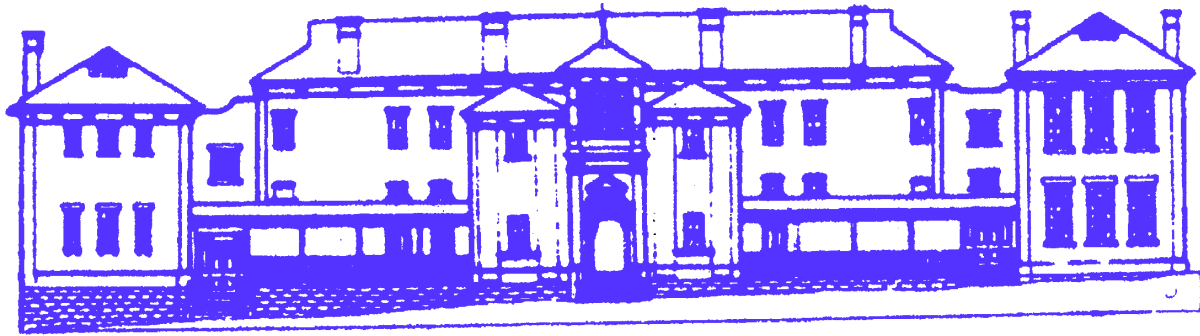


Opportunity 'C' Handbook



Welcome to Summer Hill Public School

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

Its formal name is the Opportunity C class. We have two parallel OC 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 highly gifted. Our aim is to stretch these students across all areas of learning.

MATHS AND ENGLISH IS ONLY PART OF WHAT WE DO

We teach the core curriculum areas of maths and English - but these students are able to take their study of these subjects to a much higher level. They also learn much more than the core curriculum - they explore ancient civilisations and modern authors; use technologies and stretch their computer skills. They write their own plays - and then put them on.

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 every single child at Summer Hill. Children in OC often take this work much further and work at a higher level of thinking in order to achieve their best through differentiation of the curriculum.

HOW TO HELP MOTIVATE BRIGHT KIDS

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 asset is to be able to work co-operatively and to be able to communicate your ideas.

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 the Minds, orchestras, bands, debating and public speaking, 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 the learning, the content needs to be both broad and deep.

It needs to be broad so that the imagination can be captured - and deep 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 but also be encouraged to ask questions and participate in discussions.
4. They will learn to be team players whether that means working on maths problems, the strategy for the soccer teams, or putting on a play about water management. 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.

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. Work is marked but students are also encouraged to evaluate their own work.

IS OC RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Gifted children have many different characteristics. Some are quiet and shy; others are noisy and sports-mad. These are girls and boys from many different ethnic groups.

There is one unifying characteristic of children at OC - they have been identified as having the aptitude, competence or 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 OC test.

These students have some of these traits:

- the ability to handle abstract ideas;
- higher order thinking skills;
- independent learning skills (our challenge is to help them commit these skills to all areas);
- creativity and originality.
- curiosity and energy;
- a wide variety of interests;
- long attention spans (don't panic if they don't have this - they will soon develop it here);
- a good vocabulary and the ability to speak well;
- very good reading skills and habits;
- ability to learn the basics easily (but still can't spell!); and
- a good memory.

The OC program tries to foster 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 and a choral group

A 'state of the art' school hall

'State of the Art' performance spaces

Debating

Public Speaking

Recorder Group

A Stimulating Library

Technologically advanced and 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 and road safety programs

Pedestrian crossing supervisor

Before and after school care

Advanced Technology

A K - 6 computer education program

'State of the art' information technology resources

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 Years K - 6

Sport for students in Years 3 -6

Successful participation in sport programs at the zone, area and state levels.

Swimming lessons as part of the school program

Camping program for Years 3-6

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

Two orchestras in Years 3 - 6

Three bands in Years 3 - 6

String Ensemble

Chess for all levels and abilities

Debating

Public Speaking

Participation in inter school competitions such as Tournament of the Minds

WHAT PAST AND PRESENT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT OC

"I went to Summer Hill Opportunity School in 1949 and 1950. It was, for me, a great experience. I was encouraged to act more freely, to express myself more boldly and to think outside the square. I also learned the duties to others that come with privileges.

I went on to Fort Street and I will never forget my debt to public education - to my teachers and my fellow students."

Justice Michael Kirby, High Court of Australia, Class of 1950

"The teaching at Summer Hill has a high standard and the teachers expect more from us. It is less boring as the people you work with are at, or about, the same level as you and no-one gets left behind so you can move through your work more quickly.

