



**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

**TO THE**

**SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

**FOR THE**

**2023**

**ACADEMIC YEAR**

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

**PRINCIPAL'S REPORT to the SCHOOL COMMUNITY  
for the 2023 ACADEMIC YEAR**

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to Covenant Christian School's Annual Report for the 2023 academic year.

For 2023 the theme is 'God's goodness and truth' and the associated Theme Song was 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.'

The term verses set for student memorisation as well as being the text for assembly devotions during the year were:

Term	Verse	Rationale
1	Ex 34:6-7 "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty."	Our God is absolute goodness and truth and therefore all His ways are good.
2	Gen 8:22 "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."	God's goodness is His care over this world for us – we need not fear global climate catastrophe.
3	Gal 5:22-3 "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."	We are called to be imitators of Christ – goodness is therefore required of us as a fruit.
4	Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"	Our salvation, all our blessings flow out of God's goodness; He expects us to live accordingly.

2023 saw the continuation of the steady enrolment growth we have been experiencing along with other independent schools in the ACT and throughout Australia.

The school was awarded a grant of \$910,000 towards a specialist Music facility which is nearing completion and should be available for use in Term 2 of 2024. This building will provide the school with two large sound-proofed classrooms and associated storage space for Music. In addition, the building will provide four practice rooms which provides scope for the school to have a number of itinerant Music teachers offering instrumental instruction during the school day for families who wish to enrol.

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 over 200 students (KG-Year 10). This has included additional leadership roles being established as the school's first Deputy Principal was appointed in Term 4.

Covenant Christian School continues to be affiliated to Christian Education National (CEN) which provides support and fellowship with like-minded schools, particularly in the ACT and NSW. Emmaus Christian School is the only other CEN-affiliated school in the ACT. We also maintain regular contacts with other Christian schools in the ACT through Principal and Business Manager forums.

**COUNCIL**

The Chairman's report covers the work of Council and its Committees in 2023.

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 was granted re-registration for the period 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2026 with no conditions noted. The ACT Education Act has now been revised and independent schools such as Covenant are under a “continuous registration” regime which means that we no longer have a 5-year cycle of audits but we do have to provide a statement of compliance each year and be subject to periodic audits. The ACT government is appointing a new board which will oversee the process of ensuring schools are continuing to meet government obligations but has yet to finalise these arrangements – we anticipate periodic audits may start later in 2024 once the final shape of this new approach has been finalised.

## Recurrent Income (\$)

MySchool Data – 2023 (provisional)

Aust Govt	3,821,776
State Govt	761,194
Fees etc.	1,669,909
Other private	131,029
Gross	6,383,907
Deductions:	2,271,471
TOTAL	4,112,436

## 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 2023 Covenant Christian School employed 26 (18.3 FTE) teaching staff and 22 non-teaching staff (9.7 FTE) across Years K-10. Teacher staff absences represented 6.13% of total days worked.

All teaching staff members were deemed qualified for their positions, and are registered with the ACT Teachers Quality Institute (TQI) where applicable. The breakdown of highest qualifications held by all (non-casual) teaching staff is as follows: 5 Masters degrees, 9 Grad.Dip., 15 Bachelor degrees and 1 Diploma of Teaching. All registered 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 regular volunteers hold valid and current WWVP (Working with Vulnerable People) registration.

The ratio of male to female teaching staff (K-10) was 5.8/12.9 (FTE basis) or 6:20 by headcount. There is one member of staff who identifies as part-indigenous.

There were staff changes in 2023. Miss Elizabeth Daly (now Kirkpatrick) and Ms Amy Uebergang were employed as part-time junior primary teachers and ran Kindergarten in 2022. Mrs Kirkpatrick went on maternity leave at the end of the year to have her first child. Mrs Kim Macpherson joined us during the year as a part-time Year 6 teacher with the departure of Mrs Katrina Wilkie to a full-time position at another school. We also saw some changes in our Teacher Aide staff and also in Administration.

Miss Janine Rumbel took over the position of Director of Curriculum and Learning after Mrs James requested to be released from this position of responsibility.

## Professional Development Weeks

### 23 – 27 January 2023

- Mr Jayan Parry, Pastor of Southside Bible Church in Tuggeranong, led staff devotions in the morning at Covenant.
- A CPR refresher for staff was attended by all staff.
- Staff enjoyed an online refresher on Young Earth Creation from a US-based instructor with Answers in Genesis.

- Teachers were given significant time to work on the implementation of Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum.
- The Secondary 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 the previous week.

### **17 - 21 July 2023**

- Rev John Steenhof Snr from Southside Bible Church, led staff devotions for two mornings at Covenant.
- Staff attended a two-day CEN ACT/NSW State Conference at Nepean Christian School in Sydney on Thursday-Friday 20-21 July.
- Staff were involved in preparation for Term 3 as well as various meetings.
- The mid-year reports were finalised and distributed during the July term break.
- The Primary 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 264 students (K-10) enrolled at the August census date, 8 of whom were international students.

