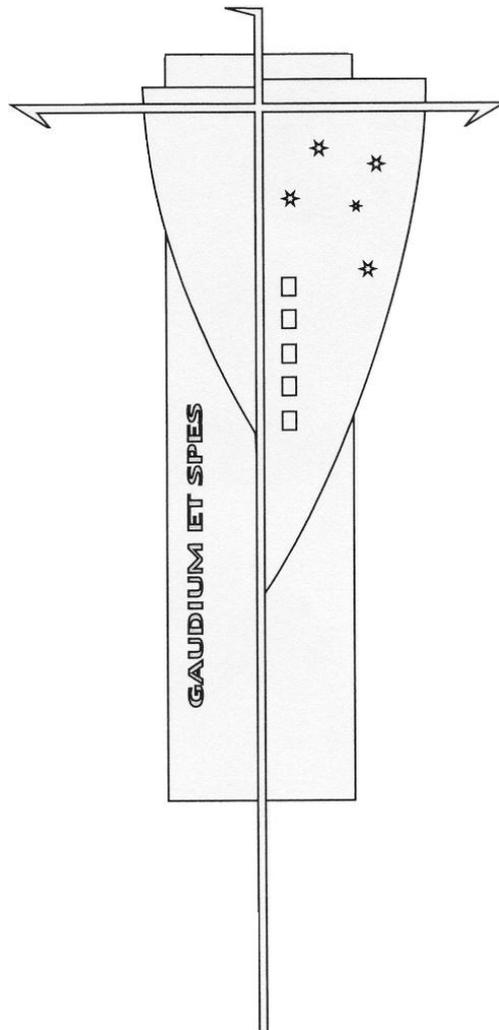


St John Bosco College
Engadine

2012
“Challenge Class”
Years 8, 9 and 10



Information Booklet for Parents and Students

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The "Challenge Class" Concept

The "Challenge Class" concept has been in operation at St John Bosco College for the past nine years and will continue into 2012 for Years 8, 9, and 10.

In each of Years 8, 9 and 10 there will be four (4) mixed ability classes and one (1) "Challenge Class" of approximately thirty (30) students. The "Challenge Class" is specifically designed to cater for the learning needs of the more **academically talented students**.

The "Challenge Class" concept differs significantly from "streaming", which is usually associated with a whole year level group being allocated to differentiated classes on a sliding scale from the 'top' class to the 'bottom' class. The "Challenge Class" concept is only one class and all other classes in the year group remain mixed ability classes.

Students in the "Challenge Class" will study all their **core subjects** in this class (English; Geography; History; Religious Education; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education; Science, and LOTE (Italian) in Year 8 only). Mathematics will continue to be studied in separate streamed classes, as is presently the situation. For timetabling purposes the "Challenge Class" operates in the same manner as any other class.

The "Challenge Class" is an **opportunity** for academically talented students to undertake their studies in an environment in which they are able to interact with their intellectual peers.

The "Challenge Class" covers the syllabus material mandated by the NSW Board of Studies, the same as any other class. However, the choice of content, the pace at which the material is undertaken, and the depth and breadth of the material covered is more suited to the more academically able students. There is a focus upon offering opportunities for independent learning, for providing extension activities and developing higher order cognitive skills. The range of teaching and learning strategies selected is also more suited to facilitating the learning of very able and talented students.

A position in the "Challenge Class" is offered to students according to their ranking based on a clear **selection process** and rigorous **selection criteria**.

There are no additional costs associated with a student being in the "Challenge Class". The cost of participation in the "Challenge Class" is included in the College's usual fees and charges. However, there is a \$20 non-refundable fee associated with applying for the Year 8 "Challenge Class". This covers the cost of the standardised test that Year 7 students are required to sit as part of the selection process. Families for whom this fee is an exceptional hardship are invited to speak with the Principal. No student will be excluded from applying on the basis of the fee.

Year 8 and Year 9 students currently in the Challenge Class will be required to re-apply for entry into the 2012 Challenge Class. Other students, not already in the Challenge Class are encouraged to apply, especially if they have performed particularly well in a range of subjects this year.

Please note that selection into the 2012 Challenge Class at a particular year level is for 2012 only. Entry into the 2013 Challenge Class at a particular year level will require a separate application at the appropriate time. A similar selection process and selection criteria will be applicable.

Purpose

The purpose of the "Challenge Class" Program is to:

- challenge the most able students in the year group;
- address the learning needs of individuals and groups within the year group;
- raise a range of pedagogical/educational issues;
- provide opportunities for students to excel academically;
- offer opportunities for students to develop higher order cognitive skills;
- provide opportunities for gifted and talented students;
- incorporate gifted and talented strategies within the classroom;
- explore different curriculum structures that provide alternative academic pathways for students;
- allow very able students to interact with their intellectual peers in the classroom environment;
- raise the educational standard of the whole year cohort;
- continue building the academic culture of the whole school.

