

An Introduction to
**CLASSICAL
EDUCATION**

*A Guide for Students,
Parents and Educators*



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“The ultimate goal of the educational process is to help human beings become educated persons.”

Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal*

What is Classical Education?

Traditional Learning for the Contemporary World

Classical education is rooted in a rich tradition that traces its origins to ancient Greece and Rome. Over centuries, it was shaped and refined by some of history’s greatest thinkers, including Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. They believed that education should be about far more than acquiring information; instead its purpose is *the cultivation of wisdom, virtue and knowledge* by focusing on *educating the whole person* and *developing habits* that form the foundation for *lifelong learning*.

In the West, classical learning was influenced and enriched by the Christian faith throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Theologians like Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas further developed the ancient foundations of education by instilling within it a sense of transcendence, human meaning and purpose. They refined concepts inherited from the Greco-Roman past – like the cardinal virtues - and imbued them a pursuit of human flourishing in all dimensions of life, including the spiritual.

For this reason, classical education has often been synonymous with the *liberal arts*: those academic pursuits that help to create free people by empowering them to think with critical reasoning, act with virtue and appreciate the majesty of Western civilisation. Accordingly, such learning seeks and inculcates the divine transcendentals: the *Good, True and Beautiful*.

Classical education encourages students to grow as thoughtful, curious and articulate learners. Through discussion, questioning and reflection, young people learn not only what to think but *how to think*. This approach fosters strong reasoning skills, sound judgement and the confidence to communicate ideas clearly and effectively.

As a pedagogy (method of teaching and learning), classical education is founded on the seven liberal arts: the Trivium of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric; and the Quadrivium of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. Together, these disciplines provide students with the intellectual tools needed to understand the world and engage thoughtfully with it. (*For more information, see pages 6-7.*)

Classical education also invites us to meaningfully engage with the great ideas and works of the Western intellectual tradition. By exploring connections across subjects and through different periods of history, we gain a deeper understanding of the human story, culture and our place in the world. Ultimately, this encounter cultivates a life-long love of learning that inspires the pursuit of all that is true, good and beautiful.

Classical education promotes:

- The pursuit of wisdom
- The formation of character
- The development of reason
- The ability to communicate clearly and logically

This form of learning prepares young people to flourish in a rapidly changing world while grounding them in a respected and significant tradition. It prepares them for academic success as well as a life of wisdom, virtue and civic contribution to society. Rather than concentrating on the issue: “*What should I know?*” it poses the deeper question: “*What kind of a person should I be?*”

Why Classical Education Matters Today

In today's educational landscape, there is often a strong focus on preparing children for future careers and the workplace, sometimes at the expense of learning for the sake of personal wisdom and civic engagement. Additionally, subjects are generally taught as separate and isolated areas of study; what is learned in Science class rarely converses with what one studies in History or Literature. This is a very artificial mode of education.

Classical education takes a different approach. It aims to provide students with a rich, meaningful and interconnected learning experience that nurtures the whole person: intellectually, morally and spiritually.

This teaching method differs from modern education by:

- Integrating subjects so they naturally support one another
 - Cultivating a holistic view of learning
 - Developing questioning and reasoning capabilities
 - Promoting self-reflection and self-awareness

With its primary emphasis on the humanities, classical education supports student exploration of those timeless questions about what it means to be human. It builds a firm base for lifelong learning, personal growth and wise decision-making in an increasingly complex and changing world.

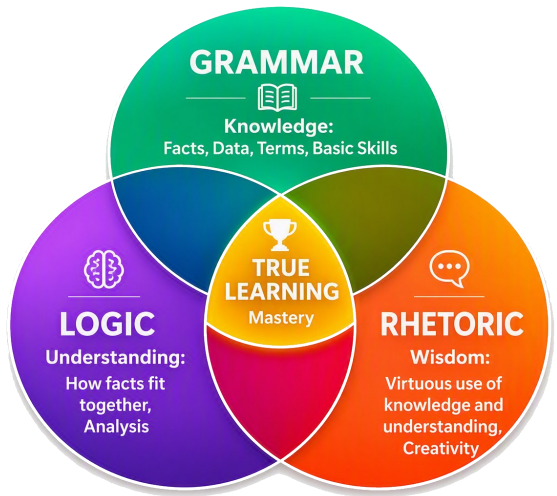
By grounding learning in proven pedagogical practices and human excellence sourced from ideas, literature and works that have moulded Western civilisation for millennia, classical education offers us a stable and enduring foundation from which to flourish academically and personally. Where modern education prioritises *what to think*, classical education emphasises *how to think*.

