Welcome to Summer Hill Public School

Let us tell you a little about the Opportunity Class Program at our school.

We have two parallel Opportunity Classes in both years of the senior primary, which means we have 120 OC students at the school.

In order to have gained a place in OC, students must be gifted. Our aim is to extend these students across all areas of learning.

WE WANT CHILDREN TO BE ENGAGED IN LEARNING

Being engaged in their learning is important to all children. We offer stimulating and engaging work to all students at Summer Hill. Children in OC often take this work much further and work in the higher levels of thinking in order to achieve their best through differentiation of the curriculum.

HOW TO HELP MOTIVATE BRIGHT CHILDREN

We help these students discover the benefits of self-motivation, rather than doing work because someone else told them to do it. Children who are already highly motivated find themselves easily able to move on to the next step of developing their ability and creativity.

MORE THAN INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS

At the end of their time in OC, students have learnt to be creative and critical thinkers who are also able to work in a team. While it is an asset to be bright, the best outcomes of the OC program are to be able to work co-operatively, be able to communicate your ideas and to be a deep and critical thinker.
HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

The children who leave Summer Hill OC with the happiest experience are those who have become involved in the life of the school. Summer Hill has an unparalleled range of extra-curricular activities. Children can join chess, Tournament of Minds, orchestras, bands and debating, to mention just a few. These activities enrich a student’s experience, which in turn strengthens their knowledge of the world.

Involvement in school life should also include the parents of any child coming to Summer Hill. There are many ways you can help - and any input you have will strengthen your child’s bond with the new school.

IN WHAT WAY IS THE CURRICULUM DIFFERENT?

Students in OC do more than the core curriculum - although they do that as well. In order to enrich their learning, the curriculum content needs to be both broad and deep.

It needs to be broad so that the imagination can be captured - and narrow so that even the most complex of ideas can be explored thoroughly. The work is always varied and often at an abstract and not a concrete level.

The curriculum is compacted, enriched and accelerated.

There is a lot to do - but it is not just work for work’s sake. It is work for the sake of intellectual engagement and a broad world view.

HOW CAN EFFECTIVE INDEPENDENT LEARNING BE ACHIEVED WHEN THE CHILDREN ARE SO YOUNG?

A gifted child can do ‘pen and paper practice’. That is not what OC is about. We want to encourage our students to make their own discoveries and learn how to learn successfully.

We do that in many ways.

1. We set open-ended tasks. That means that children can explore as much as they want.

2. We help them use a variety of avenues for research. Their tasks will not just be about sitting in front of the computer or using reference books. They will be able to do research using a variety of techniques, including interviews, discussions, experiments and collaboration.

3. They will develop independent work habits.

4. They will learn to be team players. Many of these children have automatically been intellectual leaders in their previous school environment. Here they learn to work well in groups, an essential preparation for life. Participation in discussion and posing questions is very important in individual and group learning.
**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Children discover for themselves what is an appropriate standard for their work. They start to become highly interested in content - but also realise that presentation is important. For some children, handwriting improves dramatically. For others, computer skills become very important.

In the meantime, the students are developing their thinking. They are not merely collecting facts but synthesising this knowledge and analysing it. It is not just the “what” but also the “how” and the “why”.

As they develop their speaking, listening and writing skills, they become more confident. They are then able to express themselves in a variety of genres. Students engage regularly in self and peer evaluation.

**IS OC RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD?**

Gifted children have many different characteristics. Some students are quiet and shy; others are noisy and sports-mad. There are girls and boys from many different backgrounds and cultures.

There is one unifying characteristic of children in OC - they have been identified as having the potential to develop through the OC program.

In order to be offered a place at Summer Hill OC, children will have been very successful in the Opportunity Class Placement Test.

These students may have some of these traits:

- the ability to handle abstract ideas;
- higher order thinking skills;
- independent learning skills;
- creativity and originality;
- curiosity and energy;
- a wide variety of interests;
- long attention spans;
- a good vocabulary and the ability to speak well;
- very good reading skills and habits;
- the ability to learn the basics easily; and
- a good memory.

The OC program tries to foster and develop these traits in everyone.
SUMMER HILL HAS MUCH TO OFFER

In addition to participating in the OC program, students have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities which are all part of the life of Summer Hill.

