



PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

TO THE

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

FOR THE

2017

ACADEMIC YEAR

**COVENANT COLLEGE, TUGGERANONG, A.C.T.
ASSOCIATION INC.**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Covenant Christian School's Annual Report for the 2017 academic year.

This year the theme has been agreed as 'God is sovereign' following on from 2016 theme 'the Love of God'.

Term	Verse
1	For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:3-5 ESV)
2	Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1-5 ESV)
3	The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (Acts 17:24-26 ESV)
4	"O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. (2 Chronicles 20:6b ESV)

2017 was the fifth year that the new enrolment policy has been operating.

The main focus of 2017 has been consolidation of what we have been developing over the last few years. Our utilisation of the Google Apps for Education (now called G Suite for Education) has deepened as staff grew in confidence and understanding during the year. The Preschool has continued to be a very effective draw for new students and our promotional efforts have started to bear fruit in that we noted an increased number of inquiries and school tours at the end of 2017.

Academically, we, like most schools in Australia, have been finding the Australian Curriculum has far more content than can be taught effectively in the time allocated. Currently we are continuing the work of streamlining our programmes to deliver a guaranteed core curriculum to prepare students well for what is expected in future years. Prime Mathematics (a Singapore-based mathematics program) and Spalding intensive phonics form the core of our numeracy and literacy curriculum in the primary years and these have proved very successful. We are continuing to refine our instruction in these key areas.

Our staff continue to be a strength of the school with few changes. We are blessed to have such a group of committed and experienced Christian teachers.

COUNCIL

The Chairman's report covers the work of Council and its Committees in 2017.

Council provides a valuable oversight for the school and has sought to give wise and God-honouring direction in all its deliberations. Please continue to uphold these faithful servants of the Lord in your prayers.

Re-registration

Covenant is due to be audited for re-registration in 2021.

MySchool Data – 2017 (provisional)

Recurrent Income (\$)

Aust Govt	890,197
State Govt	281,167
Fees etc.	657,633
Other private	45,616
Gross	1,874,614
Deductions:	111,150
TOTAL	1,763,463

STAFF

The staff are the most important part of Covenant Christian School in that they are the people who day by day work with the students in the classroom and elsewhere around the school. The Lord has blessed us with a group of very competent and committed Christian staff – both teaching and non-teaching. Their work has continued to make Covenant a school where young people can be nurtured in a safe and caring learning environment that seeks to honour God in all that is done.

In 2017 Covenant Christian School employed 16 (10.7 FTE) teaching staff and 8 non-teaching staff (4.0 FTE) across Years K-10. Teacher staff absences represented 1.30% of total days worked.

All teaching staff members were deemed qualified for their positions, and are registered with the ACT Teachers Quality Institute (TQI). The breakdown of highest qualifications held by staff is as follows: 1 Masters degree, 14 Bachelor degrees and 1 Diploma of Teaching. All teaching staff achieved at least the minimum approved professional learning as required by TQI during the year and were thus able to renew their practising certificates for the following year.

All our staff and volunteers hold valid and current WWVP (Working with Vulnerable People) registration.

The ratio of male to female teaching staff was 3.2:7.5 (FTE basis) or 4:12 by headcount. There were no indigenous members of staff in 2017.

There were a few staff changes in 2017. We were pleased to welcome Mr Benji Winslade for term 4 as maternity leave cover for Mrs Sarah Allan. We farewelled Mr Chris Butler and Mrs Evie Burry at the end of the year.

Professional Development weeks

23 – 27 January 2017

- Rev Peter Gadsby, Pastor of the Reformed Church of Canberra, led staff devotions over the four days.
- Council Chair, Dr Richard James, addressed staff on Council initiatives and survey results.
- First Aid Refresher training was provided by the Red Cross and was attended by all staff.
- Staff participated in Professional Learning on Speech Pathology in Education – Voice Care and Child Speech and Language with Ms Jacqui Barwick.
- A one-day course on Google Apps for Education was provided for all teaching staff.
- Primary teachers joined colleagues at Emmaus Christian School for a day of networking and joint professional learning.
- Mr Chris Butler organised a Staff/Council Breakfast.
- In-house orientation was carried out by the Principal and Bursar.

