



PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

TO THE

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

FOR THE

2020

ACADEMIC YEAR

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

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for the 2020 ACADEMIC YEAR**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Covenant Christian School's Annual Report for the 2020 academic year.

For 2020 the theme is '**Loving God – mind, body and soul**' and the associated theme song was: '*When we Walk with the Lord*'. We want to emphasise that love undergirds God's requirements of us as His creatures and that His ways are good for all people.

ESV version

Term	Verse
1	"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deut 6:4-7
2	I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12:1-2
3	And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:35-40
4	but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:15-17

2020 saw a continuation of the growth in the school's enrolments as our numbers increased by about 8.5% in Years K-10 (compared to 13% in 2019).

The Oval refurbishment project was completed in Term 2 of 2020 and since then good use has been made of this area for Sport and physical education activities as well as general student use during breaks.

2020 was significant as the impact of ACT Government Public Health directives associated with the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we had to implement a number of hygiene measures as well as a 6 week period of online instruction early in 2020. Hygiene and physical distancing measures have continued into 2021. It also severely impacted a number of school events, many of which were eventually cancelled.

Thanks to previous investment in computer infrastructure, most particularly the investment we had made in Chromebooks and the G Suite for Education products, the School was able to support families during the period of online learning. The level of support staff were able to provide was positively received by our parent body as the end year survey responses confirmed with 85.4% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "*The school provided good support for families during on-line learning (COVID related)*."

We look forward to a Covered Outdoor Learning Area currently under construction between the existing Library and Secondary Staff Workroom, adjacent to the rear access road. This project was due to commence around May 2020 but due to significant uncertainty related to the impact of COVID, the School Council decided to postpone commencement until the end of 2020. Excavation commenced early January 2021 and the project is on-track to be completed by October/November 2021 following a pause this year due to design changes.

Our staff continue to be a strength of the school; we are blessed to have such a group of committed and experienced Christian teachers. Changes to personal situations resulted in some staff leaving, but the Lord has continued to provide for our needs and enabled us to maintain our staffing to meet the ongoing demands of a school of nearly 200 students (KG-Year 10).

COUNCIL

The Chairman's report covers the work of Council and its Committees in 2020.

Council provides a valuable oversight and governance 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. Mrs Kerry Fitzgerald-Grigg, our part-time Policy and Compliance Officer, has been working steadily to review all our policies to align with current legislation. This work continued throughout 2020 as we aim to have completed a review of most major policies and associated procedures prior to the first stage of the re-registration process when documentation is to be provided to the Registration Panel at the end of Term 1 in 2021.

MySchool Data – 2020 (provisional)

Recurrent Income (\$)

Aust Govt	1,578,829
State Govt	477,267
Fees etc.	1,013,300
Other private	34,779
Gross	3,104,176
Deductions:	194,201
TOTAL	2,909,974

STAFF

The staff are the most important part of Covenant Christian School in that they are the people who work each day 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 2020 Covenant Christian School employed 20 (15.1 FTE) teaching staff and 17 non-teaching staff (6.5 FTE) across Years K-10. Teacher staff absences represented 4.49% 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: 4 Masters degrees, 1 Grad.Dip., 16 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. A specialist tutor was employed to deliver the Years 9/10 Art elective in 2020. This person was supervised by a TQI registered teacher.

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

The ratio of male to female teaching staff (K-10) was 6.2/9.3 (FTE basis) or 6:14 by headcount. There is one member of staff who identifies as part-indigenous.

There were staff changes in 2020. Mrs Jessica Leayr resigned in order to have her first child. Mrs Lesli Findlay took an extended period of carer's leave in order to look after her terminally-ill husband. She subsequently resigned at the end of the year as there was still a lot of uncertainty around her husband's situation. Miss Carleigha Wolf resigned after 5 years of faithful service in order to move nearer her family. We welcomed Mrs Rachelle Potter and Mrs Sunday Ciastkowski to our Primary teaching staff. Miss Jasmine Lyons, one of Administration team, also tutored

the Years 9/10 Art elective group in 2020. We also appointed additional Teacher Aides to work with students requiring more individualised assistance. A new School Chaplain, Mr Nate Swift, commenced duties at the beginning of the year.