Creative and Performing Arts
Outstanding opportunities for student performance
Specialist Drama program
Specialist Music program
Extensive Visual Arts program
School choirs
Specialist performance spaces
Debating
Recorder Group

A Stimulating Library
Well resourced
Extensive literature and research facilities

A Safe Environment
Sound and balanced environmental practices
Well supervised playground areas
All-weather and grass playing areas
Landscaped surroundings and natural shade areas
Covered outdoor learning area
Pedestrian crossing supervisor
Before and after school care

Advanced Technology
Computers in all classrooms
School network
Internet access in all classrooms
Computer laboratory in library

Comprehensive Physical Education and Sport Programs
Fitness programs Years K - 6
Specialist gymnastics program
Sport for students in Years 3 - 6
Successful participation in sport programs at the zone, area and state levels.

Active Parent Participation and Support
A friendly and active P & C
An efficient, hygienic and well-stocked canteen
A clothing pool where new and 'pre-loved' uniforms are available
An 'open' management style which encourages communication and consultation
Parent seminars organised by parents and the school to keep the school community informed

Extra Curricular Activities
After-school private instrumental tuition on site
Three orchestras in Years 3 - 6
Three bands in Years 3 - 6
Chess for all levels and abilities
Debating
Tournament of Minds
Participation in national and inter-school competitions
Frequently Asked Questions

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GIFTED AND TALENTED?

The Revised 2004 NSW Department of Education and Training Policy for the Education of Gifted and Talented Students adopted the following definitions:

"GIFTED STUDENTS are those whose potential is distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, social and physical"

"TALENTED STUDENTS are those whose skills are distinctly above average in one or more areas of human performance."

Your child might be exceptional in one area and just above average in others but will still be able to expand his or her horizons across a whole range of activities in OC.

2. HOW DO OPPORTUNITY CLASSES FIT WITHIN THE OVERALL POLICY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS?

Opportunity Classes are one of the many possible provisions for gifted and talented students. All schools have the responsibility to provide a range of opportunities to cater for talented students. If talented students are not challenged, there is the danger that they will underachieve with resultant detrimental effects on self-esteem. Opportunity Classes offer children the chance to be with a cohort of children with similar abilities.

3. WHAT BENEFITS WILL AN OPPORTUNITY CLASS AT SUMMER HILL OFFER THAT MY CHILD DOESN'T GET AT HIS/HER LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Your child will be in a class of "like minds". All the students have similar abilities and more relevant curricula can be employed with greater opportunities for extension and enrichment. Your child will be forced to think and accept challenges and will be less likely to become bored with repetitive routine.

Talented students in regular classes may play down their intellectual ability whereas in an Opportunity Class they will be encouraged to be individuals who think creatively and can express different ideas.

At Summer Hill, there are two parallel classes of OC children in one grade. This is an enormous pool of bright, inquisitive minds.

4. WILL THERE BE JUST TOO MUCH COMPETITION FOR MY CHILD?

Co-operative learning is the ethos of our program and students are guided to develop co-operative skills and personal organisation skills necessary to operate in small groups. They are taught skills of negotiation, an awareness of social roles in groups and the need to compromise in some situations. Although overt competition is discouraged, work of an extremely high standard is produced because of the presence of role models and the development of self-motivation.

Children learn to compete with themselves by improving their own standard.
5. **MY CHILD IS SUCH A PERFECTIONIST, WILL HE OR SHE BE ABLE TO COPE WITH THE WORKLOAD?**

Our personal development programs recognise this problem and provide activities and teacher counselling to assist the child to set realistic goals for themselves to help overcome this fear of failure and to cope with constructive criticism. With class work raised to a more challenging level, lower marks can be expected. The students will learn that school work requires a different approach requiring them to display more initiative.

Children are also expected to hand their work in on time and this often helps a child set limits on the level of work which can be achieved.

6. **HOW MUCH HOMEWORK WILL BE GIVEN?**

In an attempt to prepare these students for their secondary schooling, teachers usually set longer term assignments as homework. Through individual, group and class discussions, students are required to plan the stages of their homework tasks from beginning to completion in order to train them to be better managers of time. This approach is usually used, in preference to individual nightly exercises.

Student product is often seen to be directly proportional to the interest and effort expended. It would be expected that on any week night the student should spend between 45-60 minutes on homework. If a longer period of time is suddenly required (often with tears) it is usually the result of a time management problem.

Parents can support their child through providing emotional support and assisting their child to develop and practise the organisational and time management skills required to complete class requirements.

