



## The spirit and key features of Harkaway Hills College

### Student welfare and pastoral care principles

This aim of this document is to outline the guiding principles of the College, and the mechanisms established in pursuit of those principles, which will ensure student welfare and effective pastoral care.

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## 1. Parents as the first educators

The schools founded by the PARED Foundation recognise parents as the first educators of their children. The philosophy of education pursued in the schools is a consequence of this view. Schools which share this philosophy (now more than 150 schools in many countries) were first begun in the early 50's at the encouragement and inspiration of the founder of Opus Dei, St Josemaria Escriva, who encouraged parents to be particularly responsible in the education of their children.

The specific approach of the PARED schools, making use of a personalized mentoring system approach in which the school works very closely with each student's parents, ensures that the parents are, in fact, the "first educators".

*Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which everyday society needs.*

**Vatican II, Declaration on Christian Education, 3.**

## 2. School as an extension of the home

An essential feature of the philosophy of education in PARED schools is that parents are able to work in close liaison with the school so that the two major learning environments work in harmony. It is the parents' right to be the dominant influence in the education of their own children. Harkaway Hills College seeks to uphold this right by providing an educational environment which reflects the parents' own values. Obviously, teacher example and peer values are key areas where parent ideals must be reflected.

## 3. A family spirit

The College has a family spirit. In other words, each member of the College – parents, teachers and especially the students – deserves unqualified respect and the support of all to grow to his or her full potential as a human being. Clearly, deep confidence and friendship between families and between teachers and families is a consequence of this solidarity.

## 4. Character development and human virtues

At Harkaway Hills College, great emphasis is placed on developing human virtues, or strength of character, because these virtues enable a person to be self-directing in life - to be truly free. Freedom is not seen as mere freedom from constraints but as a capacity to carry noble convictions into action. Too often a person finds him/herself limited and inhibited by his/her own failings, ignorance or unquestioning conformity. Ultimately, the capacity to truly love others and to be happy is a consequence of character with a well-rounded development of virtues. The family, where an overriding motivation is the welfare of the other members, is the environment par excellence for fostering virtue.

The four core human qualities through which character is forged are:

- **Justice**, manifested in personal responsibility: Each person has certain duties to perform at home, at school and in the wider community. By adolescence, young people begin to hold

their destiny and that of others in their hands. Action or inaction has consequences. An understanding of justice will lead them to act rightly.

- **Good judgement:** the ability to judge what is right in each situation and follow a worthy set of values.
- **Personal toughness:** development of a personal strength which enables one to persevere in things that are worthwhile.
- **Self-control:** the ability to exercise self-discipline in many ways.

All other virtues flow from these four. Working with parents, the College aims to empower its students to become competent, responsible, considerate and committed persons.

### Facets of the human virtues program

1. **The human virtues motto** – each week a motto is published for each section of the College. The human virtue in focus changes roughly monthly.
  - a. The class teacher and students discuss, reflect upon and express ideas relating to the virtue in focus.
  - b. The success of this approach relies on the prominence which the motto enjoys each day in class and during the week in the home.
  - c. Teachers strive not only make the motto and its theme practical and appealing in their classes but, more importantly, bring it into their own day to provide effective example to students.
2. **The weekly newsletter** - this provides practical pointers and thought provoking material for parents.
3. **Monday morning assembly** - opportunity is taken to illustrate some point relating to the virtue being considered.
4. **Mentoring discussion** with individual students.
5. **Parent meetings** - material of particular relevance and interest is exchanged.
6. **Key parent functions** - human virtues are the focus of some of the parent information evenings in the year.

### 5. The mentoring system

The personalised mentoring system is the most distinctive feature of the PARED schools. An individual mentor, from amongst the teachers of the College, is appointed to each student. The mentor meets with the child in frequent mentor meetings, and with the parents in regular goal setting interviews. She supports the parents in exercising their privilege and duty as primary educators.

The mentor takes a direct and personal interest in each child's development. She helps the student develop positive habits and qualities such as responsibility, thoughtfulness and good use of time. Everything else, including academic results, flows from this character development. Academic results are part of a bigger picture. The College aims to work with parents in the education of the whole person academically, spiritually, culturally, socially and physically.

