School Philosophy

Introduction

Fitra Community School (FCS) is a small not-for-profit community based primary school. This document describes the key principles of FCS and explains the underlying beliefs that drive the school. Our approach to education is focused on developing the whole child. It is centered around the belief that education is for life and not simply a means for earning a living. The ultimate goal is to develop confidence in our students' identity as Australian Muslims, and nurture the skills necessary for them to excel in a fast changing, digitally driven world and become positive contributors to the future of humanity.

To achieve our ultimate goal our schooling experience will endeavour to create excitement for learning whilst also prioritising spiritual, social and creative development, based on the values of Islam. At FCS we believe this is best achieved in an environment where students enjoy the freedom to learn and explore the world around them in the absence of unnecessarily prescriptive courses of study, whilst also participating in a school community that values engagement with and contribution to society at large.

There are four key outcomes that our school will seek to nurture in our students, these are explained in more detail.

1) The first of these is ***agency*** - the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.
2) The second is ***social and emotional intelligence*** - the ability to understand one's own and others' feelings and emotions and then use this understanding to inform one's decisions and actions.
3) The third is ***creativity*** - the process of developing original ideas that have value.
4) The fourth is ***active citizenship*** - becoming a conscious and positively contributing member of society.

Underpinning the pursuit of the above mentioned outcomes is a strong learning program with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills and the incorporation of Islamic principles in the day to day fabric of school life in a way that is meaningful and relevant to students.

While some of the key outcomes we are pursuing may seem like a significant shift from conventional schooling, we believe they are necessary in order for our students to successfully navigate an increasingly unpredictable future. We cannot determine what the world will look like when our students graduate, including what current occupations will be redundant and what new possibilities will exist. However, we as educators can equip them with the tools and skills to thrive in a constantly changing environment and capitalise on the opportunities it presents. FCS will facilitate this unique educational experience within the context of government requirements relating to schools as well as by incorporating the best of contemporary knowledge about teaching and learning.

Agency

Agency is defined as the ability to make choices and take an active role in one's life path, rather than solely being the product of one's circumstances. In an education context, it is essentially taking ownership of one's learning. We believe that providing opportunities for students to develop their ability to take action, assume responsibility, and hold themselves accountable for their learning and personal development helps build key skills necessary for their future.

Accordingly, at FCS we will provide students with multiple opportunities to take an active role in their learning and have a voice in their educational experience. This may include deciding how to approach a topic, who to collaborate with, where to study, when to study and when to take a break and how to communicate what they have learnt. Whilst providing opportunities for autonomy and decision making may lead to some inefficiencies in the short-term, we believe that the learning gained by students as part of the process is necessary to becoming self-sufficient, lifelong learners.

Social and Emotional Intelligence

Social and emotional intelligence refers to how well individuals can understand and manage their own emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. We believe that the explicit teaching of social and emotional intelligence is of paramount importance for future success of students across all areas of their lives.

According to the the evidence based CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework, there are five key sets of skills that are central to social and emotional intelligence[1]:

- *Self-awareness* — The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. It also includes the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."
- *Self-management* — The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. It also includes the ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.
- *Social awareness* — The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also includes the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports
- *Relationship skills*—The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. It also includes the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.
- *Responsible decision-making*—The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. It also includes the realistic evaluation of consequences

[1] http://www.casel.org/core-competencies/

of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

At FCS we understand that the skills of social and emotional intelligence are practically learnt over time by students through their interactions with and observations of others around them. As such we will actively promote a whole school culture where these skills are made a priority for students and staff alike. We believe this will result in a truly supportive and caring learning environment where all members of the school community are empathetic to the needs of those around them, and are able to collaborate with each other effectively.

Creativity

We are living in times of increasingly complex challenges. The global population has more than doubled in the last forty years putting an increasing strain on the world's natural resources. At the same time ever evolving digital technologies are transforming how we all work, think, and connect, making the future of jobs & careers very unpredictable. We believe that responding effectively to the social, environmental and economic challenges our world faces requires us to be creative, innovative, and solution focused.

Therefore at FCS we place a premium on nurturing our students creativity. Creativity is the process of having original ideas that have value. This encompasses creative thinking in addition to creativity in expression, endeavour and collaboration. To be creative one has to be prepared to make mistakes and persevere in spite of the challenges that arise. Accordingly, we will create an environment where creativity can flourish and mistakes are not stigmatised, but rather viewed as a necessary stepping stones on a journey of discovery. We believe that all individuals are naturally creative in some way but can be educated out of it. As such our role as educators is to guard against doing so and to give our students the confidence to continue to express themselves creatively through different mediums.

Active Citizenship

Whilst we have a strong emphasis on equipping our students with the tools and skills they will need for personal success, we also recognise the need to educate our students on their responsibilities to the world in which they live. Through the rise of capitalism, our students are inheriting a very selfish world. A world where the amassing of material wealth and possessions is the primary objective of many, a society where at least at the macro-level compassion, the well-being of the environment and care for the hopes and aspirations of the less well-endowed are less valued than they once were. At FCS we want our students to be of those who rise above this.

By focusing on active citizenship we want our students to value their belonging in a diverse and dynamic society and have a desire to positively contribute locally, nationally, regionally and globally. In addition, we want our students to approach the world with compassion, concern for others and a strong sense of justice. By building reflective, active and informed decision-makers, we believe our students will be well placed to contribute to a healthy Australian democracy as well as an increasingly interconnected global world.

In order for our students to practically develop towards being active citizens, we believe we have to do two things: the first is to help our students build a strong foundation of moral

values, ethics of behaviour and good manners that gives precedence to the consideration of others and the common good; and secondly provide our students with opportunities to practically apply what they are learning to benefit more than just themselves at the local, national and global level.

Conclusion

This document forms the basis of the philosophy that guides FCS. It provides the foundation upon which the school's day-to-day activities and culture will be built. Each of the key outcomes of the FCS philosophy - agency, social and emotional intelligence, creativity and active citizenship - represent the skills and attitudes we believe every person needs to lead a fulfilling life in the 21st century. We hope that our students will leave us with a solid foundation in these skills, a strong academic base and a firm understanding of how they can add value to their lives and the lives of those around them through practicing the Islamic faith.