We built our own energy-efficient model of a house and wrote an anthology of poems, which we then published. We have made working boats and studied Pascal's Triangle."

Dominic Kavanagh, Class of 2002

"It was really challenging and you felt satisfied when you did something well. It wasn't just work only, there were plenty of co curricular activities and I found that really interesting too."

Yenna Chun, Class of 2002.

"Being at OC prepared me well for the experience of a selective high school. I discovered that there were plenty of bright people in the world and that I wasn't necessarily going to come top of everything."

Amelia Walter graduated from Summer Hill OC in 1996. She did her Higher School Certificate in 2002 at Sydney Girls High School.

"I didn't actually think I was going to go but my parents thought I should. I was the only one from my school and I didn't know anyone all. It was complete starting anew.

I was worried that I wouldn't fit in and I was really nervous in first term. Then I started to settle and I completely got over it by the end of year five.

But it is really easy to become friends with the kind of people who come to OC.

It is not like you have to break into little groups. It is completely unstructured.

I did want to go back to my old school but I didn't go back in the end and I really love it now, it is great fun and I have made really good friendships with people who have lots and lots in common with me. "

Nina Ubaldi, Captain of Debating, Class of 2002.

"It helps you with the time management issues so you can plan out your assignments and it helps you get ready for the standard of the work in higher years because you have already done some of it. It means you have got good basis to start from.

But I remember finding the size of the school overwhelming in the beginning."

Kai Tan, Class of 2000, now at Fort Street

"The level of academic work was pretty high. It was easier to concentrate because the teachers are able to get the whole class working together.

The actual school environment feels safe so you can work much more effectively.

Moving schools wasn't so bad. I thought it would be but it turned out to be no problem."

Hans Anggus, Class of 2002

"You are never bored and you meet lots of new people. I was very nervous about leaving my old school but on the first day we sat around and met everyone else in our class. Then it was easy to make friends."

Alice Kruszelnicki, Class of 2002

"It was a much freer and open learning environment rather than homework just dictated night after night.

It was more about motivating yourself. It encouraged self-discipline more than my other primary school.

OC was a settled environment but very challenging."

David Carter, Class of 96, Sydney Boys High, HSC 2002

WHAT THE PARENTS SAY

"It has made Kate very self-sufficient and it has taught her to manage her time in a very effective way. She is independent in her learning and also in the way she gets to and from school. One of my concerns was that she would be overworked because she is so busy outside school - but that hasn't been the case because she has been taught time management and is given an appropriate time frame so she can plan.

It feels like home to her, she has just fitted in. it was brilliant."

Sandra Robinson, mother of Kate Hulme, Class of 2002.

Summer Hill started off precariously because Natalie didn't know anyone but it was such a welcoming environment that she blended in very quickly and has never looked back.

Prior to that, she was cruising, no interest, bored. This has broadened her horizons and stimulated her."

Melanie Nugara, mother of Natalie Ngu, Class of 2002.

"My older children say that they feel a bit envious because Dominic's work habits now are of the kind which should make his transition to high school painless.

Although my son and others initially complained about the quantity of the work, the one thing they all celebrated was the diversity of the work. Instead of written projects about famous Australians, straight off the internet with a few downloaded pictures, they are suddenly being asked to think about why those Australians might be famous.

Instead of being permitted to sit up the back of a classroom and read all day, they are being asked to share what they read; and to write a story which takes their own reading several steps further.

And they discover an entire class of children with whom they feel very comfortable."

"I like the individual planning for the children and was impressed when his teacher pointed out that there was PSSA district hockey. She had already taken the trouble to discover what the children's individual interests were.

- It's a shame Summer Hill isn't a high school as well."

Jenna Price, mother of Dominic Kavanagh, Class of 2002.

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 'C' CLASSES FIT WITHIN THE OVERALL POLICY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS?

Opportunity C classes are one of the many possible provisions for gifted and talented students. All schools have the responsibility to provide a range of opportunities and mainstream teachers cater for talented students through extension activities and grouping techniques. If talented students are not challenged, there is the danger that they will underachieve with resultant detrimental effects on self-esteem. Opportunity 'C' classes are particularly appropriate when there are no children of 'like ability' with whom to interact.

These classes offer children the chance to be with a cohort of children with similar abilities.

3. WHAT BENEFITS WILL AN OPPORTUNITY 'C' 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 C 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. All set assignment work must be handed in by the due date, but extensions are available if the situation warrants.