3 – 4, 19 - 21 July 2017

- Pastor Dan Evers (Stromlo Christian Church) led a staff devotion.
- The mid-year reports were finalised during this period.
- A short module on the importance of intentionally focussing on Cultural Literacy was provided by Mr Martin Keast.
- In-house professional learning about the '8people' classroom management model was provided by Mrs Sharyn Laughlin.
- Teaching staff travelled to Nepean Christian School for the 2 day Christian Education National NSW/ACT State Conference.

- Mr Chris Butler organised a Staff/Council Breakfast.
- Staff continued to work on the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in unallocated time during this week.

Staff devotions have continued each morning. Various members of staff are rostered to lead this profitable time of reflection and encouragement from God's Word. A member of staff and two school families are always brought before the Lord in prayer along with other items of praise, thanksgiving and intercession.

STUDENTS

The school had 123 students (K-10) enrolled at the August census date, 3 of whom were international students.

The Year 10 students who left the school in 2017 enrolled in Trinity Christian School (9), Lake Tuggeranong College (7), and Canberra College (3).

Student Attendance

The average student attendance rate was 92.8% (Years 1-10). The rate in Infants/Primary was 93.8% and in Secondary 91.7%. Students at Covenant are required to be in attendance each day that the school is in operation. Parents are requested to telephone (or email) the school before 8:50am if their child is going to be absent. Each morning, the teacher marks the electronic roll and submits it by 9.05am. The school office contacts parents if a student has an unexplained absence from the school – this is usually done within 45 minutes of the rolls being marked each day.

Students with Special Needs/ESL

Students with special needs have been well catered for with the mandatory process of SCAN identifying those most in need of assistance. The Study Skills elective option continues for students in Years 7/8 needing special help to organise their workload and ensure assignments are completed by the due date. Modified levels of work have been applied to students in a number of subjects. Tracking of all students has been maintained and students with special needs identified and helped. An Afternoon Skills Programme for primary students with special needs was operating each day and this has proved very beneficial for these students.

Student Activities

The annual Foundation Day special assembly was addressed by Rev Geoff Findlay, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Cook. He spoke on the topic "The Foundations of the Earth" which dovetailed nicely with our theme "God is sovereign". The annual Foundation Lecture was held in June. We enhanced the evening by providing both a light meal and a supervised room for young children to encourage parents to attend. Dr Ryan Messmore from Christian Heritage College's Millis Institute spoke on the topic, "Christian Education and the Classic 'Path to Wisdom'" which was very well-received.

Senior students in Year 10 were given leadership badges to recognise their position and role in the life of the school. The students provided a valuable input into the life of Covenant including leading the student House teams and providing a role model for service around the school. Some of the Year 10 leaders gave a devotion to the primary students at various assemblies.

The 3 day Secondary Camp in 2017 was held at Wedderburn Christian Campsite in Wedderburn, NSW from 6 - 8 March. Students were exposed to a variety of activities including archery, giant swing, abseiling, BMX bike riding, initiative games and camp fire activities. Students were accommodated in cabins which worked well.

Our CARE Ministries raised \$3,528 in 2017. This fundraising effort was spearheaded by senior students under the guidance of Mrs Lyons and Mr Hopwood. Monies were raised for our 'Compassion children', Melaku and Karla, Bibles for distribution around the world (Bible League) and TEAR Fund.

Secondary students also engaged in various service activities both in the wider community and within the school. We see this as a practical outworking of an education that is both academic and spiritual in nature and engages the whole person. These projects provide a great opportunity for our students to give of themselves practically to meet needs that exist and enjoy themselves serving God at the same time.

Students were involved in the performing arts this year through various annual events such as the Drama and Music Festival and the Evening of the Arts (a variety evening involving students and staff). We are blessed to have the services of Mrs Wendy Lyons and Mrs Sarah Allan who both put a lot of effort into these events.

Students were also engaged in activities that involved developing and wearing a costume –the Living Literature Day in August gave students the opportunity to dress in a favourite character from a work of fiction. Primary assemblies, particularly for Year 5/6, often have a drama element which involves dressing in a costume. These activities formed a great break from the normal routines of study and allowed many students to shine.

Regular Chaplain’s Breakfasts were held during the year for one year level at a time to hear from a teacher who is from a different part of the school. These were well-attended and enjoyable. Our Chaplain, Mr Jeremy Hopwood, provides a very well-received service to the school community.

