

Frances Pene

The Suva Christian Community School is located in a pleasant garden suburb of Suva, Fiji's capital city. Two large, airy houses have been converted into a primary school and a high school. The broad aims of the school, as expressed in the SCCS Profile (p 3) are:

- "to provide an education of high academic standards that is based on and acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and ... of the Bible as the revealed word of God",
- to provide an education that also fosters self discipline, develops the individuality of the learner, trains the learner in moral and ethical standards of the Bible, develops the learner's creative and critical abilities and stresses co-operation rather than competition.

The primary school was established in 1997, and the high school in 1999. The total roll this year is 160. Jeanette Cricket,

a primary supervisor, gave the author a tour around the primary school and answered her questions. Later, the primary school principal, Patrick Bower, made a substantial contribution to the article. The author is grateful to both Jeannette and Patrick.

*Do you follow the Fiji curricula and take the Fiji school exams?*

No, our students follow a learning programme which we get from Australia. After a diagnostic test we start them off at the right level so that they do work that is challenging but not too hard. Then they work through the programme on their own.

*How many subjects do they study in this way?*

The seven core subjects: English, Maths, Social Studies, Science, Bible reading, Word Building, Literature and Creative

writing. The children work their way through PACE<sup>1</sup> booklets, 12 a year for each subject.

*Is there any whole class teaching?*

Yes. We teach PE, Swimming and Life Saving, Art, Music, Drama and Poetry to the whole class once a week for each subject. Swimming and Life Saving for all primary levels have been localised and put into PACES.

*Is there any local content in any of the study programmes, such as vernacular languages, Fiji social studies?*

Not as yet, but Fijian and South Pacific studies will be compiled into PACES as soon as is practical.

*How are the children assessed?*

Assessment is built into the PACE booklets. At the end of each booklet there is a self-test followed by a PACE test. Children must score 90% or more before they can move on to the next PACE. They work at their own speed and level. In other words, they take a lot of responsibility for their own learning.

*Who marks their work?*

The teacher monitors the children's progress. The children score their own work, and the teacher marks their tests, keeps records, and helps them when they need assistance.

*What is the staff:student ratio?*

On average it is 1:10

*Apart from the PACE booklets, what resources and materials do the children use?*

They have regular sessions with the computers. Some of their study programmes include computer activities. Each class also has a small library and the children are encouraged to borrow books.

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<sup>1</sup> Package of Accelerated Christian Education

*How do you help children who have learning disabilities?*

They get special attention for some time each day until their performance is on a par with their chronological age.

*How are Christian values taught?*

Every PACE booklet is oriented around Godly character traits. In addition, a scripture passage is memorised each month. Children attend daily class devotions for the first thirty minutes each day.

*What is your policy regarding corporal punishment?*

Corporal punishment is administered only by the parents or by the Principal, and then only when other methods of correction prove unsatisfactory to bring about changed behaviour.

*What motivates the children to work?*

The children are motivated by reward. When they complete their daily goals at school, they don't have any homework for that evening, and when they successfully complete a PACE test, they are rewarded with the next level PACE. All PACE tests results are recorded and parents are notified weekly with a congratulations slip.

*What do you see as some of the most important benefits the children get by coming to this school?*

One is that Bible study and Christianity are not tacked on subjects but are carefully worked into the entire educational programme. Each child studies at least two character traits each week, such as accountability, self-control, patience, and faithfulness. A total of sixty traits are covered in every year's programme.

Secondly, the children follow their own academic programme, working at their own level in each subject. This means that no child has to wait for others to catch up, and no child has to attempt work which is beyond his/her capabilities.

In addition, the programme followed by the children ensures their balanced development and at the same time they can reach a high academic standard. The high school students accumulate credits, through competency-based internal assessment, towards the General Certificate of Education at Year 10 and the Academic Certificate of Education at Year 12, both of which are recognised in Australia.

The students enjoy the homely atmosphere of their school, and the fact that they do not have to sit any external exams.