**The Year 9 Dilemma**

Shaping individuals

The philosophy of Preshil, The Margaret Lyttle Memorial School in Kew, is that students are all individuals with unique talents, and their learning styles should be catered for accordingly. Principal Marilyn Smith says: “Preshil has never segmented the students into hard and fast categories of ages or abilities. “All the evidence suggests that integrating different age groups and avoiding the traditional ‘pecking-order’, which goes hand-in-hand with the hierarchy of seniority, leads to greater respect for individual differences, more opportunities for friendships across year levels, arising from shared interests rather than being limited to specific age groups.”

A study published in 2006, Understanding Year 9 Students: A Theoretical Perspective, perhaps offers a reason why Preshil’s model is so successful: “Students in Year 9 who are well into adolescence are not unique in their developmental stage. Many students in the years below and above Year 9 may also share common experiences as students in the middle years tend to move through the adolescence phase over several years.”

Although Years 9 and 10 take separate subjects, electives are shared to increase the range of subjects and programs offered. “It is much more important that individuals are catered for in their learning, rather than depending on the rather simplistic idea that every student of the same age can be catered for by the same curriculum,” says Ms Smith.

“Different interests and abilities across subjects mean that every student needs an individual learning plan with different emphases, goals and levels of challenge or support,” she says. “Preshil actively involves the students to have a say in the shaping of their education. They take part in the planning which will shape future programs in the senior school,” says Ms Smith.

**Braving new paths**

Year 9 students are risk-takers who will challenge anyone crossing their path, but this shouldn’t be considered bad behaviour because it’s simply an indication their brain is developing as it should. A woman who Sacré-Cœur Catholic School appreciates for taking risks is St Madeleine Sophie Barat, a founding member of the Society of the Sacred Heart order, which founded its first school during the French Revolution. The school’s new Year 9 program, Notre Monde (our world), was inspired by the order.

Jennie Carter, director of studies at Sacré Coeur says: “They were really brave and one of the things we’re called to do is follow them, so we needed to be brave about what was going to help our girls achieve their academic potential. “Year 9 is a perfect time because they’re starting to question, and we need to provide them with opportunities to do that and to take risks in a safe environment, to make mistakes and learn,” she says.

After much research and consultation the school devised a series of six units running for six weeks each (in conjunction with the core curriculum), which are designed to expose students to experiential learning across the areas of sustainability, outdoor education, music, creative arts, student exchange and social justice.

The social justice unit, in which students are currently assisting with the Kinglake clean-up, is practical and hands-on. “It’s also developing their heart and saying ‘everything you’re doing here is contributing to your world, your community’. Yes, their academic program is very important but it’s also about their heart being involved,” says Ms Carter. The Year 9 program, housed in a separate part of the school, incorporates open-plan learning and traditional classrooms. Girls and staff use their own iPads extensively through the year.

On Wednesdays, students work on chosen units for extended lengths of time, enabling them to “get into the flow and forget about the time.” They’ve seen huge growth in the girls and Ms Carter believes the Wednesday program has a lot to do with it. “They had exams mid-year and the way they approached them was impressive, They were very good at managing their nerves and anxiety,” she says.

Students of Sacré Coeur’s Notre Monde program use iPads extensively during the year.

6 blisters, 4 leeches, fart jokes for 100km.

It’s what happens on the trip that counts.

Some people think adolescent boys lose interest in learning.

The Year 9 BGS Sea Change program takes boys beyond the everyday allowing them to grow.

Make it relevant and we know the lessons remain for life.