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. Places are not offered again if they become vacant.

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.

It is not uncommon for a child to complain during the first term.

As one parent said: "At the end of the first month, quite a few of the kids said they were keen to go back to their old schools. By the end of term three not one child had left And I don't think that was because their parents had tied them to the front gates here."

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.

For the Opportunity C teacher it is a difficult situation because the class is so disjointed. 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 a strong desire to return to their local school.

Feelings of insecurity are further exaggerated because the students suddenly find themselves no longer alone at the top of the class with that position's attendant privileges. Because the general standard is now so much higher, students may label themselves as being 'dumb', as their self-concepts take time to adjust to the new situation. The period of adjustment can take 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 C 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 C teacher must possess highly developed teaching skills and must exhibit a genuine concern and commitment to the needs of the talented child in the education process.

These teachers also have on-the-job training with a classroom full of exceptionally gifted children - and a strong commitment.

10. ARE THERE ANY DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN OPPORTUNITY 'C' CLASSES?

A talented student is a child first and therefore requires the same guidance and discipline as all children. Often some of the characteristics which identify a student as gifted can create the need for discipline. Creative students may be continually creating in their minds and therefore frequently off task. Because of their analytical minds, gifted and talented students can often be critical and disruptive. One characteristic of gifted and talented students is a keen sense of humour which can at times be used inappropriately. The Opportunity C teacher will aim to develop a high level of self discipline in the students without destroying such traits.

Summer Hill has a positive approach to discipline and we are always looking for ways to recognise our students. Parents are directed to the Summer Hill Code of Behaviour and our policies on the Merit Award system, Anti-Racism, Bullying and the Management of Student Behaviour. These policies are included in your folder.

11. IS TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL A PROBLEM?

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. Some parents have organised car pools or group bookings of a cab (using, for example, cab charge and a monthly sharing of costs).

After school care is available for those parents who have difficulty collecting their children at 3pm (refer to the Summer Hill handbook). Long distance travellers do tend to get a little tired and so it is important to keep all those extra-curricular activities in balance.

12. DOES ENROLMENT IN AN OC RESULT IN ELITIST ATTITUDES AMONG THE STUDENTS?

Participation of all upper primary classes in many integrated activities ensures that elitist attitudes do not develop at Summer Hill. Within each Opportunity 'C' class, because students have been selected on intellectual ability, they are usually able to view their abilities more realistically than in their previous schools. The classes mix in music, in drama, in sport, at camps, in the playground and in the many extra-curricular activities.

13. WILL THERE BE MORE EXCURSIONS?

YES!

The program provides a lot of 'hands-on' experiences through field trips and by inviting professionals in the community to share their expertise. Regular excursions are seen as an important aspect of the Opportunity C curricula and parents will be expected to meet the necessary costs. Excursions could include a camping field trip to investigate coastal environment, visits to museums and art galleries or to a play.

14. DOES BEING IN AN OPPORTUNITY C CLASS MEAN AUTOMATIC PLACEMENT IN A SELECTIVE SCHOOL?

NO!!!

The Opportunity C 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 criteria for entry are English language performance, Mathematics performance and General Ability. The school provides marks for each student's performance in English and Mathematics during Years 5 and 6 and the student sits a state-wide test covering English, Mathematics and General Ability.

Other factors include outstanding performances in other areas of the curriculum, commitment to learning, sensory and physical disability, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander or non-English speaking background and outstanding performance in areas, which the parents/guardians consider to be relevant. Enrolment at the Conservatorium of Music and Newtown High School of Performing Arts require an audition and 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.

15. SHOULD MY CHILD BE COACHED?

This is a decision for each family.

The benefits of coaching, in our opinion, are that coaching gives more hours of practice on specified skills and in examination technique. Often the practice occurs on skills they already know and our program does provide practice in examination technique.

The Summer Hill Opportunity C program is not a training ground for selective high schools and the homework and class tasks assigned by the school must have a much higher priority than work set for coaching. The school will not accept coaching commitments as a reason for not completing homework or assigned tasks. Good school marks come from completing school based homework and assignments and those are the priority.

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

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

There are four Opportunity C classes at Summer Hill (two Year 5 and two Year 6 classes). Early in Term One, all Year Five classes travel away for a grade camp. This allows all the students to interact together and to get to know each other. This is the first of many activities which are planned across the grade.

Opportunity C classes also 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 C 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. Through such activities as these and others, Opportunity C classes are regarded and treated in the same manner as all other classes in the school.