



**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

**TO THE**

**SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

**FOR THE**

**2015**

**ACADEMIC YEAR**

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

**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT to the SCHOOL COMMUNITY  
for the 2015 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Covenant Christian School's Annual Report for the 2015 academic year.

Our theme in 2015 was *Wisdom*. The "Term Verse to Remember" for each term was:

| Term | Verse   |
|------|---|
| 1    | The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever! (Psalm 111:10 ESV)  |
| 2    | Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. (Proverbs 4:5-6 ESV)  |
| 3    | And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. (Isaiah 11:2-3a ESV) |
| 4    | And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 ESV)                |

2015 was the third year that the new enrolment policy has been operating.

The main focus of 2015 has been the planning, design and construction of an Early learning Centre (ELC) incorporating both a preschool and out-of-school-care facilities. This has allowed us to offer a service which meets the requirements for parents to be able to access the Child Care Benefit (CCB) and the related Child Care Rebate (CCR). Our goal with this project has been to improve the enrolment numbers coming into our kindergarten class and provide instruction that was consistent with the Christian basis of Covenant Christian School. To that end we have structured the preschool curriculum using a study of God's Word as it's integrating core.

In the curriculum area, staff have been working on implementing the Australian Curriculum which has involved some changes to Covenant's curriculum. We introduced Prime mathematics based on the Singapore mathematics curriculum starting in Year ½ and plan to continue to develop this throughout the primary years.

We have continued to attract a number of non-church attending families under the new enrolment policy and this has, to date, been beneficial overall to the school. In 2015 we had a student body numbering 125 in years K-10 and of these, 24 (19.2%) were from families who were not regularly attending a church. It is pleasing to note that a few families in this category have started attending a church or bible study recently.

Of continuing concern is our overall roll numbers. Our numbers have remained largely static for some years now and this has been a driver for a number of changes we have made already. We are hoping to see the preschool provide a steady influx of students coming into our primary school and improve the numbers at that level of the school.

In 2015 Covenant Christian School joined Christian Educational National (CEN) as a full member school. This new relationship incorporates the school into a wider body of Christian schools and opens access to professional learning and networking of like-minded Christian educators. The only other CEN school in the ACT is Emmaus Christian School and both schools are now part of the ACT/NSW cluster of CEN schools.

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 2015.

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.

## Recurrent Income

|               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| Aust Govt     | 808,726     |
| State Govt    | 276,176     |
| Fees etc.     | 609,005     |
| Other private | 62,744      |
| Gross         | \$1,756,650 |
| Deductions:   | (\$85,281)  |
| TOTAL         | \$1,671,369 |

## Re-registration

Covenant is due to be audited for re-registration in 2016.

## 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 2015 Covenant Christian School employed 15 (11.1 FTE) teaching staff and 6 non-teaching staff (3.7 FTE). Staff absences represented 3.56% 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, 13 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 3.8:7.3 (FTE basis) or 4:11 by headcount. There were no indigenous members of staff in 2015.

There were a few staff changes in 2015. We were pleased to welcome Mrs Hannah Butcher as the new ELC late in 2015. We farewelled Mrs Rebecca Hooley (primary) and Mrs Kellie Inman (secondary part-time) and Mrs Gail Derkley (part-time administration and teacher aide) at the end of the year.

## Professional Development weeks

### 27 – 30 January 2015

- Rev Peter Gadsby (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 certificate training was provided by the Red Cross and was attended by all staff.
- Staff participated in a Certificate of Christian Education (general) course taught by Mr Chris Parker, a lecturer with the National Institute for Christian Education (the academic arm of CEN).
- Mr Chris Butler organised a Staff/Council Breakfast.
- In-house orientation was carried out by the Principal and Bursar.

### 29 June - 3 July 2015

- Rev David Brookes (Tuggeranong Presbyterian Church) led staff devotions over the five days. His topics over the week were: transformation, worldview, Sabbath, gospel and obedience.