Professional Development Weeks

28 – 31 January 2020

- Rev Jonathan Holt, Pastor of Lanyon Valley Anglican Church, led staff devotions each morning at Covenant.
- Staff joined the staff of Emmaus Christian School for a combined day of professional learning. The topic was “The Bible in the Belly of the School”, led by Rev Dr Rod Thompson.
- A CPR refresher for staff was provided by the Red Cross and was attended by all staff.
- Staff participated in Professional Learning on teaching Language Arts (Reading, Writing and Speaking).
- The Primary Team organised a Staff/Council Breakfast.
- In-house orientation for new staff was carried out by the Principal and Business Manager and the respective Directors of Studies.

23 - 24 July 2020

- Rev John TerHorst, emeritus minister and member of the Reformed Church of Canberra in Rivett, led staff devotions for two mornings at Covenant.
- Due to the higher demands that staff had been experiencing due to COVID-19 related on-line learning and the subsequent return to normal class instruction, staff were given additional days for recuperation in the July break.
- The mid-year reports were finalised and distributed during the July term break.
- The Secondary Team organised a Staff/Council Breakfast.

Staff devotions have continued each morning during term time. Various members of staff are rostered to lead this profitable time of reflection and encouragement from God’s Word. A member of staff and one or more school families are brought before the Lord in prayer along with other items of praise, thanksgiving and intercession. A member of the School Council and a year group are prayed for once each week.

STUDENTS

The school had 194 students (K-10) enrolled at the August census date, 8 of whom were international students.

The Year 10 students who left the school in 2020 enrolled in Trinity Christian School (9), Lake Tuggeranong College (2), and Erindale College (1).

Student Attendance

The average student attendance rate was 95.1% (Years 1-10). The rate in Infants/Primary was 93.6% and in Secondary 97.5%. We had to address some persistent absences due to school refusal behaviour by a few students.

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 by a team of very competent teacher aides who have assisted the teaching staff address the range of needs typical of an inclusive classroom situation. Mrs Rachel Hopwood has very competently coordinated the teacher aides and ensured resources have been allocated to meet needs as these have been identified.

The new National Collection of Consistent Data (NCCD) has been implemented and ably coordinated by Mrs Sheena Mathews who worked closely with classroom teachers to ensure Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) were updated and evidence of adjustments captured. A focussed study support group operates for those 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 some 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 David Brookes, Tuggeranong Presbyterian Church. He spoke on the topic “Life under the Sun” based on Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. The annual Foundation Lecture

would normally have been held in June but due to the Public Health restrictions current at the time, we decided not to hold this event in 2020.

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 planned for 2020 was eventually cancelled after being rescheduled due to restrictions on interstate travel in force at the time due to COVID.

Our CARE Ministries raised \$2,402 in 2020. This fundraising effort was spearheaded by senior students under the guidance of Mrs Lyons. Most was raised for our 'Compassion children' (Melaku and Karla and Alisson) and Bibles for distribution around the world (Bible League). In 2020 Karla finished as a Compassion child and we took on Alisson in her place.

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 would normally have been involved in a number of performing arts activities during the year but due to COVID restrictions, these had to be cancelled.

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 often have a drama element which involves dressing in a costume. These activities formed a break from the normal routines of study and allowed a diversity of students to shine.

Our new School Chaplain, Mr Swift, provided student pizza lunch meetings on a regular basis which were well received.

Other important school activities were:

- Various sports carnivals as part of our inter-House competition – swimming and cross-country were held in 2020. The Athletics Carnival had to be cancelled due to COVID restriction in force at the time.
- Covenant secondary students won 2 First places (one with distinction) and 1 Second place in the National Creation Science Competition.
- Year 6 Dinner was held at the Woden Missionary Alliance Church property on the evening of Thursday, 10 December.
- Year 10 Graduation Dinner was held at the Southern Cross Club premises in Woden during Week 9 of Term 4.
- A Living Literature Day was held in August and Primary students enjoyed dressing up as a character in a book.
- The annual awards and prize giving was held during the day on Friday 11 December as a series of assemblies in lieu of the usual Thanksgiving Evening. Year 10 parents were able to attend in person and other families were invited to view the proceedings via Zoom. Rev David Brookes (Tuggeranong Presbyterian Church) gave a well-received message during the Secondary assembly. Lieutenant Colonel David Wade presented the Long Tan Student Leadership Award and the ADF Future Innovators Award on behalf of the Australian Defence Force.