Rationale

The "Challenge Class" concept is an initiative designed to cater for the specific learning needs of academically talented students. In this respect it is consistent with:

- current research into the provision of appropriate educational opportunities for very able and gifted students;
- Catholic educational philosophy which advocates the dignity of the individual and the need to address the needs of each individual;
- the College's Salesian Tradition, which advocates quality educational opportunities which have young people at the centre and their needs as the key point of reference;
- the Catholic Education Office's current emphasis on improving examination performance and addressing the needs of gifted and talented students;
- the College's Vision Statement, which speaks of encouraging the growth of each student's individual gifts and showing special care for those with particular needs;
- the College's goals as stated in the Strategic Management Plan 2008 – 2011 and the current Annual Development Plan.

Research Summary

Identification

- o A multi-faceted approach to identification, incorporating both subjective and objective methods, is required.
- o The use of standardised ability tests is a necessary objective component of the process, but should not be the sole criterion for identification.

Curriculum Differentiation

- o Curriculum differentiation is essential for gifted students as they have a qualitatively different cognitive ability.
- o Curriculum differentiation remains essential for gifted students in ability-based classes.

Ability Grouping

- o Ability grouping is beneficial for the educational outcomes of gifted children.
- o Many of the concerns about ability grouping are not substantiated by the available research.
- o The educational outcomes of other (non-selected) students are enhanced as a new group of able students emerges.
- o A commitment to comprehensive education should be able to accommodate the concept of ability grouping for gifted students.

Features of the Program Emerging from the Research

Identification

The research suggests that a multi-faceted approach to identification, incorporating both subjective and objective methods, is best. The use of standardised ability testing is a necessary objective component of the process but should not be the sole criterion for identification.

In the light of this research, St John Bosco College has adopted a multi-step selection process including:

- o invitation allowing for self, parent or teacher nomination;
- o students' current performance;
- o a standardised test (current Year 7 only);
- o an interview – if this is deemed necessary;
- o an ongoing review process.

The College acknowledges the difference between the process of identifying gifted and talented students and selecting very able students for the "Challenge Class". However, in the selection process we have attempted to build in some of the key aspects of the research findings. In a selection process it is essential that there are clear criteria of which all applicants are aware in advance.

Curriculum Differentiation

The research demonstrates that curriculum differentiation is essential for gifted students as they have a qualitatively different cognitive ability. Curriculum differentiation remains essential for gifted students in ability-based classes.

It is intended that the teaching and learning approach adopted for the "Challenge Class" take into account the specific learning needs of the very able students in the class. In this way curriculum differentiation is a constituent aspect of the Program.

The "Challenge Class" covers the syllabus material mandated by the NSW Board of Studies, the same as any other class. However, the choice of content, the pace at which the material is undertaken, and the depth and breadth of the material covered is more suited to the more academically able students. There is a focus upon offering opportunities for independent learning, for providing extension activities and developing higher order cognitive skills. The range of teaching and learning strategies selected is also more suited to facilitating the learning of very able and talented students.

Staff Professional Development

The research suggests that teachers require professional development training in order to better identify and cater for the needs of gifted students.

Over the last few years a number of teachers have engaged in professional development specifically related to the "Challenge Class". This work has concentrated on developing the range of resources and strategies that teachers have available to cater for the learning needs of the most capable students. Furthermore, Challenge Class teachers have given specific attention to developing teaching and learning Programs that have very able students at their key focus.

One of the key outcomes of this professional development has been the networking of Challenge Class teachers, who meet to discuss the strategies they are utilising and the progress of students. Such professional sharing is a key element of the College's LETs (Learning Effectively Together) Project, which is aimed at broadening the range, style and type of learning strategies that teachers have available to them.

Selection Process Year 8 Challenge Class 2012

Step 1 – Invitation, Information and Application

- o All students in Years 7 are invited to apply for entry into the "Challenge Class".
- o An information evening is held for interested parents and students.
- o Information packages and application forms will be available at the information evening.
- o Students and parents submit an application for admission.

Step 2 – Total Subject Class Ranking

- o Applicants' current subject class rankings for each of English; Geography; History; Religious Education; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education; and Science are collected and collated to determine their total subject ranking.
- o This ranking is calculated using the principles and formulae detailed in the Selection Criteria.

Step 3 – General Ability Test

- o Students applying for admission sit a standardised general ability test, which is conducted under normal examination conditions.
- o The College selects a standardised general ability test after considering the advice of educational testing authorities.

Step 4 – Determination of Overall Ranking

- o The principles and formulae outlined in the Selection Criteria are used to determine each student's overall ranking.
- o The total subject ranking score and the general ability test ranking score each contribute 50% towards the overall ranking. (See Selection Criteria for details.)