All staff members at Harkaway Hills College are expected to fulfil a formational role for the student and parent body. Classroom teachers meet with the mentors of the students whom they are teaching on a formal basis, regularly, at a set time. This meeting provides objective information for the mentors in their personal counselling of students and for them to pass on to the parents. Classroom teachers gain deeper insights into the character of the students whom they are teaching. On a rotational basis all students are reviewed in this meeting once or twice each term.

The mentor is ideally placed to coordinate, on behalf of the parents, the efforts of all who are contributing to the education of their child. She is able to provide objective suggestions and useful

observations for both the parents and the child's teachers. Close cooperation between parents and mentor ensures success.

### **Appointment of mentors**

Mentors are appointed from the teaching staff of the College. By accepting this appointment, the mentor is not receiving a privilege, but is rather assuming a position of specialised service to parents and students. Mentors receive a reduction in face-to-face teaching to permit time to see students and parents (but not extra remuneration).

Given the philosophy of the College, all teachers are encouraged to see their role as ad hoc mentors, following up classroom issues and student behaviour in one-to-one discussions. The success of such a personalised approach is, for many teachers, one of the greatest of professional satisfactions.

The mentor's role is:

1. to provide support for the parents in exercising their right and duty to be the first educators of their son. **The mentor meets each term with the parents of each student whom she mentors.**
2. through her rapport and friendship with the student whom she mentors, to provide an effective service of personal example, guidance and advice. This will normally be carried out in regular mentor meetings in which **the mentor and student meet fortnightly** (from year 2 onwards) for a one to one discussion. The mentor meeting should be characterised by mutual trust and appropriate goal setting.
3. to **co-ordinate** the efforts of all those devoting their efforts to the education of the student – parents, various teachers, etc. In this way, keeping the **integral development** of the student in perspective, she will be able to provide parents and teachers with opportune suggestions.
4. this co-ordination will, on occasions, necessitate additional liaison with class and subject teachers and special education specialists and any other members of the College community when special needs have been identified, be they academic, medico/physical, psychological, etc.

### **Specific responsibilities of the mentor**

1. Mentor meetings with each student each fortnight.
2. Parent-mentor interviews each term.
3. Appropriate preparation and prompt follow-up of mentor meetings and interviews.
4. Participation in regular teacher-mentor exchanges.
5. Attendance at professional development and formation events.
6. Close familiarity with the programs conducted for parents by Harkaway Hills College and Family Education Australia (e.g. Key Parent Function content, FEA Courses etc).
7. Up to date knowledge of useful parenting literature, etc.

### **Duration of mentor meetings (approximately)**

Years F-1	5 minutes
Years 2-6	10-15 Minutes
Years 7-12	20-30 minutes

### **Topics for mentor meetings**

- **Studies**  
During the school years, character will be largely formed by the approach to school work.
- **Character development**  
The mentor aims to use every opportunity to encourage the student to develop character and they do this hand in hand with the Virtues Program in place at the College.

- **Moral and spiritual topics**  
Whether parents and children are of the Catholic faith, or hold other beliefs, all work together when it comes to moral principles.
- **Social development**  
Contribution to the wider society with generosity and understanding is important. Harkaway Hills College aims to foster an attitude of service.

Topics for the mentor meetings with primary students

- Academic skills: getting to know own strengths and weaknesses
- Higher order thinking skills
- Review and discussion of school work
- Homework issues
- Books and reading and use of electronic media
- Character development
- The human virtues
- Focus and concentration during lessons
- Participation in sports and physical education
- Friendships
- Thoughtfulness of others
- Use of time
- The spiritual dimension of life

An essential key to full personal development lies in having personalised goals. These goals need to be appropriate, easy to remember, specific, achievable and able to be evaluated.

The mentoring system can help parents:

- focus on the big issues;
- plan ahead;
- talk more with one's spouse;
- talk more with one's daughter/son;
- see situations objectively;
- view crises positively;
- reflect on the importance of example; and
- grow in one's own virtue.

## 6. Counsellors

Where the services of counsellors are required, the College will arrange access to local community services.

## 7. Key Parent Functions

Key Parent Functions are a critical feature of Harkaway Hills College. They provide an on-going program to assist parents in the education of their children and in the dynamics of parenting. Key Parent Functions are held in Terms 1, 2 and 3.

Attendance at the Key Parent Functions is vital (and compulsory) for parents enrolling their children at the College.