Foundations of Learning

The Trivium

The Trivium comprises three of the seven liberal arts: Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. It is concerned with elementary linguistic and factual knowledge (Grammar), reasoning and analysis for understanding (Logic), and communication through creative construction (Rhetoric). Each of these modes of learning builds upon the other and trains students to master basic subjects.

- **Grammar** – *the art of grasping language and facts*, including the basics of any topic, such as its rules, vocabulary, data and key concepts. For example, students may define and recite Latin nouns, use timelines to grasp the order of historical events, or memorise their times tables.
- **Logic** – *the art of reasoning and critical thinking*, including the analysis of information, identifying relationships between ideas and recognising sound arguments. For example, students may compare differing viewpoints, determine causal relationships in a text, or build philosophical arguments.
- **Rhetoric** – *the art of effective communication*, including clear expression of ideas, use of creativity in new concepts and persuasive oral and written presentations. For example students may debate on an argument, write a persuasive essay, or deliver a speech.



Building on Foundations

The Quadrivium

While the Trivium provides a strong framework for elementary learning through acquiring and evaluating knowledge to then communicate new perspectives with wisdom, the Quadrivium extends this into the realm of mathematics and the natural sciences.

The final four liberal arts disciples: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy, explore matter and quantity, teaching students the skills related to numbers and their application. It can also be understood as the intersection between *arts (knowledge)* and *science (application)*.

The Quadrivium:

- **Arithmetic** – *the study of number itself and relationships between numbers.* For example, recognising numerical patterns, solving problems and comprehension of the order and structure that numbers bring to the world around us (mathematical reasoning).
- **Geometry** – *the study of numbers in space,* taking the concepts of Arithmetic and giving them physicality. For example, learning about measurement, design (shapes) and spatial reasoning. Geometry further examines how numbers play an important role in what makes something beautiful.
- **Music** – *the study of numbers in time.* Rather than the performative aspect of music, this subject studies patterns of rhythm, harmony and proportion, discovering how mathematical relationships create beauty and order in the aural world of the senses.
- **Astronomy** – *the study of numbers in motion,* as relations between numbers govern movement and change. For example, students learn about the activities of celestial bodies, the seasons and order in the universe. Deeply connected with Physics, Astronomy helps to develop curiosity, observational skills and an appreciate for the beauty and complexity of the world around us.

Fostering Virtue and Piety

In classical education, virtue and piety are integral to a child's learning because the ultimate purpose of education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge or skills but the formation of the whole person. Parents naturally desire more for their children than academic success alone; they want them to grow to be wise, kind and resilient adults. Indeed, moral virtue and right relationship with God and society are necessary aspects of a flourishing human life.

Theology therefore occupies a privileged place as *queen of the sciences*, applying reason and experience to divine revelation and providing a lens through which all other subjects are viewed. The Bible is central throughout every stage of schooling, both as a witness to its cultural value but, more significantly, as a means to know God. Alongside scripture, students encounter ecclesial thinkers and writers, great works of art, examples of Christian witness and the personal lived experience of charity to move them towards the Good, True and Beautiful. Whether studying order in the world, the pursuit of justice in history or inspiring literature, young people are encouraged to see all learning as connected and directed towards God.

Closely associated with this vision is *education in the virtues*, especially in piety, which is one's duty towards God, family and society. In practical terms, classical classrooms engender reverence, prayer and right worship, with liturgy and spiritual reflection forming part of the rhythm of school life. It also means students learn to serve others through charitable acts, whether by assisting peers, participating in community outreach or caring for those in need.

