

WELCOME TO VILLAGE SCHOOL

Village School is an independent, non-sectarian and non-denominational primary school having no specific affiliations with any other educational establishment or educational system.

Village School's educational philosophy is underpinned by the concept of liberalism and tolerance, and promotes humanitarian concerns such as inclusiveness, equity and universal rights.

It follows that Village School does not endorse or favour any particular religious or political belief but prefers to consider and compare all ideas and doctrines in the spirit of intellectual inquiry.

We aim to inspire young children to discover and learn in a supportive, caring environment. We celebrate individual differences while at the same time encouraging children to develop an awareness of their place in Australian society and the global community, and to grow to understand their role in supporting and caring for each other, all living creatures and the natural environment.

We continue to endorse the sentiments of the three founding teachers of Village School who chose to quote the American educationalist J.S. Bruner:

We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught in any intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development. It is a bold hypothesis and an essential one in thinking about the nature of the curriculum. No evidence exists to contradict it; considerable evidence is being amassed that supports it.

This hypothesis frees the home-group teachers to pursue any subject they may find interesting or relevant and to engage children at any age in a variety of experiences.

We make the assumption that each child learns in a unique way and at different rates, therefore no single teaching method will address this. While literacy and numeracy will always be a top priority, we will foster each child's special talents and try to discover his or her own particular path to achieving these outcomes.

We support a differentiated curriculum which provides a variety of teaching approaches and classroom structures. It addresses varying intellectual, social and emotional needs by providing a balance of whole and small group activities as well as individual tuition. In a differentiated curriculum students are encouraged to make safe choices about learning and to pursue their interests. While we value whole group teaching as a springboard for further learning experiences we believe it is essential that this is balanced with fluid classroom construction which allows for individual instruction and small group activities.

Each child is unique

Children are individuals with backgrounds of differing experience. They have different intelligence potentials and need to develop skills in order to survive and thrive in the real world. We acknowledge that children learn at different rates and in different ways and accept that knowledge outcomes vary from one child to the next. Each child is a worthwhile person, respected and valued for who they are. In our ever-changing world, children need a wide range of skills, social, emotional and academic to adapt to the demands of society.

So how do we cater for these differences?

In each of the home-groups children will be working at different stages of learning for each subject, according to their individual development. For instance, a child may be exploring one section of mathematics while practicing skills with another. The academic program is designed to be open-ended to allow for these different developmental stages. Learning for the children is therefore a mixture of individual lessons, small group lessons based on ability and whole group discussions and activities which promote cooperative learning experiences and social and emotional growth.

Therefore we do:

- Have individual goals for each child
- Spend at least half of our teaching time working with individuals
- Encourage each child's special talents so that he/she experiences success
- Prepare and present different tasks to different children
- Choose open-ended tasks relating to themes so that children can work alongside each other and yet achieve at their own academic levels
- Apply different teaching styles and strategies according to children's needs and preferred learning styles
- Discuss with children how they learn best so that they can 'own' their learning
- Have an expectation that at the end of a teaching term or year, the children will have developed in different ways and achieved at different academic levels
- Measure a child's progress by how far he/she has come, not by how they compare with their peers
- Ensure the children are grouped according to where they are socially at ease

Rather than:

- Teach new skills to an entire class to save time
- Compare children's progress with others, using terms like 'behind' or 'ahead'
- Display individual scores for comparison
- Expect the same volume of work and level of understanding from every child
- Limit our expectations for outcomes of learning
- Expect all students to work at the same pace
- Withhold teaching a concept on the grounds of "not age appropriate" when the child is showing an interest in learning
- Give 'prescriptive' instructions that result in identical end products for art/craft, model-making etc
- Have a school uniform
- Group children according to academic ability
- Expect all children to work at the same pace

Looking to the future

A child will not always be six or seven years old but will eventually live an adult life in the real world. Bearing this in mind, we feel that it is our duty to equip them for this life by giving them real chances to try out life situations in an environment which will support them in their efforts, accept them if they don't make it first time and give them the skills and confidence to try again and succeed.

Therefore we do:

- Foster responsibility and accountability in our daily programs
- Include daily tasks in our Village School farm
- Encourage children to initiate and run with community projects
- Include a daily meeting chaired by the children
- Include weekly whole school meetings chaired by the children
- Listen to the children's ideas and where possible allow them to follow their dreams
- Develop time management skills by allowing students to make some scheduling choices from their work projects

Rather than:

- Have low expectations of the children's capabilities
- Tell them that we (the teachers) know all the answers
- Shield them from the realities of life, within reason

What about their future?

We foster thinking and problem solving skills as a way of preparing our students for adult life. Predicting, checking, monitoring, and mind-mapping are successful and relevant ways of dealing with information and technology in today's society.

