

Policy

On

Learning

Endorsed by College Council March, 2005

Review by September, 2006

stirring from its centre – our centre is God, from whom all our actions should spring.”

Catherine McAuley

“Mercedes College will provide an innovative curriculum to reflect the changing needs of students in a global society of today and tomorrow.”

Mercedes College Strategic Plan (2003 – 2007)

“Catholic schools, in partnership with parents, in union with Christ's saving mission and communities, educate young people for participation in the Church and world communities today.”

**South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools
Vision Statement**

“The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.”

**International Baccalaureate Organization
Mission Statement**

1. Introduction

The Policy on Learning has arisen from a need to recognise that learning is central to decision making by the College Council and Leadership Team that relate to capital development, staffing, provision of resources and other policy or procedural matters.

This policy will:

- provide a framework to ensure the educational, emotional, spiritual and social needs of students are central to the core business of Mercedes College
- guide the review and documentation of the appropriateness of resources (learning spaces, support materials, staffing) to learning and curriculum
- formalise the accountability to state, commonwealth and international educational programmes
- guide the review and development of learning and curriculum at the College
- identify and respond to the professional development needs of staff
- highlight the role of assessment and reporting practices for continuous improvement
- identify and promote the links to the Mercedes College Vision and Ethos
- respond to the specific issues raised by members of the Mercedes College learning community

2. Policy Principles

The following policy statements represent the guiding principles and beliefs that underpin learning and curriculum at Mercedes College.

2.1. Students are at the centre of learning at Mercedes College

Mercedes College will ensure students are at the centre of learning by

- using teacher expertise and consulting with students to utilise their experiences in guiding the learning and curriculum agenda
- promoting and sustaining an open culture of student safety within the physical and social environment of the College and other learning places
- providing accountability structures that are visible and accessible to students and the general Mercedes College community
- promoting the Mercy keys of loyalty, integrity, responsibility, mutual respect, compassion and justice across the Mercedes College learning community.

2.2. Excellence in Catholic and International Education

Mercedes College will

- Invite students into a learning process that is grounded in Catholic beliefs and values
- support students in their striving for excellence¹
- ensure students will attain national benchmarks in numeracy and literacy (including information and communication technology).

¹ Based on the standards adopted by the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS), South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework, the International Baccalaureate Primary Years (PYP), Middle Years (MYP) and Diploma (DP) Programmes and the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).

2.3. Constructivism² and Holistic education

Mercedes College will support constructivist learning throughout the educational experience of students through:

- inquiry based learning and the use of guiding questions in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years and Middle Years Programmes
- encouraging students to discover principles
- guiding students in making connections between concepts and processes
- scaffolding principles with existing experiences
- making learning purposeful, contextualised, challenging and inherently interesting.

2.4. Contemporary and Relevant Curriculum

Mercedes College will provide curriculum options that:

- embed spiritual, emotional and social growth within Religious Education and Pastoral Care experiences
- reflect national and international educational trends
- consider the individual needs and talents of students
- provide new and innovative ways to deliver curriculum
- result from regular reviews and developments in curriculum offerings at national and international levels
- ensure every student up to Year 10 undertake a second language
- support career planning for today and tomorrow

2.5. Resources

Mercedes College will endeavour to provide that:

- class sizes and resources are appropriate to the age of students and areas of study
- learning spaces are appropriate for the diverse needs of learning and curriculum
- information and communication technologies are appropriate to support learning and teaching

2.6. Accessibility to Education

Mercedes College recognizes that its community reflects diverse skills, backgrounds and cultural needs. We endeavour to :

- meet the physical, mental and emotional needs of students
- provide support to students with identified learning disabilities and giftedness
- determine and respond to the range of learning styles of students
- provide individualised programs of learning where required
- provide counselling and psychological support
- link with external institutions, industry and the broader community who may provide support and further learning opportunities

² See Appendix for supporting documentation on learning and curriculum

2.7. Staffing and Professional Development

Mercedes College is a learning community. We are therefore committed to support the learning needs of staff to ensure they have current and appropriate training to support the learning and curriculum needs of the College and its students. In particular,