This is a form of enculturation or *paideia* that shapes the moral character of children. Through classroom learning, school traditions, relationships and daily routines, students develop habits of self-discipline, justice, courage and compassion. These virtues help young people grow to be thoughtful, faithful and generous individuals, prepared to live lives of meaningful service to God and others.

A Love of the Beautiful

Living Books

“Education is of the spirit and is not to be taken in by the eye or effected by the hand; **mind appeals to mind** and **thought begets thought** and that is how we become educated. For this reason we owe it to every child **to put him in communication with great minds** that he may get at great thoughts; with the minds, that is, of those who have left us great works; and **the only vital method of education appears to be that children should read worthy books, many worthy books.**”

– Charlotte Mason, *A Philosophy of Education*

Much of what children come across in contemporary classes can seem impoverished and lacking in beauty. As rational beings, we rarely devote our time and effort to studying something that appears to be valueless or gives little meaning to our lives. Classical education recognises this fact and seeks to immerse young minds in the best of human creativity by exposing them to nature, art and the great books

of the Western tradition.

The **great books** is a term that refers to the finest and most enduring human creations, influential works of literature, art or music that have shaped civilisation and continue to speak powerfully across the generations. These masterpieces raise challenging, timeless questions, cultivate wisdom and virtue, allow for rich and polyvalent interpretations, and - most significantly - help the human spirit to flourish. The great books have inspired people for centuries.

Some examples of the great books within the classical tradition include: the Bible, Plato's dialogues, Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, the epics of Homer, Augustine's *Confessions*, the poetic works of Dante and Shakespeare, historical writings of Plutarch or Livy, the speeches of Lincoln and Churchill, or the music of Mozart and Beethoven.

Through consistent engagement with these great books students develop **an appreciation and love of the beautiful**, which not only inspires creativity but also shapes moral character, drawing one God and all that is noble. Furthermore, beauty reveals the interconnected nature of all subjects, for instance, in the principles of proportion and design in architecture, harmony and symphony in music, or order and wonder in the natural sciences.

What Does it Look Like in Practice?

What does it look like to stroll through the grounds of a classical school or step into one of the classrooms? While no two schools will be identical, here are some identifying signs of a classical learning environment.

The buildings of the school campus reflect a sense of tradition and permanence, typically with spaces that are calm and properly maintained, designed to support learning and reflection. You can expect to walk through clean, orderly corridors, passing walls beautifully decorated with frescos or religious imagery, to a library stocked with quality literature. Outside, the environment will blend fine architectural styles with the greenery of nature. Often, a chapel or liturgical space will also be quite prominent.



When you enter the classroom, the sense of order continues: desks face the front, educational materials (maps, timelines, portraits, etc.) are displayed, with the purpose of facilitating learning and enkindling wonder. The teacher leads students in a Socratic discussion, with everyone speaking in turn; you get the impression the rules are known well and adhered to. After this time of sharing, the class begins to recite a string of Latin verses they have memorised and one student then stands in front of the room and opines on them. As he falters, you notice the teacher gently question and guide the student in responding on the merits of the language used in the poem and how it might reflect living a good life. When he is finished, the student returns to his seat and the teacher projects a painting that vividly illustrates the poem and a study of it begins.

Does it Work?

While classical education boasts a compelling philosophy and pedagogy, accompanied by a long history of practice, there is substantial evidence for positive educational outcomes, not to mention other benefits for families, schools and society.

Within *the school community*, classical education strengthens partnerships between parents and teachers, involving them in the learning process and creating a strong sense of belonging. Moreover, such schools foster vibrant faith-centred cultures, with doctrine, rituals and charitable works helping to form faithful, committed Christians, equipped to live out and share their faith with the world.

For this reason, classical education *supports society too*. Graduates are ethically mature, well-rounded individuals, with refined critical thinking and communication skills, enabling them to perform civic duties and participate as responsible citizens.

Students, of course, profit most from this type of education. They are provided staggered, age-appropriate foundations and so can build knowledge progressively while nurturing virtue and discipline. A love of lifelong learning is instilled, as young people develop a deeper understanding of themselves, others and God.