Therefore we do:

- Favour learning experiences which are multi-faceted and have multiple outcomes rather than always looking for one 'right' answer.
- Choose themes that are relevant to our current Australian context
- Include appropriate technology use in our home-groups and library

Rather than:

- Give children 'busy work' i.e. Lots of worksheets for the sake of keeping them quiet and apparently 'working'
- Place more emphasis on standardised presentations rather than the content and evidence of thinking.

We learn by making mistakes

We encourage children to take risks in a non-threatening, caring environment in order to develop realistic, problem-solving skills. We promote learning as an exciting, enjoyable and ongoing life experience and foster creative thinking and individuality in a cooperative, rather than a competitive environment.

Therefore we do:

- Allow children to complete a task that may not achieve its intended purpose, in order to let them discover for themselves why they didn't succeed and how they can change what they do to succeed next time
- Often live with mess and untidiness so that children can discover through consequences the reasons for tidiness
- Spend lots of time with small groups discussing social problems and problems related to use of equipment
- Allow the children rather than the teachers to be accountable for room tidiness, and jobs being done (provided the welfare of other living creatures is not at stake)
- Allow choices of time use in the home-group environment so that the children learn to manage their own time
- Persist with individuals who waste their time by expecting them to make up for this in their own time (e.g. Breaks and lunches)
- Expect children to be accountable for their own actions and work to put right anything that they break, mess up or lose through persistent carelessness
- Value the process as much as the end product
- Praise children for ideas, actions and for persisting with problem-solving even when the outcome is not successful or fully complete
- Encourage children to have a go without expecting immediate success

Rather than:

- Tidy up for the children without involving them at some level of the process according to age and physical abilities
- do tasks for them in order to achieve a 'perfect' or uniform result
- make rules which limit children's behaviours and activities in order to forestall mistakes
- make all the decisions for the children

We do acknowledge:

- That some common sense rules are necessary to ensure physical and emotional safety.

Learning should not be restricted by subject boundaries

A flexible curriculum content enables themes to be selected for both their intrinsic value and their relevance. Subjects are relevant to the children, the local community, the world community, the school community and the local environment.

Therefore we do:

- choose themes as a way of combining the key learning areas in a more meaningful, real life context
- ensure that themes have an intellectual integrity and look at the 'bigger' questions in our society
- use themes as a way of motivating the children to practice their literacy and mathematical skills for a real purpose
- address requirements of the study of society, science and health by choosing themes related to these areas
- encourage designing and creating models, pictures, life-sized constructions and inventions as part of our thematic studies
- allow children to initiate their own projects and learning experiences
- We do sometimes teach new skills in language and maths without reference to the theme
- We use specialist teaching strategically and regularly
- We do have a flexible timetable which doesn't isolate specific subjects

We live in a multi-cultural democratic society

We celebrate and appreciate the rich diversity of the children within our school.

Therefore we do:

- Accept all students as equal regardless of religion, cultural background or political affiliation
- Present all discussion about particular religions, culture or politics in an unbiased manner
- Acknowledge festivals regardless of origins and encourage discussion and exploration without bias

Rather than:

- Present any religion, culture or political viewpoint in a more favorable light than another
- Promote or volunteer our own religious, cultural or political views
- Allow our own beliefs or views to colour our presentations to students in any way

If you don't own your learning, it's not yours to keep

Whilst the teacher maintains the learning framework, the children are empowered to plan, structure, self manage and self evaluate their own learning. All children need time to reflect on information. This does mean less information and more discussion. By asking well-structured questions we are teaching for thinking.

Therefore we do:

- involve the children from time to time in the choice and planning of study themes
- reassess and modify study themes which fail to capture the group's or a child's excitement and imagination
- encourage negotiation of tasks and deadlines
- involve the children in group decision-making about deadlines and output
- encourage the children to give constructive criticism to their peers and to themselves
- encourage the children to accept these criticisms as a learning experience rather than a personal criticism
- encourage children to seek out assistance and ideas from their peers
- share the children's learning rather than control it

Rather than:

- impose text book reliant curriculum on the children
- maintain set study themes for the different home group levels
- slavishly follow current trends in education which stem from knee jerk reactions to media, community criticisms or ambitious politicians

If you don't play with something you never really find out how it works

Through play we discover, learn and acquire fundamental skills and understandings.

We practice, develop and apply these skills and understandings to become responsible for our own learning.

Therefore we do:

- expect that a large proportion of the younger children's time will be spent in undirected play in a resource rich environment
- observe the children's undirected play and use these windows of opportunity for teaching new skills in a meaningful context
- use structured games and play acting as a way of acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills
- allow play to continue to be a valid part of the curriculum in all homegroups
- explore more in-depth studies through experiential learning
- provide a diverse outdoor environment which encourages imagination and inventiveness to flourish
- use competitive games to help the children to develop resilience, cooperation skills and a team spirit
- acknowledge that sometimes games are just for fun

Are all your friends the same age as you?