Step 5 – Preferred Candidates

- o Students with the highest overall rankings are given preferred candidate status.
- o Consideration for preferred candidate status is given strictly on the basis of overall ranking. Students with a higher overall ranking are considered first.
- o Preferred candidate status does not entitle a student to automatic entry into the "Challenge Class".

Step 6 – Interview

- o A senior member of the College staff may, if necessary, interview students with preferred candidate status to ascertain their overall suitability and readiness for the "Challenge Class".

Step 7 – Confirmation and Contract

- o Students who successfully demonstrate the ability, suitability and readiness for the "Challenge Class" are officially offered a place in the class.
- o Students confirm their acceptance of the offer by signing a contract which details the College's expectations as a member of the "Challenge Class" in their year group.

Step 8 – Ongoing Review

- o Each student's continuation in the Program is reviewed on a regular basis.
- o The College, parents or the student may initiate this review.
- o Factors that may be taken into account in a review may include academic performance, effort, diligence, attitude and behaviour, as well as personal and/or pastoral considerations.

Selection Criteria Year 8 Challenge Class 2012

Students who apply for entry into the Year 8 "Challenge Class" attain preferred candidate status according to the following criteria:

1. Subject Year Group Rankings [50%]

The current subject ranking for each of the subjects listed below is converted to a score by means of the formula detailed below*.

- o English
 - o Geography
 - o History
 - o Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
 - o Religious Education
 - o Science
- Please note that each subject carries equal weighting

* Subject Ranking / Score Conversion Formula

- o First place ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 150 points
- o Second place ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 149 points
- o This scoring continues sequentially.
- o The 150th placed ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 1 point.

The scores for each subject are tallied to give the total subject class rankings tally (x), a score out of 900 points. The total subject class rankings tally (x) is converted to a score (y) out of 50 according to the following formula:

$$y = \frac{x}{900} \times \frac{100}{1} \times \frac{1}{2}$$

2. Standardised Test Ranking [50%]

Each student's result in the standardised test is converted to a percentage and then divided by 2 to give the Test Score (z), a score out of 50.

3. Overall Ranking

The class ranking score (y) [worth 50%] and the test score (z) [worth 50%] are added together to establish each student's overall score (T).

$$T = y + z$$

This score is then converted to an overall ranking.

Students are allocated preferred candidate status strictly on the basis of their overall ranking.

4. Interview

Entry into the Challenge Class is confirmed only after an evaluation of each student's suitability and readiness to participate in the Program. If necessary, an interview may be conducted to assist in making this determination.

5. Contract and Review

Only students prepared to sign a contract committing themselves to the goals and purposes of the Program and prepared to participate in a regular review progress are eligible for entry into the "Challenge Class".

Please Note:

The Principal reserves the right to exercise some discretion in the final allocation of students to the Challenge Class when there are exceptional circumstances and/or on the advice of senior staff. Parents should inform the Principal of any exceptional circumstances at the time of application. Notification of exceptional circumstances after the allocation of students to classes may not be favourably considered.

Selection Process and Criteria Year 9 – 10 Challenge Class 2012

Step 1 – Invitation, Information and Application

- o All students in Years 8 – 9 are invited to apply for entry into the "Challenge Class".
- o An information evening is held for interested parents and students.
- o Information packages and application forms will be available at the information evening.
- o Students and parents submit an application for admission.

Step 2 – Subject Year Group Ranking

- o The current year group subject ranking for each of the subjects listed below is converted to a score by means of the formula detailed below*.
 - o English Please note that each subject
 - o Geography carries equal weighting
 - o History
 - o Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
 - o Religious Education
 - o Science

*** Subject Ranking / Score Conversion Formula**

- o First place ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 150 points
- o Second place ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 149 points
- o This scoring continues sequentially.
- o The 150th placed ranking in each subject in each year group corresponds to 1 point.
- o The scores for each subject are tallied to give the total subject year group ranking (a score out of 900 points).

Step 3 – Interview

- o A senior member of the College staff may, if necessary, interview students to ascertain their overall suitability and readiness for the "Challenge Class".

Step 4 –Candidate Selection

- o Students are selected for entry into the Challenge Class on the basis of:
 - Total subject year group ranking
 - Interview (if conducted)
 - Discretionary factors (as determined by the Principal)

Step 5 – Confirmation and Contract

- o Students who successfully demonstrate the ability, suitability and readiness for the "Challenge Class" are officially offered a place in the class.
- o Students confirm their acceptance of the offer by signing a contract which details the College's expectations as a member of the "Challenge Class" in their year group.

Step 6 – Ongoing Review

- o Each student's continuation in the Program is reviewed on a regular basis.
- o The College, parents or the student may initiate this review.
- o Factors that may be taken into account in a review may include academic performance, effort, diligence, attitude and behaviour, as well as personal and/or pastoral considerations.

