

SMC Performing Arts: a creative philosophy

“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life”: Pablo Picasso

A Collaborative Pathway

With the creation of a Performing Arts Faculty and the appointment of key staff, St Margaret’s is undergoing a transformation at a creative level, where collaboration between departments, staff and students is becoming the “new normal”. Our *modus operandi* for major school productions is a prime example of this kind of creative partnership where Music, Dance and Drama combine seamlessly to produce a rich and unique performing arts extravaganza providing a platform for all our girls to shine. It is heartening to see this process also take place in the classroom, and we have enjoyed Middle School Dance-Drama collaborations where fusion is synonymous with originality and freshness.

As practitioners, we all learn so much from this cooperative model, and it is also a source of inspiration for our students as they experience first hand how well the arts can intermingle and support each other. This working model is rich in its blending of art-forms, and it is so much more creative as a process, with the opportunity for different perspectives to be exchanged in the development of ideas. It relies on robust communication between staff and students, something we encourage as a life skill for our students.

Lifelong skills taught through the Arts

Arts education not only enhances students' understanding of the world around them, but it also broadens their perspective on traditional academics. The arts give us the creativity to express ourselves, while challenging our intellect. The arts integrate life and learning for all students and are integral in the development of the whole person.

Dr. Terry Bergeson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State

Our concern for the spiritual wellbeing of our girls is reflected in the holistic approach adopted for our curricular and co-curricular work alike. We have singled out the following 10 key “C” qualities:

courage, care, challenge, connection, consideration, communication,
collaboration, cohesion, community, creativity.

We see ourselves as lifelong learners, and as such we are continually role-modeling these qualities to our students. Our work is student-centred, our girls are at the core of everything that we do, and we must show integrity in what we do at all times. As the arts are ever-evolving, so will we strive to continually challenge ourselves to persevere, to be accountable, to problem-solve, to improvise, to collaborate and to create. These are the skills we hope to pass on to our girls. We will encourage them to understand the Arts as including investigation, invention, discovery, play and cooperation, to experience all of this within their work, and also in the critical dialogue around the activity itself. As part of this journey, healthy, positive relationships are essential. We are charged with the care of our students, and we will also

strive to equip our girls with the skills to accept and give feedback, to “feel the fear and do it anyway”, so building resilience to further allow their own personal growth. The Performing Arts are the perfect vehicle for charting individual progress at the same time as developing group cohesion and awareness.

Excellence and Inclusivity

*Te toi whakairo, ka ihi ihi, ka wehi wehi, ka awe awe tea o katoa
Artistic excellence makes the world sit up in wonder.*

As a faculty, we acknowledge the role of the Performing Arts in the promotion of our school, as an effective interface between students, staff and the community, and we accept this responsibility with pride.

Our students are achieving well in the Arts, and receiving regional, national and even international recognition. St Margaret’s is represented well in regional and national Music, Dance and Drama events and competitions, and is recognized in the community as such. We have some outstanding talent in our school; we are very proud of these high achievers and endeavor to give them every chance to excel. We also believe in supporting each and every student to strive for excellence.

“The Arts should not be the preserve of some privileged elite – all our children should be enabled to experience them” Andrew Lloyd Webber

Within the school context, it is difficult to find a better environment for a truly inclusive, diverse setting, than the Arts. Both Academic and Sporting ventures require an organization that is competitive or at least hierarchical, where individuals or teams are pitted against one another, relying on the grouping of students of a similar age or ability. While this organization also exists within the Arts, events such as concerts or showcases are more egalitarian settings, where multi-aged and -skilled students work hand in hand.

The Performing Arts Faculty believes in meeting the needs of all students, with access for all levels of ability and experience, and all cultures. This model is necessarily a flexible and adaptable one, and as such can require more hands on deck and a more in-depth process to work as well as it does. We are dedicated to giving opportunities for our top students to extend and excel, whilst also providing the means for less able or mature students to become involved at whatever level they can. We aim to recognize and celebrate diversity within our community wherever possible.

Our co-curricular offer (around 40 different arts groups to date) reflects this move away from exclusivity and towards a more open approach, as group membership is open, in many cases, from Year 7 up, whilst still providing auditioned groups for our girls performing at the highest competitive levels.

This extra-curricular growth feeds directly into our concerts and shows, and is never more evident than in the school’s major production for the year, where auditioned performers work alongside class groups and larger support sections, allowing girls to participate at every conceivable level. We endeavor to widen participation in terms of skills as well, with backstage crew and technicians, designers and support crew working alongside the cast, and

performers new to the stage mixing with virtuoso old hands.

Inclusivity is never an excuse for a drop in standard but rather a way of bringing together our community in all its creative diversity and glory. The connections formed through this type of experience are often far-reaching for our girls, especially those struggling to achieve in other areas.

Teachers as Facilitators, Students as Leaders

The great artist Henri Matisse said, "Creativity takes courage." As staff we know we have done our jobs when students take the initiative to create projects and lead groups. By enabling students to become leaders in their own right, we are helping to establish a culture of student empowerment and leadership within our school. The process that leads to this involves creating an environment where students not only have the tools, but also feel safe enough to challenge themselves, to experience and explore; where self belief is a motivator towards contribution, participation and ultimately leadership.

This process will be a transparent one, with staff as catalysts for students' artistic expression and growth. We believe in teachers taking an "invisible leader" role, providing a platform for our girls to take ownership of their development forward, to enable them to be involved in the creative process, but clearly supported by their teachers as part of this methodology.

Senior Arts Leaders

Our student Arts Council, comprised of Year 12 and 13 girls selected by student vote and lead by the Arts prefect, are a creative and dynamic group, whose main tasks fall in Term 1, with Arts Week, and Term 3 with the Arts Soiree. The ability to create and deliver such high quality events is testament to the talent of this group, and their role as ambassadors/promoters of the Arts is highly valued. Senior students step up each year to take co-curricular arts groups, organizing choirs and instrumental groups, assisting art club, coordinating Theatresports teams, running dance classes and leading our senior Dance Company, as well as helping manage such things as the Drama wardrobe. These leaders are also designers for the promotion of school events, composers and choreographers, directors and performers, and demonstrate initiative, commitment and drive as well as being impeccable role models for younger students.

Middle School Arts Leaders

Students at Middle School level are also involved as part of the Year 10 Leadership Project, working with Junior School classes using Visual Art, setting up and running the Middle School Talent Quest, choreographing for the Middle School Dance Company and leading Music and Dance groups in their own right. Many of these girls create their own groups and projects, and the courage, skill and confidence that these emerging leaders demonstrate is to be applauded. We are proud to be consolidating our school motto, "*Educating young women to live and lead*".

"Life beats down hard upon the soul, the Arts remind us that we have one."