Homegroups are multi-aged to enhance the educational and social needs of the children. Cross-age interactions and peer tutoring allow opportunities for developing cooperative and leadership skills. A multi-aged group is a less competitive and is a more stimulating learning environment. It provides a more natural environment which allows the children to form friendships beyond their year levels. This in turn enhances self worth and provides the basis for a variety of positive relationships in the wider community.

Therefore we do:

- take friendships into account when forming homegroups
- foster a big friend system for Ringtail Possums
- have the children run whole school meetings
- involve the whole school in our annual productions
- run specialist sessions which are interest based rather than ability based e.g. choir, gardening
- encourage younger children to visit other homegroups to gain help with word processing, model making etc.
- arrange special buddy activities for intellectual rather than age peers, e.g. creative writing
- encourage parents to share their special interests and expertise with small interest groups

Rather than:

- separate our playground into defined areas for different age groups
- have special age groupings rules that preclude different age groups from mixing socially

We welcome parents/carers

Parents, carers, teachers and children work together to set and achieve individual student goals. The presence of parents provides continuity between home and school, enhancing and reinforcing our mutual beliefs and practices.

Therefore we do:

- invite parental commitment of time and/or skills
- encourage parents to work as teacher aides in our homegroups
- invite parents to offer special interest activities to groups of children
- enjoy having parents/carers spending informal time with each other in the school buildings and grounds during the school day
- appreciate parents planning and preparing weekly special lunches
- encourage parents to talk to the teachers about their children whenever they feel the need (outside active teaching time)
- maintain two formal parent/teacher interviews across the school year
- invite parents to participate on the school board
- enjoy sharing our weekly whole school meetings with parents

Although we may:

- advise some parents to limit their time in the homegroup if their child needs to develop independence

What's in a name?

The fundamental idea of mutual respect between children and adults at Village School facilitates the growth and development of responsibility in each individual. All adults and children address each other on a first name basis to reflect this mutual respect. The teachers promote integrity and are honest role models for the children, with an appreciation of humour that allows the children to relax and learn from any situation.

Therefore we do:

- allow directness and honesty between children and adults, rather than an imposed one way politeness from children to adults
- allow children to mention teacher's indiscretions without fear of reprisals
- treat the children in the manner we would expect them to treat us (the adults)
- expect children to comply with teachers' requests relating to behaviour and learning activities
- follow up disrespectful behavior between people with discussions, apologies or other appropriate actions
- withdraw privileges and freedoms for children who persist with disrespectful behavior
- make no distinction between adults areas and children's areas
- sit on the floor with the children if they are expected to do so
- make jokes and play with the children
- expect parents to maintain the same first name informal basis with the children within the school community
- acknowledge that we all make mistakes and apologise to the children when we have a misunderstanding or make a wrong judgement

Rather than:

- take advantage of our adult status by going to the front of queues, flaunting the safety rules or overriding homegroup decisions for our own adult conveniences
- expect blind obedience from children no matter how they are treated
- talk down to children or patronise them

Real discipline comes from within

The approach to discipline at Village School flows directly from that of social development, which intends to give the children growing responsibilities for themselves and their actions and is based on respect for their rights and the rights of others.

The aim is for the students to develop an internal discipline: to do something because it is 'the right thing to do' rather than a reliance on external discipline – 'I'll do this or I'll get into trouble'.

Consideration will always be given to the safety and welfare of the individual, other students, staff, the school community and animals.

Therefore we do:

- expect the children to display courtesy to others in the same way that they are given courtesy from the teaching staff
- expect the children to use commonsense rather than mindless rule following
- expect that the children will respect the school's, the teachers', the animals' and each others property and environments
- expect the children to understand that at times teachers will need to enforce appropriate consequences for the children's actions
- spend time listening to children's explanations about behavioural problems
- encourage children to try solving their social problems by discussion and negotiation before seeking a teacher's help
- encourage children to look out for others and speak up when they notice injustice
- involve the children in decisions about appropriate consequences for individuals when the problem concerns and affects the group

Rather than:

- display teacher driven rules for the children to learn and obey
- give meaningless detentions
- enforce dress codes except in matters of safety (e.g. sun-safe, footwear)
- persist with consequences for actions which don't change behaviours

It needs to be understood that their enrolment will be terminated if there is no improvement in the child's behaviour after:

1. discussion with a child
2. discussion with a child and parents
3. implementation of behaviour management plans and/or student contracts
4. a period of suspension
5. a letter to parents expressing concerns about unacceptable behaviours

To implement the above ethos successfully requires:
small group sizes,



flexibility,

experience,

and above all

**a whole school commitment
to ensure its ongoing growth.**