- The mid-year reports were finalised during this week.
- Mr Chris Parker delivered the one-day Certificate of Christian Education (Teacher) course which was well-received by staff. This was accredited as 5 hours Professional Learning by TQI.
- 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 124 students enrolled at the August census date.

The Year 10 students who left the school in 2015 were enrolled in Trinity Christian School, Canberra College and Lake Tuggeranong College.

### **Student Attendance**

The student average attendance rate was 93.7%. The rate in Infants/Primary was 93.8% and in Secondary 93.6%. Students at Covenant are required to be in attendance each day that the school is in operation. Students absent from school are required to furnish a reason (from their parents) in writing, signed and dated, for their absence upon his/her return. 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 (limited to six students) continues for students 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.

### **Student Activities**

The annual Foundation Day special assembly was addressed by Rev Peter Gadsby from the Reformed Church of Canberra. He spoke on the topic "*Be a Wise builder*" which dovetailed nicely with our theme of wisdom. The annual Foundation Lecture was moved to an evening in term 2. We enhanced the evening by providing both a light meal and a supervised room for young children to encourage parents to attend. We had a much higher turn-out as a result which was pleasing. Chris spoke on the topic of how the biblical worldview, centred in Christ, should shape how we approach technology.

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.

The 3 day Secondary Camp in 2015 was held in the Bega valley area from 25 – 27 February. Students were exposed to a variety of activities including bush skills, paddle boarding, mountain biking, golfing and team initiatives. It was a most enjoyable camp and the Lord blessed us with good weather for the whole time. The accommodation was quite primitive at Bournda National Park but students enjoyed the experience all the same.

Our CARE Ministries raised \$2,250 in 2015. This fundraising effort was spearheaded by the Business Studies students under the guidance of Mrs Helen Crow. Monies were raised for our 'Compassion child', Melaku, and for Bibles for distribution around the world (Bible League) and also for a Compassion Special Relief Appeal and some minor TEAR Australia projects.

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 TAG Quest (a talent quest), the Music Soiree (musical entertainment combined with culinary and hospitality skills), 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 Claire Cain 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 2015.
- 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 in a University of Canberra Crystal Growing Competition winning first place awards in Year 7 and in Year 8 and also second place awards in both Year 8 and Year 9.
- The annual Bush Dance was held at the Gordon Primary School hall at the end of August.
- Year 6 Dinner was held in the school library on the evening of Friday 11 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 11 September.
- A student choir performed at the Floriade festival in September.
- The annual awards and prizegiving gathering, known as the Thanksgiving Evening, was held at Namadgi School on the evening of Friday 11 December. Dr Richard James, our Council Chairman, and Rev Geoff Findlay both gave well-received messages during the evening.

The 2015 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.

Since the beginning of 2010, the NAPLAN results have been published on the Federal Government’s “My School” website. The 2015 results were published early March 2016.

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.

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.

| <b>Writing</b> |                |                |             |             |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
|                | <b>2012</b>    | <b>2013</b>    | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
| <b>Year 3</b>  | 100%           | 100%           | 100%        | 100%        |
| <b>Year 5</b>  | 95%<br>(19/20) | 100%           | 92%         | 100%        |
| <b>Year 7</b>  | 94%<br>(17/18) | 100%           | 92%         | 87%         |
| <b>Year 9</b>  | 100%           | 93%<br>(14/15) | 87%         | 80%         |

| <b>Reading</b> |              |             |             |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>2012</b>    | <b>2013</b>  | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
| 100%           | 100%         | 92%         | 75%         |
| 100%           | 100%         | 100%        | 90%         |
| 100%           | 83%<br>(5/6) | 100%        | 100%        |
| 100%           | 100%         | 94%         | 100%        |

| <b>Spelling</b> |                |                |             |             |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
|                 | <b>2012</b>    | <b>2013</b>    | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
| <b>Year 3</b>   | 100%           | 100%           | 100%        | 100%        |
| <b>Year 5</b>   | 100%           | 100%           | 100%        | 100%        |
| <b>Year 7</b>   | 94%<br>(17/18) | 83%<br>(5/6)   | 92%         | 87%         |
| <b>Year 9</b>   | 100%           | 93%<br>(14/15) | 94%         | 94%         |