Other important student activities were:

- Various sports carnivals as part of our inter-House competition – swimming, athletics and cross-country were held in 2017.
- The Secondary Art Club was held as an after school activity under Mrs Elizabeth Coleman’s instruction from term 2 onwards.
- Our school did well again in a University of Canberra Crystal Growing Competition, winning first place awards across Years 5, 6, 7 & 8.
- The annual Bush Dance was held at the Namadgi High School performing arts centre at the end of August.
- Year 6 Dinner was held in the school library on the evening of Thursday 8 December.
- Year 10 Graduation Dinner was held at the Southern Cross Club premises during Week 9 of Term 4.
- A Grandparents & Special Friends Day combined with open classrooms was held on Friday 9 September.
- A student choir performed at the Floriade festival in September.
- Ebony Lyons, one of the Year 10 graduating class, was awarded the 2017 ACT Spirit of ANZAC prize – she, along with Mrs Jocelyn James, will be representing the ACT at ceremonies in France and Belgium in June 2018.
- The annual awards and prize giving gathering, known as the Thanksgiving Evening, was held at Namadgi School on the evening of Friday 9 December. Dr Richard James, our Council Chairman, and Rev Peter Gadsby both gave well-received messages during the evening.

The 2017 edition of the Covenant Christian School yearbook, the *Collage*, once again provided a colourful and comprehensive snapshot of the various activities that happened during the year. Mrs Elizabeth Coleman does a fantastic job of collating and editing this record of the life of the school and the quality of the production keeps improving.

Benchmarking

Students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 sat the NAPLAN national benchmarking tests in reading, writing, spelling, grammar & punctuation, and numeracy. The following table compares these results, showing the percentage of our students who scored results at or above the national benchmarks. From the tables you will note that the school has achieved some very good results.

However, as with any statistical analysis, there are many variables that can affect the results and the result of any student in any given year eg. being recently arrived from overseas with minimal English skills; having had a death in the family. League tables, made from such information by the media, do not take into account such variables nor do they attest to the faith-based nature of many schools where the teaching of certain values is of the highest priority. While they may laud a school with one cohort of students, they might just as easily do the opposite with another.

Since the beginning of 2010, the NAPLAN results have been published on the Federal Government’s “My School” website. The 2017 results were published early March 2018

2017 was a transition year as ACARA has been working with state and territory administrations throughout Australia to introduce an on-line testing for NAPLAN. We had some trials to assess our technical readiness. It is anticipated that all NAPLAN assessments in 2018 will be done using computers with the exception of Year 3 Writing which will continue to be paper-based.

The tables below show the percentage of our students who scored results at or above the National Minimum Standards (NMS). The figures enclosed by () represent actual student numbers.

Writing				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Year 3	100%	100%	90% (9/10)	100%
Year 5	92%	100%	90% (9/10)	100%
Year 7	92%	87%	94%	90% (9/10)
Year 9	87%	80% (4/5)	89%	83% (5/6)

Reading				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
	92%	75% (3/4)	89% (8/9)	100%
	100%	90%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	94%	100%	100%	100%

Spelling				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Year 3	100%	100%	100%	100%
Year 5	100%	100%	100%	100%
Year 7	92%	87%	100%	100%
Year 9	94%	94%	95%	83% (5/6)

Grammar & Punctuation				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
	92%	100%	90% (9/10)	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	96%	100%	94%	100%
	94%	100%	95%	100%

Numeracy				
	2014	2015	2016	2017
Year 3	100%	75% (3/4)	100%	100%
Year 5	100%	100%	100%	100%
Year 7	96%	100%	100%	100%
Year 9	100%	100%	100%	100%

While the school continues to provide a sound academic programme, it is not the most important thing. The school's purpose, as stated in our Constitution, "to encourage ... the pursuit and dissemination of true Christian scholarship in all areas of the school's curriculum and interest, so as to establish a truly Christian world view in all disciplines of life," is what matters. 'Our Covenant' adds to this:

- (i) by precept and example, to confront students with the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ so that in God's appointed time, they might come to exhibit the fruits of true repentance and faith in Christ, confessing Him as Lord and Saviour;
- (ii) to train students in the beginning of Christian scholarship and seek to give incentive for their continuing development as Christian scholars;
- (iii) to develop and apply principles that set the Christian ideals of citizenship, godly character and the spirit of reverence, so that personality and sense of responsibility are developed together in the entire life of the scholar; and
- (iv) to this end students will be encouraged to achieve the highest standard consistent with their capabilities in all their activities pursuing excellence for the glory of God."