- staff will undertake professional development as determined by the Leadership team
- staff will undergo appraisal to determine their personal professional development needs
- teaching staff will regularly update their pedagogical skills to reflect contemporary educational trends

2.8. Supporting Life-Long and Life-Wide Learning

Mercedes College will strive toward students becoming thoughtful, active, responsive and committed local, national and global citizens. These students will possess the capabilities to apply knowledge, skills and experiences to new and different contexts and situations, and to be able to act responsibly with regard to others³. This will be guided by:

- Encouraging students to embrace a commitment to a lifelong journey of faith exploration and the quest for truth
- promoting an awareness of environmental issues and developing the flexibility to respond to change, recognise connections with the past and conceive solutions for preferred futures
- developing a positive sense of self and group, accepting individual and group responsibilities and respecting individual and group differences through active participation in community and service
- ensuring internationalism and intercultural awareness are embedded in curricular and extra-curricular programmes reflected in working in harmony with others and for common purposes, within and across cultures
- being independent and critical thinkers, with the ability to appraise information, make decisions, be innovative and devise creative solutions
- communicating powerfully and effectively
- structured career counseling and planning

2.9. Learning partnerships

Mercedes College believes in the partnerships of staff, students and parents to develop and maintain learning and curriculum within an environment of change. This will be supported through communication in areas of:

- Links with the Mercy tradition and the broader church community
- review and documentation of learning programmes for continuous improvement
- consultation in design and implementation of assessment and reporting of student achievement
- criteria for promotion, awards and specialized learning plans
- latest national and international trends in education
- links with external institutions, industry and the broader community
- feedback from results of competitions and national learning benchmarks

³ South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework

3. Implementation and Responsibilities

The **Principal** is the key person ensuring the implementation of the Policy on Learning either by direct involvement or through delegation to a number of key people/groups including

- The **Curriculum Coordinating Committee**
- The **Leadership Team**
- **Special Needs Committee**
- Program and Area of Study **Coordinators**
- All **staff**

4. Connections

The Policy on Learning has numerous connections with other policies and documents within and beyond the College. These include

- Strategic Plan 2003-2007
- Policy on Assessment and Reporting
- Technology Acceptable Use Policy
- Special Needs Policy
- SSABSA policies and subject frameworks including
 - Curriculum and Assessment Policy
- International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) curriculum frameworks
- SACCS policies
 - Curriculum
 - Assessment and Reporting of Student Achievement
 - Students with Special Needs
 - Religious Education
 - Languages
 - Gender Equity
- CIS – Council of International Schools (standards)
- SACSA – South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework
- DECS – Department of Education and Children’s Services (OSHC standards)

5. Relevant Resources and References

SACSA – *South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework*
“Constructivism and the SACSA Framework”

<http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au>

IBO – *International Baccalaureate Organisation*

A continuum of International Education

PYP – A Basis for Practice

MYP – A Basis for Practice

Diploma – A Basis for Practice

<http://www.ibo.org/>

SSABSA – *South Australian Assessment Board of South Australia*

About SACE <http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/sace.htm>

<http://www.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/>

CEO – *Catholic Education Office*

Doctrinal Scope and Sequence for use in South Australian Catholic Schools R-12 (1997)

<http://www.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au>

SACCS - *South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools*

<http://web.ceo.adl.catholic.edu.au/SACCS.html>

CIS – *Council of International Schools*

<http://www.cois.org/>

DECS – *Out of Schools Hours Care Standards*

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/ybsproviders/files/links/Standard.pdf>

<http://www.childcare.sa.gov.au>

Appendix

Understanding Learning and Curriculum – Supporting Information

What is learning?

Learning is *an active process of taking in information and building knowledge and understanding*⁴. This **constructivist** philosophy is the basis of the contemporary learning where learners are supported in constructing their own understanding by

- Selecting, interpreting and transforming information; constructing hypotheses; and making decisions
- Using mental models to interpret and organize experience in order to elaborate and extend current understandings, and their overall framework of knowledge.