| <b>Grammar &amp; Punctuation</b> |               |             |             |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>2012</b>                      | <b>2013</b>   | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
| 100%                             | 100%          | 92%         | 100%        |
| 100%                             | 90%<br>(9/10) | 100%        | 100%        |
| 94%<br>(17/18)                   | 83%<br>(5/6)  | 96%         | 100%        |
| 100%                             | 100%          | 94%         | 100%        |

| <b>Numeracy</b> |                |             |             |             |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                 | <b>2012</b>    | <b>2013</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2015</b> |
| <b>Year 3</b>   | 100%           | 100%        | 100%        | 75%         |
| <b>Year 5</b>   | 100%           | 100%        | 100%        | 100%        |
| <b>Year 7</b>   | 94%<br>(16/17) | 100%        | 96%         | 100%        |
| <b>Year 9</b>   | 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**

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 March led by a team consisting of Mrs Helen Crow, Mrs Rebecca Hooley and Miss Evie Stubbs. It proved most beneficial for the good number in attendance.

Parenting seminars using the '*Getting to the heart of parenting*' conference resources produced by Paul Tripp Ministries were run for a total of five evening sessions during term 2.

Many parents, staff and students were involved in the 2015 Car Boot Sale which was a great attraction for people from the local neighbourhood. The Car Boot Sale is operating every second year alternating with a Spring Fair. With the approximately \$1,077 (net) raised, the proceeds of the Car Boot Sale would go towards equipping the new preschool.

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.

## **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.

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.

Mr Hopwood indicated that he will withdraw from being one of the teaching staff at the end of 2015 but will continue in the role of Chaplain for 2016.

### **Summary of the 2015 parent, staff and student surveys**

In December we surveyed parents, staff and students (from Years 3 – 10) concerning their views about the school and how it is performing. Data from this annual survey is used by Council to identify key issues that may need attention and to keep an eye on trends both good and concerning.

#### *Parent Survey*

The parent survey summary is an analysis of 49 responses, covering over 50% of the school's families. The Christian character of Covenant continues to be widely acknowledged by the parents as a fundamental strength of the school:

- The School is Christ-centred (4.58) (on a scale of 1 to 5)
- A Christian worldview comes through clearly across the schools program (4.48)
- The methods by which Covenant communicates with parents also received strong endorsement from parents:
  - I always read the Communicator (4.45)
  - I prefer this type of on-line survey (4.46)
  - The school has regular, meaningful communication with parents (4.24)

The exception in this category being the school's website, with a mediocre rating given by parents as to the

usefulness of the website (3.74). Further development of the school's website is currently underway to improve the quality and accessibility of information for the school community and those searching for Christian schools in Canberra.

The staff and quality of care provided by the school also received good general support from parents, although the ratings were consistently lower than previous years, which is a concern:

- Senior staff are competent and approachable (4.12 down from 4.49)
- The school's administrative staff members are friendly and helpful (4.36 down from 4.62)
- The school's teaching staff responds appropriately to issues raised by parents (4.10)
- The chaplain's role is beneficial to the school (3.98 down from 4.53)
- The school's teachers give good pastoral care (3.88 down from 4.35)

Areas that received a mixed report from our parents were the school program and student management. While parents believe that Covenant has a good academic program (4.16), they were less enthusiastic about the number of excursions (3.96) and the school's sport program (3.2–3.4). Similarly, in the area of student management, parents gave a middling score for student discipline in the class and playground (3.84), but are less positive about the way bullying is managed (3.38) and how we cater for students with special needs (2.92). Other areas that scored low indicating that improvement is needed were:

- Council's governance is coherent and effective (3.16)
- IT resources are adequate and well supported (2.92)

Overall, parents were generally satisfied that the school is still 'value for money' (3.96) and that therefore, they would be prepared to recommend the school to other Christian families (4.03).

