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| **OPPORTUNITY CLASS** |

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**INTRODUCTION**

This guide assists parents to make an informed decision about the appropriateness of the Opportunity Class for their child. The guide outlines the rationale of the Opportunity Class, the types of programs offered, and some of the underlying challenges that may face students and parents.

**THE RATIONALE**

The education of gifted students at New Lambton South Public School is strongly based on two premises.

Firstly, that students must learn to be creative and critical thinkers who can develop positive, interpersonal relationships and who can cooperate with others and communicate their ideas effectively.

Secondly, a belief that the teacher is a facilitator who will foster enquiry and challenging attitudes towards learning, and will equip the student with the necessary skills to become a self motivated, independent worker with a commitment to learning as a lifelong process and with a willingness to accept educational, social and personal responsibilities.

**DIFFERENTIATING THE CURRICULUM**

Differentiation ranges from slight to major modifications providing planned, documented and challenging curriculum that matches the ability of the gifted student to learn at a faster rate, find, solve and act on problems more readily, as well as the ability to manipulate and connect abstract ideas.

The curriculum offered in our Opportunity Class will differ primarily from the standard curriculum in line with the following principles:

* The **CONTENT** will often be related to current issues, broad themes or relevant problems. There will also be greater exploration of students’ interests and more discussions of issues, eg ethical questions arising from scientific advancement and environmental management.
* **CURRICULUM COMPACTING** will be utilised with Key Learning Area units of study modified in order to avoid unnecessary repetition. The class is able to study topics in greater depth allowing for the use of more abstract and complex material. Time will be available for enrichment and acceleration activities beyond the curriculum while ensuring the development of basic skills.
* The **PROCESS**(ie the way the teacher enables the students to learn) will be largely through inquiry and discovery and development of research methods. Students will be encouraged at all times to become functional learners with good time management and independent study skills. There will be an emphasis placed on the development of higher level thinking skills.
* The **PRODUCTS** are the outcomes of the differentiated curricula. Students will be encouraged to develop innovative products that will challenge existing ideas and produce new thinking. Work will be integrated across the Key Learning Areas and students will be required to present comprehensive studies of a high standard. The development of high level oral, written and listening skills will be encouraged so that students will become confident in expressing ideas through class discussions, debates, oral reports and writing in an appropriate genre.
* A central goal will be the development of the **WHOLE CHILD** with **SELF UNDERSTANDING** and a healthy self concept.

**QUESTIONS PARENTS MOST FREQUENTLY ASK AND THEIR ANSWERS**

**1.  WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GIFTED AND TALENTED?**

The 2004 NSW Government Strategy 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 area of human performance.”

**2.  WHAT IS THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING’S POLICY?**

The overall aim of the policy is “to maximise the learning outcomes for gifted and talented students”.

The aims are:

* To identify their gifted and talented students.
* To foster collaborative home/school partnerships to support gifted and talented students.
* To provide a range of opportunities and to monitor and evaluate programs for gifted and talented students.
* To select and implement a variety of teaching strategies for the inclusion in programs for the range of gifted and talented students.

**3.  WHAT BENEFITS WILL AN OPPORTUNITY CLASS AT NEW LAMBTON SOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOL OFFER THAT MY CHILD DOES NOT GET AT HIS OR HER LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOL?**

The Opportunity Class at New Lambton South Public School aims to enrich and extend the curriculum offered to gifted and talented children and provide for each student’s needs and interests. 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 encouraged to think and accept challenges and will be less likely to become bored with repetitive routine.

Gifted students in regular classes often play down their intellectual ability for fear of ridicule, whereas in an Opportunity Class they will be encouraged to be individuals who think creatively and can express different ideas.

**4.  WILL THERE BE JUST TOO MUCH COMPETITION FOR MY CHILD?**

Cooperative learning is the ethos of the Opportunity Class and students are guided to develop cooperative 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 encouraged because of the presence of role models and the development of self motivation.

**5.  MY CHILD IS SUCH A PERFECTIONIST, WILL HE OR SHE BE ABLE TO COPE WITH THE WORK LOAD?**

Personal Development programs in the Opportunity Class recognise this challenge, and provide activities and teacher counseling to assist children to set realistic goals for themselves. OC students will learn that school work requires a different approach often requiring them to display more initiative.

**6.  HOW MUCH HOMEWORK WILL BE GIVEN?**

In an attempt to prepare these gifted students for their secondary schooling, OC teachers usually set longer term assignments as homework. Through individual, group and class discussions, students are required to plan the stages of their homework task 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 as being directly proportional to the interest and effort expended.  It would be expected that on any week night the student could spend between 45-60 minutes on homework including Home Reading. If a longer period of time is suddenly required 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 on request.

**7.  WHAT HAPPENS TO A STUDENT WHO IS NOT COPING WELL IN AN OPPORTUNITY CLASS?**

It must be realised that an OC placement is a two year commitment. The selection process is thorough enough to minimise the chance of a student having to leave because of the inability to cope with the curriculum.