Through the years a sequence of topics is presented, covering important issues and milestones in the development of children. The evenings feature educational material intended to enhance family life and news and information sessions on policies and happenings at the College. Parent evenings contain information on academics as well. At these Key Parent Functions primary class teachers are expected to give an update of what is happening in their classrooms during the term.

## **General Structure**

### **Term 1**

The focus is on academic issues. The functions take place on campus and generally in each Year's classroom preceded by a short plenary session in the Hall where the Chaplain and Principal address the family body, emphasising a key element of parenting.

### **Terms 2 & 3**

The focus is on age-related topics. The functions may take place on campus or in a hired venue.

## **8. Class parents**

Class parents seek to ensure that fellow parents personally experience the warmth, concern and interest that are at the heart of the spirit of the College.

They take a genuine concern and interest in each of the families in their class and endeavour to personally connect with the parents. They welcome new families to the College and assist them with settling in.

Class parents ensure that support for families is there when this is needed.

In addition, class parents often facilitate discussion groups for the sharing of ideas in parenting. Such small groups can receive support discussion material from Family Education Australia (FEA).

Class parents enlist the support of a small number of couples from the class to help in their worthy cause.

## **9. Courses for parents of young children**

Family Education Australia (FEA) is a non-profit organisation closely associated with the PARED Foundation. FEA has been conducting courses on parenting and marriage relationships in Australia for many years. It is affiliated with similar international family education organisations, which have been operating world-wide for over 20 years, and with the Institute of Family Studies of the University of Navarre, Pamplona, Spain. FEA's courses are conducted by experienced speakers and moderators who have been trained in family education activities. FEA maintains links with the "International Foundation for Family Development" (IFFD).

FEA courses in Melbourne currently include:

- Marriage Enrichment – designed to deepen each couple's marriage relationship, in all of its various aspects;
- First Steps - the first of the FEA series designed to help parents in their task of parenting. It is designed for parents of children aged 0-6 years.
- First Letters - the second course in the parenting series, First Letters is designed for parents of children aged 5-8 years.

FEA's parenting series in Melbourne will include in future a course for parents of adolescent children (already offered by FEA in Sydney).

The parenting course series considers such issues as:

- establishing good habits at an early and receptive age;
- setting attainable and worthwhile goals (short and long term) for their children; and
- creating and using opportunities to form each child's character.

FEA courses provide opportunities to meet and exchange views with other couples committed to improving their family life.

## **10. Spiritual aspect**

The spiritual development of the students at Harkaway Hills College forms an integral part of its philosophy of personalised education. The College stresses the primary role parents play in their children's spiritual development.

Students, regardless of their particular religious faith, are encouraged to foster their relationship with God and to develop their spiritual life with a genuine spirit of freedom and commitment. This enables them to be enriched as human beings and to be excellent persons in every sense of the word.

The religion program offered at Harkaway Hills College gives students the opportunity to acquire a deep understanding of the Catholic faith and its practice. Intrinsic to this is the greatest respect for the freedom of consciences.

Students have the opportunity to attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.

### **Chaplaincy**

Harkaway Hills College will open with a part time chaplaincy. As the College grows, this chaplaincy will become available full time. The chaplain is available to all members of the College community on a regular basis for general counselling, marriage counselling, emotional and spiritual guidance and advice on parenting issues.

The chaplain of the College is a priest of Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. Mass is celebrated by the College chaplain who also addresses the classes at regular intervals. He is also part of the CIMT (Critical Incident Management Team).

## **11. College community**

As time passes, students will become more richly involved in the College community by participating in such initiatives as:

- coaching a team;
- sport;
- helping to run fundraising activities; and
- general organising for the functioning of teams.

As the College grows, there will be many opportunities for students and families to initiate and become involved in any number of activities, both during and outside of school hours. Such activities may include:

- chess club;
- choirs;
- variety of sports, e.g. soccer, basketball;
- debating and other public speaking opportunities and competitions; and
- art exhibitions.

The principal and teaching staff will strongly encourage and support the initiative of students and families in this regard.

Students are also expected to assist with occasional, one off activities such as collation and distribution of the newsletter, Mass booklets, etc during a lunchtime or free period, or assisting at some major College event, e.g. Grandparents Day, Book Parade, Healthy Lunch, excursions, Open Day etc. The expectation that students will assist in this way helps children to learn that volunteering their time is valuable and necessary.

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