Bellarine Campus.*