#### *Staff survey*

Areas that attracted strong support from the staff fell into three main categories; 1) the character of Covenant, 2) leadership and 3) teacher's performance;

- 1) Character of Covenant: Christ centred (4.46), Christian worldview in school program (4.46), Safe and caring community for students (4.46), Staff understand / committed to vision (4.15)
- 2) Leadership: Principal (4.31), Directors of Studies (4.23), Chaplain (4.08), Admin staff (4.31)
- 3) Teachers performance: Communication with parents (4.31), Staff treat students with respect (4.31), Return assignments in good time (4.08), Recognition of student achievement (4.38), Appropriate response to parent issues (4.00)

Areas that attracted lower scores by staff indicating potential areas of concern were as follows:

- 4) School program: appropriate internal sports program (3.00), number of excursions (3.69), curriculum; thorough, engaging, strong basis for teaching (3.69), bullying well managed (3.31)
- 5) Resources: suitable library resources for staff (3.92), improved IT resources (3.46), facilities well maintained and presented (3.00), teachers trained & resourced to teach diversity of students (3.54)
- 6) Student behaviour and attitude: students are generally positive, inclusive and caring (3.85), students treat staff/teachers with respect (3.92), desire to obey the Lord, parents & teachers - Primary (3.15), Secondary (3.54)
- 7) Uniforms: dress uniforms (~3.7), sports uniforms (~3.8)
- 8) Council : governance is coherent and effective (3.62) (up from 3.38 in 2014!)

Our staff identified a key strength to be the great sense/feel of community largely due to small size of the school and the friendliness / familiarity which exists between staff and parents. Other key strengths include the school being Christ focussed, offering a truly Christian education, with committed staff and teachers.

#### *Student survey*

The student survey attracted 92 responses accounting for about 80% of school's student population. Consistent with the perspective of both parents and teachers, our students also recognize the Christian character of Covenant, indicating that Covenant encourages them to focus their learning on God and the Bible (4.29), and actively encourages their faith in God (4.22). They see value in the role of the chaplain (4.18) and readily acknowledge the teachers example in modelling the beliefs and values of the school (4.24). It is encouraging to

see that the students feel safe at Covenant (4.12) and that they are well cared for the teachers (4.17) and staff (4.28) and that they are well satisfied with Covenant and the quality of education they receive at Covenant (4.24 up from 3.9)

Students are less satisfied with their school dress uniform (~3.2), the school's facilities (3.60) and give low ratings for the website (3.26) and IT resources (2.78). Homework (2.99) continues to be an annoyance for many students at Covenant!

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. New wireless access points have been installed throughout the campus to improve the connectivity experienced around the school as we had identified a 'patchiness' of wireless coverage which had been affecting the experience of users.

Our staff continue to develop their expertise in the effective use of Google Classrooms, particularly in the secondary years.

### **Change of period length**

The introduction of a 50 minute long period for secondary classes in 2015 has proved a positive benefit and has now been adopted as the standard for Covenant Christian School.

### **CONCLUSION**

2015 continued to build upon the new 'brand' of Covenant Christian School with the expansion of the enrolment policy and the decision to construct an Early Learning Centre with the aim of commencing instruction in term 1, 2016.

The construction of the Early Learning Centre and all the work associated with gaining the requisite government approvals and staffing dominated in the second half of the year. We are thankful to the Lord for making this possible and granting His blessing on the project from a favourable response to our grant application through to finding wonderful staff and also granting a successful conclusion to a very tight construction phase.

The proportion of students from non-Christian families grew significantly during the year and a recommendation to extend the 'cap' to 40% was agreed to by Council as we grew in confidence in our ability to manage the new enrolment policy effectively.

We thank the Lord for guiding us through this period of transition and we look forward to His continued guidance and blessing for the 2016 school year.

Yours in Christ

Martin Keast  
Principal  
29 March 2016