Perhaps no evidence demonstrates these excellent outcomes more than *The Good Soil Report* (2020), a comprehensive comparative study commissioned by the Association of Classical Christian Schools and analysed by the University of Notre Dame. The research focused on adult graduates over two generations and compared the results from classical schools with various other educational models. In summary, those who had a classical education were better prepared for tertiary studies and careers, had more positive outlooks on life, showed greater independent thinking and were more engaged in their community. Additionally, these graduates had a strong commitment to their faith, lived Christian lifestyles and upheld traditional values.

Classical Education in Australia

Below is a list of classical schools and tutoring agencies operating in Australia, in addition to important resource organisations.

NAME AND GRADE	STATE	WEB ADDRESS
Covenant Christian School, <i>P-10</i>	ACT	https://www.covenant.act.edu.au/
Augustine Academy, <i>16 years+</i>	NSW	https://www.augustineacademy.com.au/
Campion College, <i>tertiary</i>	NSW	https://www.campion.edu.au/
Hartford College, <i>5-10</i>	NSW	https://www.hartfordcollege.nsw.edu.au/
Via Classica, <i>tutoring/resources</i>	NSW	https://www.viaclassica.com/
Logos Australis, <i>resources</i>	QLD	https://logosaustralis.com/
St John Henry Newman College, <i>P-12</i>	QLD	https://newmancollege.qld.edu.au/
St John of Kronstadt Academy, <i>P-6</i>	QLD	https://stjohnacademy.qld.edu.au/
St Philomena School, <i>P-12</i>	QLD	https://stphilomena.qld.edu.au/
Toowoomba Christian College, <i>P-12</i>	QLD	https://tccollege.qld.edu.au/
St Benedict School, <i>P-6</i>	SA	https://stbenedictschool.sa.edu.au/
Chesterton Academy Melbourne, <i>P-12</i>	VIC	https://classicalschoolmelbourne.com.au/
St Monica's College, <i>online courses</i>	VIC	https://www.stmonicas-epping.com/
St Philip's Primary, <i>P-6</i>	VIC	https://www.stphilipbbn.catholic.edu.au/
Coram Deo, <i>P-12</i>	WA	https://coramdeo.org.au/
Immaculate Heart College, <i>P-12</i>	WA	https://ihc.wa.edu.au/
The Classical School, <i>tutoring</i>	WA	https://www.theclassicalschool.com.au/

Recommended Resources

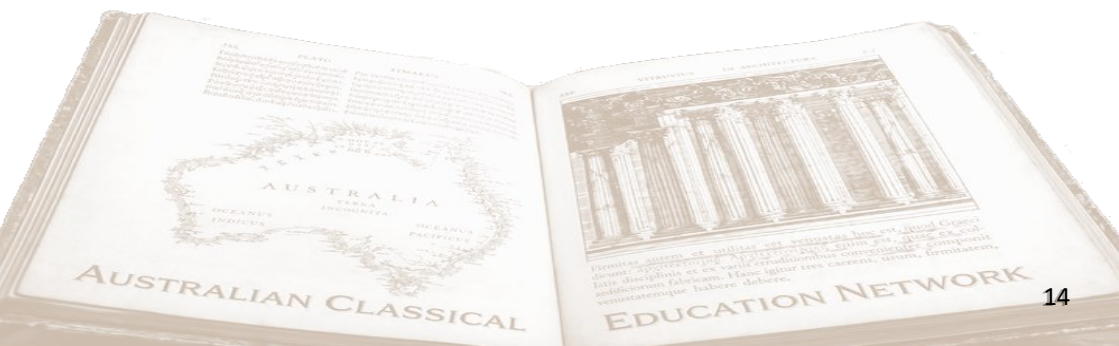
Print publications:

