Why Enrol Your Child at HHC in the Primary Years

For some families, it is tempting to delay enrolling their child at Harkaway Hills College until the child is approaching secondary school. There are many different reasons families have for thinking this way, and so Dr Andrew Mullins, the former headmaster of two PARED schools in Sydney, has prepared the following article for families to consider when posing the question:

"What is the best age to enter Harkaway Hills College?"

The earlier the better. Certainly we advise parents not to delay the enrolment of their child until secondary.

There are some very good reasons why PARED Victoria spared no effort to start Harkaway Hills College with the earliest possible year levels, instead of biding its time and commencing with secondary.

Put simply, the primary years are the most important. Psychologists are unanimous in affirming that the years 0-7 are the most formative years in a person's life.

A really valuable window of opportunity exists with young children for character and faith development. The reality is that younger children are the most receptive to parenting input. Parents at Harkaway Hills College understand very quickly that the school assists them greatly to be more effective in their own parenting. The mentors can greatly assist parents in this vital educational process.

Education is not just a question of developing a child's mind; if that were so, one might think that teenagers, being more capable, are better able to benefit from an enriched educational experience. In fact education of the mind must be complemented by the development of good habits, and these are much more easily acquired in younger years. Aristotle himself wrote, "Good habits formed in childhood make all the difference". Teachers at Harkaway Hills are attuned to forming habits in the primary classroom: habits for example of sincerity, generosity, self control, respect for others, and perseverance at challenging tasks. Basically, it's no good having access to great learning opportunities, if you don't have also have discipline, industriousness, courtesy etc.

Further, important academic foundations are laid down in primary years. Primary children are sponges for learning. Late primary in particular is a very settled time in a child's life, before the hormones of adolescence intervene, and it is a great shame if children are not stretched according to their own capacity. Dr Gerard O'Shea of the John Paul II Institute in Melbourne is adamant that upper primary children respond marvellously to scholastic challenge. It becomes apparent very quickly in secondary if a child has not had the benefit of a sound structure in primary - both in the rudiments of literacy and numeracy, and also in building habits of industriousness. The curriculum at Harkaway Hills College has been painstakingly developed with these rudiments in mind and together with its human virtues program and unique mentoring system make for an ideal primary school.

Early impressions are powerful – even indelible. It is so important to be focussed on the potential of primary children for character development. Again, Aristotle observed that "We always like best whatever comes first... and therefore youth should be kept strangers to all that is bad, and especially to things which suggest vice or hate. We like best what we first experience". School and home must be determined to take full advantage of this sensitive period of development. If a child is exposed to negative impressions either at home, or at school, or from peers, these impressions can be virtually indelible.

A school such as Harkaway Hills provides somewhat of a homogeneous and consistent environment in primary. A family too is a sheltered environment. A sheltered environment in a period of impressionable growth is not only acceptable, it is a developmental necessity.

Crucial faith development also takes place during late infancy and primary years. This is the time when sacramental programs are imparted to children, and for a family with a Catholic faith, there is no learning more important than to acquire a depth of understanding and of piety. The school cannot replace the home in passing on the faith, but it can reinforce your efforts dramatically.
One further practical advantage of starting at Harkaway Hills College earlier rather than later is that children, generally, adjust more easily to a change of school the younger they are. Children grow with the same group of friends and in a familiar environment. If it can be avoided, it makes little sense to uproot children from their peer group in vulnerable early adolescence.