Might we be ever grateful to our wonderful Heavenly Father for the opportunity He has provided through the school to grow our children in His ways.

PARENTS

A few members of staff, parents and supporters gather for a monthly Saturday morning prayer meeting to pray for the needs of the School community. This is usually held on the first Saturday of each month during the school term.

A Reading Success seminar for parents was held over three evenings in late February/early March led by a team consisting of Mrs Sharyn Laughlin and Mrs Evie Burry. It proved most beneficial for the good number in attendance.

In 2017, we ran our biennial Car Boot Sale and raised \$417 (net). A Car Boot Sale operates every second year alternating with the Spring Fair (which raises a lot more money but is also a lot more work).

Parent/teacher interviews were held in late Term 1 and early in Term 3. An interim written report was forwarded to parents prior to the interviews held late term 1. Comprehensive Semester reports were distributed to parents at the end of both Semesters 1 and 2. The reports are 'plain English' report cards with A – E grades.

Weekly communication with parents is via the Communicator. It is distributed each Thursday afternoon by hard copy and email. In 2017 we introduced the 'Skoolbag' app to enhance communication from the school to parents.

GENERAL

Chaplaincy

The School Chaplain position has been ably filled by Mr Jeremy Hopwood. Funding for this position is through a special grant which is provided by the Federal Government. In 2015 this funding commenced being administered by the ACT government and this arrangement has worked well into 2017. 2018 is the last year under the current funding arrangement and there has not been any indication from government about what will happen in the future.

Mr Hopwood has organised a series of 'Chaplain's breakfasts' which have been well-attended by students. In addition he has been able to provide pastoral advice and counselling to students as required. The school community has reflected positively on the Chaplaincy.

Surveys

Annual surveys are carried out with the main stakeholder groups in the school community to get feedback on the performance of the school during the year. Students from years 3-10 are included in the group of stakeholders surveyed.

Summary of the 2017 parent and staff surveys

In October 2017, Council provided an opportunity for staff and parents to provide their feedback concerning their views about the school and how it is performing. Feedback from this annual survey is predominantly used by Council to identify key issues that may need to be addressed and to also capture suggestions as to how the school could be improved. Last year, 21 staff responded to the survey, which represents a large proportion of staff and similarly, the parent survey results represented approximately 60% of the parent community.

Parent Survey

The Christian character of Covenant is well-recognised and generally appreciated by parents. Parents identify Covenant as a Christ-centred school (4.69 out of 5.00) and similarly, that a Christian worldview comes through clearly across the school program (4.39). This perception is also supported by a number of the written responses by parents.

Parents also appear to be appreciative of the school's academic program (4.25), however as in previous years, IT resources in the school are rated poorly (2.74) and parents still believe that the sports program is largely inadequate both within the school (3.20) and externally between other schools (2.37). Another constant area of weakness identified by parents is how Covenant caters for students with special needs (2.55).

Encouragingly and consistently now over the last three years, the performance of all staff at Covenant is rated well by parents. Parents believe that teachers are providing good pastoral care for their students (4.18), that teachers are responding well to concerns they raise (4.26), the administrative staff are considered to be helpful and friendly in the service they provide (4.51), the chaplain's role is well regarded (4.04) and senior staff are generally considered to be competent and approachable (3.90).

On the important issue of communication, most parents recognise that the school has regular meaningful communication with parents (4.25). It appears this is largely through the Communicator – both received (4.71) and read (4.50). The school website rates poorly (3.39) as useful to parents, perhaps understandably given the website has been orientated more towards attracting new families to the school in recent times. A majority of parents (~60%) acknowledged that they haven't even used the Parent Community portal on the school's website. Covenant has recently introduced a number of electronic systems to communicate to parents. These received reasonable support from parents, judged to be useful or very useful by a majority of parents. While the school's facilities are considered to be well maintained and presented (4.25), parents continue to identify additional facilities (e.g. shaded areas, hall / gymnasium) they believe are needed. Finally, Council's governance is not considered to be particularly coherent or effective, which is an enduring trend. In summary, parents largely appear to be very supportive of Covenant. This is reflected not only in their written responses in the questionnaire but also how they responded to key survey questions. Parents still believe that Covenant provides a 'value for money' educational option (4.02) and importantly, parents are increasingly likely to recommend Covenant Christian School to a friend or colleague with a Promoter score of 57, which is well above the benchmark score of 38 and almost double the score indicated in 2015!