The Year 10 students who left the school in 2023 enrolled in Trinity Christian School (1), Lake Tuggeranong College (7), MacKillop College (1), Merici College (1), St John Paul College (1), Brindabella Christian College (4), Erindale College (4), Googong College (1), Narrabundah College (3), Hawker College (1).

### **Student Attendance**

The average student attendance rate was 91.8% (Years 1-10). The rate in Infants/Primary was 92.0% and in Secondary 91.1%. The breakdown per year level is below:

#### Full Day Attendance Rate

Overall	91.8%
Year 1	89.6%
Year 2	90.9%
Year 3	91.1%
Year 4	92.6%
Year 5	93.2%
Year 6	94.5%
Year 7	89.3%
Year 8	91.9%
Year 9	89.8%
Year 10	93.3%

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 National Collection of Consistent Data (NCCD) is ably coordinated by Mrs Hopwood assisted 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.

Adjustments are made to learning tasks and assessments for those students identified as needing additional support. Tracking of all students has been maintained and students with special needs identified and helped.

### **Student Activities**

In 2023 we had the largest single year 10 cohort since the school was founded in 1991. As a group of students, they made a strong contribution to the life of the school, particularly as a good number of these young people had already made a public commitment to serve the Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

2023 saw the resumption of a full calendar of school activities as the covid-19 restrictions have now all ceased to have an impact on the life of the school.

We were very pleased to have a specialist guest speaker, Susan McLean of Cybersafety Solutions, who gave a comprehensive presentation to students in our Years 5-10 cohorts. It was eye-opening for our young people as she made them aware of the many risks they take when using social media and the internet in general. We plan to hold such events every two years for our students and alternate with a parent session in 2023.

Senior students in Years 9 and 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 Student Representative Council (SRC) provides a forum for students to make suggestions and have input into the life of the school. Secondary student leaders work closely with Mrs Lyons who provides support and advice to them in their roles.

Primary student leadership positions are also functioning well – these students have been active in supporting teachers in such areas as award presentations and fundraising. Mrs Laughlin provides mentorship and guidance to these young leaders who provide a number of supports to staff and encourage their fellow students to do the right thing.

The 3-day Secondary Camp in 2023 was held at again CRU Galston Gorge which was able to provide a comprehensive and soundly Christian programme for our students. Due to the increased numbers expected in Years 7-10 in 2024, the decision was made to split the Y7-10 camp into a Y7-8 camp and a separate Y9-10 camp starting in 2024. The CRU campsite at Lake Macquarie was identified as a possible venue.

Our CARE Ministries raised \$2,135.92 in 2023. The fundraising effort was spearheaded by senior students under the guidance of Mrs Lyons. This was raised for our 'Compassion children' (Melaku and Alisson) and also for a relief organisation (Middle East Reformed Fellowship).

Primary and Secondary students also engaged in various service activities both in the wider community and within the school. For example, Primary students tidied up the build-up of leaves around the school during autumn and were involved in establishing vegetable garden beds. Secondary students were able to do projects around the school during the service week as well as fundraising for our Compassion sponsor children throughout the year. 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 a number of performing arts activities during the year such as a TAG Quest and we were able to resume the Evening of the Arts – many of these were held in the COLA and were well-received by the school community.

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. For the first time we were involved in an inter-school debating competition set up between the ACT Christian schools. It was held at Emmaus Christian School and was a challenging event and a lot of fun for our students. A Soccer Gala Day was held in August and a Futsal Gala Day in October. These activities formed a break from the normal routines of study and allowed a diversity of students to shine.

The new enhanced Years 9-10 elective structure continued in 2023 with 3 lines of courses each semester which gave students a wide variety of subjects to select from. The partially subsidised 4-day Sydney special excursion for Year 10 was a positive event held at the beginning of Term 4. Students enjoyed this special time and were able to contribute in various service activities as well as enjoy the sights of Sydney.

Extension activities are offered across the school. These include but are not limited to the Ethics Olympiad (Junior and Middle School, Mathematics Olympiad and Interschool Spelling Bee.

Other important school activities were:

- Various sports carnivals as part of our inter-House competition – athletics, swimming, and cross-country were held in 2023.
- Year 6 Dinner was held in the school Library on the evening of Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> December.
- Year 10 Graduation Dinner was held at the Southern Cross Club premises in Tuggeranong on the evening of Friday 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- The annual awards and prize-giving gathering (Thanksgiving) was held during the day on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December as a whole school assembly. Rev Dave Brookes, Senior Pastor of the Tuggeranong Presbyterian Church gave a well-received message during the Thanksgiving assembly. The ADF Long Tan Leadership Award and the ADF Future Innovators Award were presented on behalf of the Australian Defence Force.