Please Note:

The Principal reserves the right to exercise some discretion in the final allocation of students to the Challenge Class when there are exceptional circumstances and/or on the advice of senior staff. Parents should inform the Principal of any exceptional circumstances at the time of application. Notification of exceptional circumstances after the allocation of students to classes may not be favourably considered.

The Standardised General Ability Test

Why Have a Test?

The inclusion of some form of standardised general ability testing as part of the selection process is considered essential. It is one way of acknowledging that some very able students are actually underachieving and/or masking their ability because the learning environment in which they currently find themselves is not suited to their learning needs or does not correspond to their learning style.

About the Test

The first point to note is that the test is not something for which students can study. The test is a general ability test, provided by a reputable educational testing provider and is designed to identify a student's ability to engage in high order cognitive functioning.

Key Aspects

The test will focus specifically upon **verbal reasoning** (verbal analogy, semantic comprehension, and vocabulary) and **abstract reasoning**. It is important to note that there will not be a mathematical component to the test because students study mathematics in separate streamed classes.

Other Details

The test will be in two parts each taking approximately 30 – 45 minutes. It is therefore envisaged that (allowing time for instructions, entry, exit, etc) the test will take approximately 80 – 100 minutes.

Students are not required to bring any equipment or material for the test. A pen or pencil will be provided.

The test will be conducted under **normal examination conditions**.

Interview

Why Have an Interview?

An interview is conducted only if there is a need to verify a student's suitability and readiness to participate in the Challenge Class. It allows for subjective data to be collated to validate the objective data already collected. As has already been noted, the research demonstrates that a variety of subjective and objective identification methods should be combined in identifying gifted and very able students. An interview is one such subjective method.

The Purpose of the Interview

The key purpose of the interview (if required) is to assess the student's overall readiness and suitability to be involved in the "Challenge Class" in terms of:

- o academic achievement and potential;
- o social and emotional capacity to cope;
- o attitude and behaviour;
- o maturity, willingness and ability to balance multiple demands and expectations.

Format of the Interview

A senior member of staff will conduct the interview. It will be a one-on-one interview and will take 10 – 15 minutes.

Content of the Interview

In the course of the interview students may be asked to speak about a range of topics and issues including:

- o reasons for wishing to be part of the "Challenge Class";
- o goals, aspirations and career options for the future;
- o ability to work as a member of a team;
- o motivation and capability to undertake independent learning and self directed study;
- o social and emotional capacity to cope with the rigorous expectations of the Program;
- o maturity to balance study, work, family, sporting, social and other commitments.

Expectations of Students in the "Challenge Class"

The expectations of students in the "Challenge Class" are equal to and greater than those expected of all students at St John Bosco College. In no way are students in the "Challenge Class" exempt from any of the normal expectations that are part of the life of the College nor are they to consider themselves as in any way superior to others.

Students in the "Challenge Class" will be expected to:

- o act respectfully and appropriately according to the normal expectations of all students;
- o respect and abide by all the College's expectations regarding behaviour, attendance, uniform, participation, academic standards and all other aspects of College life;
- o conduct themselves humbly, placing their unique God-given gifts at the service of others and using their talents with generosity for the benefit of the whole College community;
- o demonstrate a commitment to the whole life of the College and participate in all other events and activities;
- o have a special commitment to the pursuit of academic excellence;
- o work to the best of their ability and to engage in the learning process collaboratively with their teachers and peers so as to maximise the learning opportunities of all members of the class;
- o meet all homework, study and assessment task requirements and deadlines according to the College's guidelines and procedures;
- o demonstrate a particular commitment to their studies by means of exemplary classroom behaviour, diligence and application;
- o participate in the ongoing review process, knowing that this review may be initiated by the College, parents or themselves and that it may address such factors as academic performance, effort, diligence, attitude and behaviour, as well as personal and/or pastoral considerations.

Purpose of the Contract

The purpose of the "Challenge Class" contract is to make the expectations outlined above explicit and to formalise each student's commitment to the goals and purposes of the Program. The contract also allows each student to re-confirm their overall commitment to the whole life of the College and their willingness to be of service to the College community.

In a similar way, the contract allows parents to provide their support to their son / daughter, to the Program and to the College's specific and overall objectives.

Selection Process Timeline – Term 4 2011

This timeline is subject to alteration if it is deemed necessary to facilitate the overall selection process.

Week 1

Information published in College Newsletter

Week 2

Parent Information Session
Tuesday 18 October

Week 3

Applications close
Friday 28 October

Week 4

Standardised Test
Wednesday 2 November

Week 7

Interviews conducted (if necessary)

Week 9

Acceptance Offers announced
Contracts distributed

Week 10

Signed Contracts return deadline
(9am, Monday 12 December)