

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES ANGLICAN SCHOOLS DISTINCTIVE?

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In establishing the distinctiveness of Anglican Schools it is important to try and identify some of the features of Anglican Schooling and especially those which flow from the nature of Anglicanism itself and the history of Anglican Schooling. These may be referred to as the Commission's "core values".

The first thing that must be said is that the Anglican Church has seen its provision of schools as a significant service to the community. In 2011 the 200th anniversary was celebrated in the United Kingdom of the founding of the Church Schools Movement by Joshua Watson, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Anglican Schools Commission was one of those from across the Anglican Communion invited to attend a Consultation in England. The result of this gathering is the Cambridge Declaration which affirms and promotes 'Anglican schools as central to God's mission in the world.'

During the early years of White Settlement in Australia it was the church which provided schools. Before long, however, the task was too great and the state needed to be involved. The Anglican Church has continued to develop schools, although for more than a century that was a difficult ask without government funding.

In more recent times, with the advent of government funding, there has been a renewed concern for the provision of schools which are more affordable than the Independent Anglican Schools, so that they might be accessible to a wide range of families (especially those which are Anglican) in the community. It was this concern which led to the establishment of the Anglican Schools Commission by the Synod of the Diocese of Perth in 1985. Since then the ASC has established or acquired ten schools on twelve campuses in two States, with the eleventh school to open in 2015.

So what is distinctive about Anglican Schooling? It may be that some of these features are shared with other systems or schools, but taken together they form an impressive 'package' which is very attractive to many concerned parents in the community.

1. Aiming for Excellence and the Development of the Whole Person

Anglican Schools have a good track record in helping students reach out for the best of which they are capable. Anglican Schools are highly regarded by their local communities and most have waiting lists. In Anglican Schools the co-curricula program is highly significant because it provides students with a wider range of learning opportunities than might be the case in some other schools. Thus the possibility for a more rounded education is enhanced. Anglican Schools take seriously the needs of the whole person, that is, their spiritual, physical, intellectual, social emotional, aesthetic and moral needs.

Such a stance reflects a Christian view of the nature of persons and of the need to affirm the particular gifts and abilities of each person.

2. Providing a Thoughtful and Balanced Education

There is a strong emphasis in Anglicanism of taking a thoughtful and considered approach to controversial and contemporary issues. Anglican theology and liturgy value both 'word' with its rational emphasis, and sacrament with its more intuitive and affective emphasis. There is a valuing of the 'head' as well as of the 'heart'. This is reflected in Anglican schooling with its concern to encourage students to think and reason, as well as to participate in the creative arts and to deepen relationships with others and the natural environment. Anglican schooling also challenges students to consider their relationship with God: who creates us, who redeems us in Jesus Christ and who sustains us through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

3. Inclusive and Open - Valuing All Students

Anglicanism has a capacity to hold together a diversity of Christian belief and practice. This comes from its "Catholic" heritage as well as its 'Protestant' or 'Reformed' one. The notion of 'unity in diversity' is very important for Anglicans who work hard at being inclusive although at times that is difficult to achieve. ASC Schools make available a caring Christian education to as wide a cross section of the community as possible. All students are valued whatever their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or abilities might be.

4. Positively Affirming All that is Wholesome in Human Life

There is a strong thread in Anglicanism which celebrates 'humanness'. Anglicans hold firm to the doctrines of Creation ('And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good", Genesis 1:31a) and Incarnation ("And the word became flesh and dwelt among us", John 1:14a). Anglicans rejoice in all that is wholesome in human life and experience and seek to live in a celebrative way. We also affirm humankind's need for renewal and healing and rejoice in the knowledge that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself", 2 Corinthians 5:19.

5. Maintaining Continuity with the Past but Thoughtfully Responsive to Education Innovation

Anglicanism maintains continuity with the past in its liturgies, its adherence to the historic creeds, its episcopal leadership and its synodical governance, while retaining a capacity to be responsive to its cultural and contemporary context. In its schools the Church preserves what is good from the past while being thoughtfully responsive to education innovation.

6. Pastoral Care of all Students Especially Those with Special Needs

Anglican Schools have always maintained a strong emphasis on pastoral care. This is evidenced in part by the appointment of a Chaplain but as importantly by a commitment on the part of all staff to care for the whole person. Each school will have its own structures in place to ensure that pastoral care is given a high priority. It is not insignificant or by chance that the Anglican Schools Commission aims to provide "a caring Christian education" in its schools.

A strong thread running through Anglicanism is its concern for social justice and its ministry to the poor and disadvantaged in the community. This is evidenced in the Church's social welfare work through Anglicare, St Bartholomew's, Parkerville Children and Youth Care, Meath Care and similar agencies. Social justice issues are significant items on a Diocesan Synod's Agenda and they form a strong component of outreach within and beyond each ASC school.

The concern for children with special needs is an important element in the Commission's mandate and all its schools have a commitment in this area.

7. Providing Religious Studies for Anglican Schools and Promoting Anglican / Christian Values

In Anglican Schools the spiritual and moral dimensions of education find a significant place in the curriculum and substantial resources are directed to this end. Religious education and worship opportunities may be called by different names in each ASC school, but in all schools they proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, while acknowledging the multi-cultural, multi-faith society which is Australia in the twenty-first century. Students are encouraged to explore Christian faith and practice and to develop a value system for their own lives which gives expression to such faith and practice, without being coerced into an emotional or spiritual response which is not authentic or age appropriate

8. Providing Stability and Reliability in Leadership and Teaching Staff

Anglicanism by its very structure provides stability in leadership and a series of checks and balances in the decision-making processes which impact on its parishes and its agencies. No school or parish can operate in complete independence. There is an assurance to parents that a school's education policy and practice will not be overly influenced by any particular person or pressure group.

9. Communities of Faith

Anglican schools are faith communities where regularly in term time, students and staff gather to worship God and to witness to the core values of each school. Quite often former students, family or community members also join with them in worship.