7. **WHAT HAPPENS TO A STUDENT WHO IS NOT COPING WELL IN AN OPPORTUNITY C CLASS?**

We like families to realise that they are making a two year commitment to "OC", if they accept a place.

The selection process is thorough enough to minimise the chance of a student having to leave because of the inability to cope with curriculum.

However, because students are talented in different areas, some students will be naturally weaker in some learning areas. As in any classroom, extra help will be given to overcome any difficulties of learning.

If a child was unhappy, every attempt will be made through discussion with the child, parents, teacher and counsellor to help him/her adjust to the new situation.
8. HOW DO THE STUDENTS COPE WITH CHANGING SCHOOLS?

Students enter the first day excited but apprehensive. This is particularly true if the student is the sole student from his/her previous school to accept the offer. They feel sad at leaving old friends behind and very insecure at not having a support network around them in a strange environment.

The first challenge for the teacher is to introduce a range of personal development activities to allow everyone to get to know each other and to create friendly, non-threatening work environments. Parents should not be surprised if there are tears in these initial stages and on occasion desire to return to their previous school.

Feelings of insecurity are further exaggerated because the students suddenly find themselves no longer alone at the top of the class and their self concepts take time to adjust to the new situation. The period of adjustment can take up to six months. However, once they again realise their worth and ability, their self concept returns to healthy and often more realistic levels. They are then ready to meet the challenges offered.

Children often complain in the beginning that the work is “too hard”. What that means is that they can no longer skate through it in ten minutes and spend the rest of the day reading a book. They are actively engaged in learning here.

9. DO OPPORTUNITY C TEACHERS HAVE SPECIAL TRAINING?

Currently special training is not required for a teacher to become an Opportunity Class teacher. However many of the teachers do have special qualifications in this area and many have been involved in intensive in-service courses run by the Department of Education and Training. Any teacher who is offered the position of an Opportunity Class teacher must possess highly developed teaching skills. They will have a working knowledge of teaching methodology for gifted students and must exhibit a genuine concern and commitment to the needs of the talented child in the education process.

10. HOW WILL MY CHILD GET TO SCHOOL?

Most parents recognise this as a difficulty but often become quite creative themselves in solving this problem. Summer Hill is well serviced by public transport (train and bus) and is within easy walking distance of Summer Hill railway station. It is a very good preparation for high school and the students enjoy travelling to and from school with their new friends. The students who travel alone or in a group by public transport tend to enjoy it and feel very independent.

After school care is available for those parents who have difficulty collecting their children at 3pm (refer to the Summer Hill handbook).
11. DOES BEING IN AN OPPORTUNITY CLASS MEAN AUTOMATIC PLACEMENT IN A SELECTIVE SCHOOL?

NO!!!

The Opportunity Class program is not a training ground for selective high schools. Our program is designed to provide a wide range of stimulating activities aimed at developing higher order thinking and creative skills and self-learners.

Students must qualify for entry to a selective high school in competition with other students on merit. The school provides marks for each student’s performance in English and mathematics in Year 5 and the student sits a state-wide test in English, mathematics and general ability to assess their potential.

Enrolment specialist high schools such as the Conservatorium of Music; Dulwich High School of Visual Art and Design; and Newtown High School of Performing Arts require an audition, portfolio and/or interview.

The reality is that many OC children proceed to selective schools. However, they also go to performing arts high schools, and comprehensive local schools.

We encourage parents to find the school to fit the child and not the other way around.

The school holds a High School Information Night each year for interested parents.

12. SHOULD MY CHILD BE COACHED?

This is a decision for each family.

Summer Hill expects that each student will give a full commitment to our learning program including extra curricular activities eg chess, band, orchestra, sport etc.

13. HOW DO OC CLASSES FIT IN WITH THE REST OF THE SCHOOL?

Opportunity Classes are regarded and treated in the same manner as all other classes in the school.

Opportunity Classes participate in many, whole-school activities including a Student Representative Council, band, choir, instrumental ensembles, chess, public speaking and sport. Senior Primary classes often participate in a pairing and sharing program in which the primary student is matched with a buddy from a K-2 class and time is set aside, perhaps each week, when the two classes can share in a teaching-learning activity.

Opportunity Class students are required to wear Summer Hill School uniform as they are part of our school and it assists in building a whole school spirit. In Year Six, along with everyone else in the grade, they are permitted to wear the Year Six t-shirt.