The 2020 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. Miss Jasmine Lyons under Mrs Elizabeth Coleman's oversight did a fantastic job of collating and editing this informative record of the life of the school and the quality of the production is very high.

Benchmarking

NAPLAN testing was not carried out in 2020 – this was a government decision in response to the restrictions at the time related to COVID. We anticipate the NAPLAN testing will proceed as planned in 2021.

While the school continues to provide a sound academic programme, that 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 worldview in all disciplines of life," is what matters. The School's Mission and Vision Statements developed in 2018 illustrate this:

VISION:

In dependence on God's grace, Covenant Christian School will nurture and equip students with a heart to glorify God by serving Him and living according to His Word.

MISSION:

Covenant Christian School is a safe, caring and loving community. In partnership with parents we cultivate Christian character in our students and equip them to serve God and contribute positively to society. This is achieved through a Christ-centred approach where the gospel is central. God's Word is applied to all areas of learning and experience. Students and staff are challenged, encouraged and supported to love learning and pursue excellence to the glory of God.

We are thankful for the opportunity to provide an education founded on God's Word as the foundation of all knowledge.

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 two evenings in late February/early March led by a team consisting of Mrs Sharyn Laughlin and Mrs Hannah van Bentum. It proved most beneficial for those in attendance.

The Spring Fair scheduled for 2020 was cancelled due to the requirements related to COVID current in 2020. We hope to run a 2021 Spring Fair at the end of October if COVID-related restrictions allow.

Parent/teacher interviews were scheduled to be held in late Term 1 and early in Term 3. Due to the implications of COVID and the related period of online learning, partial reports were issued for Semester 1 and the parent-teacher interviews were held in Term 3. Comprehensive Semester reports were distributed to parents at the end of Semester 2 only in 2020. The reports are 'plain English' report cards with A – E grades.

Regular communication with parents is via the Communicator newsletter (once a fortnight). It is distributed each Thursday afternoon by email using Adobe InDesign cloud-based software. The PCSchool Student Management System is used to facilitate sending messages to parents by both email and SMS as appropriate. Teachers are increasing their use of Google Classroom and this has a useful guardian email digest feature which many parents have found valuable. During the online learning period in 2020, some Primary classes used the Seesaw package to share student work with parents. The decision has been made to continue using Seesaw for the Preschool and junior primary classes in 2021 as the main school has reverted to Google Classroom as its main tool.

GENERAL

Chaplaincy

The School Chaplain position has been ably filled by Mr Nate Swift who took over this role from Mr Jeremy Hopwood at the start of the year. 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 2020.

Mr Swift has organised a series of 'Chaplain's lunches' 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. The Council Chairman's report gives a detailed breakdown of key findings from these surveys.

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

All student computing continues to be based on the Chromebox/Chromebook devices utilising G Suite for Education, a cloud based set of basic software tools such as Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides and Google Classroom. The main computer room and the school library provide two places where there are sufficient devices for a class to use. In addition, these are supplemented by two mobile trolleys with Chromebooks which are taken into a classroom as needed. Internet provisioning was converted to the NBN at the beginning of 2020 and this has proved to be a much more robust and stable system than our earlier wireless system.

We continue to maintain that a ‘Bring Your Own Device’ (BYOD) approach 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.

Legislative concerns

The ACT Government under the leadership of the Labor/Greens coalition pushed through, just prior to the Territory elections in 2020, the *Sexuality and Gender Identity Conversion Practices Bill 2020* which aimed to ban so-called “conversion practices”. Christian Schools (including Covenant) in the ACT were involved in a lobbying effort through the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) which was largely ignored by legislators. The full impact of this legislation on Christian schools and churches will not be fully realised until the ACT Government’s Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs starts to develop policy and regulations. The stated aim is to “make Canberra the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia”.

CONCLUSION

2020 saw continued growth in numbers at the start of the year but the effects of COVID and other factors have seen a number of families seek alternative schooling options at the end of the year. Due to changes in staff, we carried out a recruitment drive which resulted in the appointment of 5 new teachers to commence in 2021.

The Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA) project will start in earnest in the first part of 2021 and will be an exciting development that comes to fruition in conjunction with the School celebrating 30 years.

We thank the Lord for guiding us through this period of transition and we look forward to His continued guidance and blessing for the 2021 school year.

Yours in Christ

Martin Keast
Principal
29 June 2021