The following principles for teaching and learning based on the constructivist view¹:

- Learning is the process of constructing knowledge
- Learning is not linear; it involves learners extending, elaborating, reorganizing, reformulating and reflecting upon their own frameworks of knowledge
- Learning involves building on prior knowledge
- Learning is making explicit the implicit conceptions, frameworks and explanatory systems in the minds of learners, which shape how they interpret and what they learn. Learners' conceptions are embedded in their culture and tied to their use of language
- Learning occurs in a context, and the understandings about the context are part of what is learned
- Learning involves learners communicating their questions, intuitions, conjectures, reasons, explanations, judgments and ideas in a variety of forms
- Learning involves developing knowledge, skills and dispositions to think and act in ways which determine individual effort, the setting of personal goals, self-assessment and awareness of the uses (and misuses or abuses) of knowledge
- Learning involves the progression of learners through cycles of growth

What is curriculum?

Curriculum is defined as “*any arrangement of activity which affects the educational outcomes of students*”⁵.

Mercedes College implements curriculum within a Catholic context. This ensures that young people are guided in their development of a **catholic identity** where their intellectual, personal, spiritual, religious and social growth is fostered within a Christian environment. The curriculum offered at Mercedes College provides all domains of knowledge, involving the major traditions of learning in languages, humanities, sciences, mathematics and the arts.

We recognize that we are part of a **local and global community** and as such, ensure curriculum provides students with an awareness of the needs and responsibilities of citizens working within communities with rich **social and cultural diversity**. This includes an understanding of social and environmental issues, an awareness of differing cultural needs in decision making and the role and responsibility of being a member of a global technological world.

Living in times of rapid change, Mercedes College meets the responsibility to prepare students to be able to cope with and manage **change** by promoting respect for themselves and others.

As a College working within a **broad educational setting**, we provide accurate and up to date information about future pathways and help to facilitate a smooth transition to them.

⁴ South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework

⁵ from “Curriculum Statement for Catholic School”, Catholic Education Office

The curriculum for Mercedes College from Reception to Year 12 is provided by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The Primary Years Programme (PYP) is undertaken from Reception to Year 5; the Middle Years Programme (MYP) is studied by students in Years 6 to 10; and the Diploma Programme (DP) is available in Years 11 and 12.

The features that form the basis of the three programmes are:

- The broad nature of study, including more than one language
- The flexibility of each programme's curriculum model, enabling the adaptation and response to our local interests
- The education of the whole person
- Developing citizens of the world – culture, language and learning together
- Building and reinforcing students sense of identity and cultural awareness
- Fostering students recognition and development of universal human values
- Stimulating curiosity and inquiry in order to foster a spirit of discovery and enjoyment of learning
- Equipping students with the skills to learn and acquire knowledge, individually or collaboratively, and to apply these skills and knowledge accordingly across a broad range of areas
- Providing international content while responding to local requirements and interests
- Encouraging diversity and flexibility in pedagogical approaches
- Providing appropriate forms of assessment and international benchmarking

The **International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP)** focuses on the heart as well as the mind and addresses social, physical, emotional and cultural needs as well as academic ones. The traditional academic subjects are valued. In addition, there is an emphasis on the balance between the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills and the search for meaning and understanding. The programme provides opportunity for learners to construct meaning, principally through concept-driven inquiry. The threads of children's learning are brought together in the transdisciplinary programme of inquiry, which in turn allows them to make connections with life outside the school. The PYP enables children to develop sensitivity to the experiences of others through the curriculum, the attributes listed in the student profile, the attitudes that are an explicit element of the programme, and the expectation of socially responsible action as a result of the learning experience.

The **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP)** provides a common framework that is consistent across all levels and areas of study within the College. The curriculum model places the student at the centre and has a philosophy that promotes the “connectedness” of learning. A strong emphasis is placed on the rigour of the individual areas of study while promoting links between these. The MYP provides students with an excellent knowledge and range of skills that are the foundation for future study.

The **International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IB DP)** curriculum encompasses a wide range of subjects, classified according to six Groups. The IB Diploma is internationally recognised as a university entrance qualification and therefore facilitates student mobility. It is a two-year programme for the final secondary years. It was designed from the outset to prepare students for tertiary studies.

The **South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)** exists to encourage students to successfully complete secondary education and to attest to their readiness for entry into post-school studies and employment. The SACE is an internationally recognised credential that opens pathways leading to vocations and careers, further studies and employment. The SACE also ensures that students leave school with a strong general education.