The 2023 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 Ebony Lyons under Mrs Elizabeth Coleman's oversight did a great job of collating and editing this informative record of the life of the school and the quality of the production continues to be very high.

### Benchmarking

NAPLAN testing was carried out in 2023 using an online assessment platform.

The following tables show the proportion of the cohort who sat the NAPLAN assessment who achieved results at or above the expected level of achievement for their Year group. Please note our relatively small cohort sizes can cause large swings at times when results are averaged over the cohort.

### Percentage of students at or above expected level

#### Grammar & Punctuation

	2021	2022	2023
Yr 3	88.2%	100.0%	89.5%
Yr 5	90.9%	93.7%	100.0%
Yr 7	94.7%	91.2%	96.2%
Yr 9	86.7%	77.8%	100.0%

#### Numeracy

	2021	2022	2023
Yr 3	94.1%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 5	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 7	89.5%	97.0%	96.2%
Yr 9	100.0%	96.3%	100.0%

#### Reading

	2021	2022	2023
Yr 3	94.1%	100.0%	94.7%
Yr 5	91.7%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 7	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 9	100.0%	92.6%	100.0%

#### Spelling

	2021	2022	2023
Yr 3	88.2%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 5	90.9%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 7	94.7%	94.1%	96.2%
Yr 9	100.0%	81.5%	100.0%

#### Writing

	2021	2022	2023
Yr 3	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 5	91.7%	100.0%	100.0%
Yr 7	89.5%	82.4%	92.3%
Yr 9	66.7%	76.0%	100.0%

Common entry points into Covenant are Kindergarten and Year 7. This does explain why the Year 7 cohort has, at times, a higher proportion of students who were assessed at below the expected level of achievement for their

grade. 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 joyfully 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**

We are now planning to hold a Spring Fair in 2024 which will be the first time since before COVID restriction in 2022 prevented the event being held. This activity is a very popular event which provides our families with the opportunity to serve the community and also showcases the school for those interested in what we do.

Parent/teacher interviews were held in late Term 1 and early in Term 3. Due to increased numbers, the secondary interviews were split between Years 7-8 and Years 9-10 for the first time. Comprehensive Semester reports were distributed to parents at the end of Semester 1 and Semester 2 in 2023. 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 on 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. Other online systems are used in preschool and junior primary grades to facilitate parental involvement in their children's education in these early years.

## **GENERAL**

### **Chaplaincy**

The School Chaplain position has been ably filled by Mr Tom Edwards. 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 2023. We have recently had our funding approved for 2024-2027.

Mr Edwards has been able to provide pastoral advice and counselling to students as required. Overall, the school community has reflected positively on the Chaplaincy in surveys and general comments.

### **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 continues to be 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 the Google Workspace for Education platform, a cloud-based set of basic software tools such as Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides and Google Classroom. We subscribe to the Education Plus version which gave us significantly improved functionality and storage.

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 three mobile trolleys with Chromebooks which are taken into a classroom as needed. A fourth trolley is being ordered for 2024. Internet is provided through a fibre-connection to the NBN which has given the school more stable and reliable access. We have found the NBN Enterprise Ethernet service has greatly increased the capacity and stability of our internet connection. Late in 2023 we converted the school to a Voice-over-IP based platform which allowed us to retire the aged PABX system and gives us capacity to add additional extensions as required.

Ipads are used in both the junior primary classes and also in Music to supplement the learning activities in the classroom. These have proved a challenge to administer and we hope to find competent technical support to help us make good use of these devices.

Our school is committed to avoiding a 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) approach to student computing as it does not fit with our school pedagogy. There is growing evidence that screen time for young people is cumulative and that too much can have undesirable effects on a young person. As a school, we need to minimise screen time to what is essential. In addition, 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 has revised its anti-discrimination legislation which is potentially a threat to the school in terms of employing Christian staff. So far we have not noticed any impact but are aware that there is the potential for the school to be subjected to some sort of challenge.

The Federal Government is currently considering a report from the Australian Law Reform Commission on protecting religious freedom. Early indications have not been encouraging and we are presently awaiting the government to release proposed legislative changes following the deeply disturbing initial consultation carried out by the ALRC early in 2023.

## **CONCLUSION**

2023 saw a continuation of the enrolment growth we had been seeing prior to the pandemic time. Work is now nearing completion on the new Music building which will give us two additional classroom and four soundproofed practice rooms. This project utilises the grant of \$910,000 which the school was awarded by the ACT Government.

We are very thankful that our submission for a grant towards a new building which will give us four additional secondary classrooms has been approved. The ACT Government has given the school another grant of \$1 million towards this new project which we hope to seek tenders for in March 2024. The aim is for this building to complete before the commencement of the 2025 school year.

We thank the Lord for His continued mercies to the school and we look forward to His continued guidance and blessing for the 2024 school year.

Yours in Christ

Martin Keast  
Principal  
01 March 2024