Staff survey

Strengths of Covenant

Areas that attracted strong support from the staff fell into two main categories;

- Character of Covenant CS,
- Leadership

Character of Covenant CS: The Christian character of Covenant continues to be a key and fundamental strength of the school. This is evidenced by staff responses to the statements that Covenant is a Christ centred school (4.67 out of 5), Christian worldview in school program (4.52), and that the staff understand and are committed to the vision of the school (4.38). Staff also believe that the school provides a safe and caring community for students (4.62). Increasingly, staff also believe that the school is setting and maintaining high standards for both staff and students (4.29). Being a 'small caring community' with 'committed and dedicated staff' providing a 'Christ centred Christian education' were the three key areas of strength identified by staff in their written responses.

Leadership: Staff continue to maintain confidence in the leadership within the school with strong support associated with the performance of the Principal (4.62), Directors of Studies (4.62), Chaplain (4.48) and for the Bursar and Administrative staff (4.76).

Areas of concern

Staff workload: Similar to feedback 12 months earlier, the key area of concern and feedback by staff was associated with their workload, which was deemed to be excessive. Staff identified more teachers' aides and greater parental involvement as potential helpful solutions.

Resources and facilities: Staff believe that improvements are need in the areas of increasing staff numbers, but also the type and quality of the physical resources available at Covenant. A multi-purpose hall remains a high priority request by staff. A larger staff room and improved school appearance feature as well.

IT: Whilst improving from previous staff surveys, Information Technology (IT) continues to score low by staff in spite of considerable investment and changes over the last few years (Information on the school website is useful for families (3.33); IT resources for staff are adequate and well supported (3.43); IT services at the school are suitable for all my teaching needs (3.43)). Greater IT support and services were identified by staff as the key resource they would like to have access to in order to improve their teaching experience.

Special needs students: It is clear that staff are struggling with the demands of coping with special needs students without what they believe to be adequate support and training in their written responses and in the survey:

- The school caters well for students with special needs (3.43)
- I am adequately trained and resourced to teach the diversity of students in my class (3.05)

Staff again identify more teachers' aides, a psychologist and time management training as potential measures that might be helpful to assist in dealing with special needs students.

Student behaviour and attitude:

- Students treat staff/teachers with respect (3.62)
- Desire to obey the Lord, parents & teachers - Primary (3.29), Secondary (3.14)
- Students are generally positive, inclusive and caring' rated (3.86)

Council: Staff continue to maintain that Council's governance is largely incoherent and in-effective (3.05). When asked how Council could improve its governance of Covenant, staff responses largely centred on improving communication of Council's activities, engaging staff in the mission of the school and having more positive interactions with staff.

Thankfully, in spite of many valid areas of concern, it is encouraging to see that the staff understand and remain committed to the vision of the school (4.38), and most importantly, that they are generally satisfied with their employment at the school (4.43), a measure which has been steadily increasing over the last four years.

Conclusion

Overall there is a generally positive perception of the school and its programme. The results suggest that the school is meeting the expectations of the major stakeholders in providing a Christ-centred, quality education in a safe and caring environment.

ICT developments

We have continued to improve our use of ICT at Covenant. The library computers were replaced by 'Chromeboxes' which utilise the Google suite of applications. As a school we are intending to convert all student desktop computing to Chromeboxes. This is supplemented by a set of laptops in a trolley designed for in-class use by teachers.

We have evaluated the 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) approach which is very popular in a number of schools and have concluded that it does not fit with our school philosophy. BYOD effectively means students will have an electronic device on their desks for most of the school day and we believe this would only become a source of distraction away from classroom instruction and hinder the development of important skills that students need to gain in these early years of their schooling.

CONCLUSION

2017 continued to build upon the new 'brand' of Covenant Christian School with the addition of an Early Learning Centre; our goal is to attract families who are looking for a sound Christian education for their children from preschool through to Year 10 on the same site.

We thank the Lord for guiding us through this period of transition and we look forward to His continued guidance and blessing for the 2018 school year.

Yours in Christ

Martin Keast
Principal
24 March 2018