However, not all students are gifted in all areas. As in any classroom, extra help will be given to overcome any difficulties of learning. If a child is unhappy, every attempt will be made through discussion with the child, parents, teacher and school counsellor to help him or her adjust to the new situation.

**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 only one from his or her previous school to accept the offer. 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 a friendly, non-threatening work environment. 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 may be further exaggerated because the students suddenly find themselves no longer alone at the top of the class. Because the general standard of the class is now so much higher, students may take time to adjust to the new situation. This period of adjustment can take some time. However, once they again realise their worth and ability, their self concept returns to healthy and often more realistic levels.

**9.  ARE THERE ANY DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN OPPORTUNITY CLASSES?**

It must be remembered that a gifted 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 may be frequently off task. Because of their analytical minds, gifted and talented students can sometimes 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 OC teacher will aim to develop a high level of self discipline in the students without harming such traits.

**10. IS TRAVEL TO AND FROM SCHOOL A PROBLEM?**

Most parents recognise this as a major difficulty but often become quite creative themselves in facing this challenge. The students who travel alone or in a group by public transport tend to enjoy it and feel very independent. The school makes every effort to assist with travel arrangements to suit each child. Travel buddies are utilised where available and children are supported until they are confident with travel arrangements.

Before and after school care is available within the school grounds for those parents who have difficulty collecting their children at 3.25pm. Long distance travellers do tend to get a little tired and so it is important to keep all other extra-curricula activities in balance.

**Bus and Train Travel**

As New Lambton South is the centre of transport links, it makes New Lambton South Public School an ideal location for the Opportunity Class.

Students are expected to walk directly to and from the school and/or bus stop. Loitering around shops, doing messages or taking a different route will not be accepted. This is closely monitored and children must not deviate from the established route for safety reasons.

**11. DOES ENROLMENT IN AN OPPORTUNITY CLASS RESULT IN ELITIST ATTITUDES AMONGST THE STUDENTS?**

Participation of all senior primary classes in many integrated activities ensures that elitist attitudes do not develop at New Lambton South Public School. Integrated senior primary class activities may include camps, excursions, choir, band and sport. Within each Opportunity Class, because students have been selected on intellectual ability, they are usually able to view their abilities more realistically than in their previous schools.

**12. WILL THERE BE A LOT OF EXCURSIONS?**

The teacher will provide “hands-on” experiences through field trips and by inviting professionals in the community to share their expertise. Excursions are seen as an important aspect of the OC curricula and parents will be expected to meet the necessary costs.  Excursions could include, for example, a 4 day trip to Canberra or Hill End (alternate years), a Physics Fun Day at Luna Park or visits to the museums and art galleries.

**13. HOW ARE OC STUDENTS ASSESSED FOR SCHOOL REPORTS?**

The teaching and learning programs at New Lambton South Public School are directly related to the syllabus outcomes for all Key Learning Areas. These outcomes describe the standard against which students’ achievements are assessed and reported. Student outcomes will be evaluated by using a variety of criteria through self appraisal, peer assessment, written tasks and continuous teacher assessment.

Individual achievements are reported to parents through progress reports and three way interviews. As well as a written report, parent/student/ teacher interviews are held in Term 2. A formal written report is issued at the end of each semester. Interviews with the class teacher are available on request at any time during the year. The children in the Opportunity Class are academically advanced compared with their peers. Assessment for the reports is done at a school level, meaning that your child’s result will reflect their achievement at a Stage Three level.

**14. DOES BEING AN OC STUDENT MEAN AUTOMATIC PLACEMENT IN A SELECTIVE HIGH SCHOOL?**

No. Students must qualify for entry to a selective high school in competition with students from other schools. The criteria for entry is:  English Language Performance, Writing, Mathematics Performance and General Ability, which are assessed by examination by the Selective Schools Unit of the Department of Education and Training.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**COMPETITIONS**

Participation in competitions provides an excellent opportunity for children to extend themselves.

Children in the Opportunity Class participate with children from mainstream classes in such competitions as:

* Australian Schools Competition English, Science, Mathematics and Computer Studies and Writing.
* Tournament of the Mind / Thinkfest or similar
* Hunter/Central Coast Challenge – Debating
* Chess
* Public Speaking
* Mathematical Olympiad
* Writing competitions
* Premiers Spelling Bee
* Murder under the Microscope
* Science and Engineering Challenge

**INTEGRATION**

Integration of “OC” children into mainstream school life is very important.  These children are now New Lambton South Public School children and must feel they are a part of New Lambton South Public School as quickly as possible.  They are directly integrated into many aspects of school life, namely:

* Fitness and Sport
* Stage-based Excursions and Camps
* Assemblies
* Leadership
* Parliament
* Dance
* Starstruck
* Choir
* Band