

Learning a language

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Culture key to understanding the whole story

The world opens up for students from a school that focuses on both foreign language and culture.

Language is a verbal expression of culture: it stems from a need to convey and preserve everything that a society is. So if you take on another language without learning about its culture, you may get only half the story.

That's when things can become lost in translation for many students learning languages across Victoria.

Students who come from varying ethnic backgrounds often speak a language other than English at home and are steeped in an ancestral culture. However, others who learn a language may not have that advantage.

"Our school was founded on the premise of a focus on Greek language and culture," says Mark Robertson, principal of Oakleigh Grammar, an independent co-educational school founded in 1983 by the Greek Orthodox community in Melbourne's southeast.

When school students become familiar with the culture behind the language they're studying, their understanding is greatly enhanced, he says. Benefits flow from junior years up to VCE level.

"Learning a language has huge benefits



Multiculturalism is an Oakleigh Grammar strength. Photo: Greg Ford

for students," Robertson says. "It's agreed that it helps to develop the mind from an early age, but knowing another language is also a valuable asset when entering the workforce."

All Oakleigh Grammar students learn Greek from preschool to year 5, and Mandarin is introduced in year 6. From year 7 to year 10, there's a choice of Greek or Mandarin.

"We conducted a feasibility study to offer a second language," Robertson says. Mandarin was chosen over Indonesian, which was a close second.

"Australia's position means that an increase in Asian-language education is

crucial for the future," he says. "The feedback we got from parents made Mandarin the obvious choice."

Despite Oakleigh's roots in the Greek community, many of its students are from non-Greek families.

"Our school is open to students of all culture backgrounds," Robertson says. "We rebranded the school six years ago, and doubled our population as a result. Now we have students from over 50 different backgrounds."

The focus on Greek encourages students to expand their horizons, he says.

"Learning about another culture with language as your entry point is a great

journey." Year 12 graduates are fluent, Robertson says, and year 10 graduates are at least conversational. The school has a Greek language centre available after hours to bolster students' education.

Oakleigh encourages both personal and academic achievement and has an international focus. In Middle School (years 6 to 9) students do the International Baccalaureat program.

Oakleigh is well positioned to meet the Victorian Government's language education targets. (By 2025 all students in government and non-government schools must include a language in addition to English in their senior secondary program.)

"The government has a renewed focus on languages, and we're committed to that," Robertson says.

"By starting so early and making language such an integral part of our curriculum, students are motivated to continue their language studies."

Oakleigh Grammar follows national curriculum and state guidelines, he says. "Language is well regarded at VCE level, with bonuses available for those who've pursued their education."

Many former students say learning a language in school was the best thing they ever did, says Robertson.

"The beauty of Oakleigh is our Hellenic cultural influence. Multiculturalism is our foundation."

Oakleigh Grammar is pleased to provide scholarship opportunities for entry into Middle and Senior School (Years 6, 7, 9 and 10) in 2018.

Apply for a scholarship today
www.oakleighgrammar.vic.edu.au/scholarships

Oakleigh Grammar strives to create quality learning opportunities for every student to reach their full potential. Located in the heart of Melbourne's south-east, we offer excellence in coeducational learning from our Early Learning Centre through to Year 12 and are a top Australian school.



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