



Growing in Wisdom

P R I M A R Y S C H O O L A N D H I G H S C H O O L

Parents ask good questions

Dear Parent / Caregiver,

Recently, some questions have been asked regarding our student free days and I felt that it was important to answer them.

By now, you should be aware that our students have an extra week off during the winter holidays. This week was taken from our Christmas holidays (which parents agreed were already too long). We began this approximately eight years ago, due to staff and students becoming run down, sick, and tired during the winter months. It allows our teaching staff, and more importantly our students, to commit to the second semester with more energy, better health and greater engagement, with minimal loss of teaching time. **This trend is growing rapidly amongst the private school community.**

Also, as of this year (refer to the recent letter sent home to Middle School parents), Middle School students will have an additional 2.5 days holiday at the end of the year.

Taking into account the first day back (Student Free Mondays) the extra 2.5 days Middle School teachers have without students at the end of the year, two report writing days per year, not to mention all of the holidays they get, it would be reasonable for parents to ask, **"What exactly are teachers doing during this "student-free time?"**.

To begin with, I need to state that it is unfair for us to expect that parents will have a good understanding of what's required of teachers today and that's why I'm writing this letter. Parents often see teaching as it was in the early years when they were at school, but today there is an ever-increasing list of responsibilities placed on school teachers, unlike ever before. It's a whole new world.

Besides teaching academic skills and knowledge, teachers are now considered to be responsible for developing each child's social skills, manners, organisational skills, personal hygiene, self-control, self-motivation and even eating habits and lifestyle choices.

Obviously teachers of health, physical education and food technology subjects play an important role in fostering healthy eating and an active lifestyle. Such topics are a part of the curriculum that these teachers have been trained to teach here at Cedar. However, not all teachers are trained to teach these topics, nor are all teachers trained to teach the other types of social and personal skills mentioned above, ie. Physical and Psychological Welfare of students. They are Teachers, not Psychologists or Nutritionists or "Lifestyle Coaches". We have employed two Pastoral Carers and two Chaplains to assist us in these important areas.

So again, what do our teachers do with their student-free time?

I haven't begun to mention the National Curriculum training, Assessment and Reporting professional development, First Aid and Fire Fighting training, Occupational Health and Safety training, Mandatory Reporting of Abuse and Neglect training, and much more.

Added to that is report writing. In the past, staff were writing their reports in the early hours of the morning, which is not the best time for teachers to assess your child. They also use their holidays to create resources, write lesson plans, write programs, mark assignments, bookwork and tests, and prepare for the term ahead.

Many years ago the job of teaching was envied and sought after because of the holidays. Today, these same people are leaving the teaching profession in droves. **The holidays alone are simply not worth it.**

Because teachers are expected to be trained to fulfill all of these various roles, they will inevitably have less time and energy to devote to teaching literacy and numeracy skills. This also affects their ability to be creative, innovative and collaborative. Their technology skills and the valuable knowledge associated with academic disciplines like science, art, music and history are also affected. This obviously has a flow-on effect to your children in the classroom.

This is where our student free days come in. If it were up to the teachers, they would rather use the student-free time teaching your children in their chosen subject areas. Unfortunately, we live in a changing world that requires teachers to take on much more than they should.

FACT 1: Did you know, that 40 to 50 percent of new teachers in Australian Public Schools leave the profession within their first five years in the job (Research article, Dr Philip Riley, The Sydney Morning Herald). This is the norm in the US and Europe, and now we're seeing the same in Australia. What's more, this trend appears to be increasing. One school reported losing eight of its teachers in the past two years. (Again, the holidays do not hold as much value as we sometimes think.)

Our average staff attrition rate is approximately 3% compared with that of 40 to 50% in public schools.

FACT 2: Did you know that out of 100 occupations, teaching ranked only 34th.

The occupations listed below, rate higher and are more sought-after than teaching.

Dentist / Lawyer / Bill Collector / Accountant / Exterminator / Social Worker / Maintenance Worker / Drug Abuse Counsellor / Nurse / and then... **School Teacher.**

"By 2015, experts project, our schools will face serious staff shortages as the old teachers retire and years of dwindling demand for teaching places and high attrition rates in the profession will leave too few young teachers to replace them." (The Age).

(In other words: If we want to hold on to great teachers, we need to look after them.)

Our facilities are state-of-the-art and continuing to grow. But, it is without a doubt that both our teaching and administration staff are our greatest resource. We value them highly! We have amazing staff and an incredible parent body who offer us wonderful support, and I thank each of you for that.

The questions raised regarding student free days were very reasonable ones. I hope that this letter has given you, our parents and caregivers, enough information to understand how hard our staff work and how much we need these days for Professional Development.

Many of my enrolment interviews are with disappointed parents, wanting to put their children on waiting lists. We have student waiting lists in almost every year level because of the wonderful staff and culture we have developed here at Cedar College. **I believe that you, as part of our school community, have helped us to create that culture.**

A major part of my role as Principal is to support and look after my staff, and the teachers have the enormous role, and privilege, of teaching your children. It's a team effort, but together we're a great team.

Thank you once again for your support.



Peter Thomson
Cedar College Principal