- ♦ *The Paideia Proposal* - Mortimer J. Adler.
- ♦ *The Well-Educated Mind* - Susan Wise Bauer.
- ♦ *The Well-Trained Mind* - Susan Wiser Bauer and Jessie Wise.
- ♦ *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* - Stratford Caldecott.
- ♦ *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* - Stratford Caldecott.
- ♦ *The Liberal Arts Tradition* - Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain.
- ♦ *The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to Be an Educated Human Being* - Richard Gamble.
- ♦ *Something They Will Not Forget* - Joshua Gibbs.
- ♦ *Consider This: Charlotte Mason and the Classical Tradition* - Karen Glass.
- ♦ *Norms and Nobility* - David Hicks.
- ♦ *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* - Sister Miriam Joseph.
- ♦ *Trivium: The Classical Liberal Arts of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric* - Michell et al.
- ♦ *An Introduction to Classical Education* - Christopher Perrin.
- ♦ *The Good Teacher* - Christopher Perrin and Carrie Eben.
- ♦ "The Lost Tools of Learning" (essay) - Dorothy L. Sayers.
- ♦ *A Classical Education* - Caroline Taggart.
- ♦ *Poetic Knowledge* - James Taylor.
- ♦ *Awakening Wonder: A Classical Guide to Truth, Goodness and Beauty* - Steve Turley.

Recommended Resources

Online resources:

- ♦ Association of Classical Christian Schools, <https://classicalchristian.org/>
- ♦ Australian Classical Education Society, <https://www.classicaleducation.org.au/>
- ♦ Beautiful Teaching, <https://www.beautifulteaching.com/>
- ♦ CiRCE Institute, <https://circeinstitute.org/>
- ♦ Classical Academic Press, <https://classicalacademicpress.com/>
- ♦ Good Soil - report, <https://classicaldifference.com/good-soil/>
- ♦ Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, <https://catholicliberaleducation.org/>
- ♦ Liberal Arts and Classical Education - report, <https://www.csns.catholic.edu.au/resources/discussion-paper-liberal-arts-and-classical-education-return-beauty>
- ♦ Logos Australis, <https://logosaustralis.com/>
- ♦ Memoria Press, <https://www.memoriapress.com/>
- ♦ Roman Roads Press, <https://romanroadspress.com/>
- ♦ Society for Classical Learning, <https://societyforclassicallearning.org/>
- ♦ Via Classica, <https://www.viaclassica.com/>



Australian Classical Education Society

If this sounds compelling and you want to take a practical next step, consider contacting or joining *the Australian Classical Education Society Inc.* (ACES).

ACES exists to foster awareness, connection and renewal around a more meaningful, richer vision of education. We bring together parents, educators and individuals who seek an approach to learning that cultivates wisdom, character and human flourishing. Through advocacy, resources and community networks, we equip and involve Australians in the restoration of liberal arts education in our country.

As interest in classical education continues to grow across Australia, ACES is committed to guiding and supporting those exploring this transformative educational tradition. Lasting cultural change begins with individuals and families before it can extend into schools and society at large.

We invite you to become part of this exciting movement and help advance the truth, goodness and beauty at the heart of classical education.

To begin your journey with ACES, you can:

- ♦ *find us online* - <https://www.classicaleducation.org.au/> - *and join our burgeoning Facebook community* - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/526690198266058>;
- ♦ *get in touch* - contact@classicaleducation.org.au;
- ♦ *support our work by becoming a financial member or donor*;
- ♦ *subscribe to our monthly newsletter*; and most importantly
- ♦ *share our mission and spread awareness of classical education with those you know.*

An Introduction to CLASSICAL EDUCATION

A Guide for Students, Parents and Educators

Classical education is more than an approach to learning—it is a vision of what is best in humanity and a pathway to wisdom, virtue and joy. Rooted in the enduring truths of the liberal arts and the great tradition, this booklet offers a clear and inspiring introduction to the principles and practice of classical education for the modern world.

INSIDE YOU WILL DISCOVER:

- The aims and enduring benefits of classical education
- The Trivium: cultivating the mind in its natural stages
- Practical guidance for home, school and community
- How to nurture a love of truth, goodness and beauty
- Resources and next steps for your journey

“The object of education is not to make us clever, but to make us good.” — Plato

