



Making the Transition

*A guide for Chinese
students moving into
mainstream secondary
school education*

Student Brochure

This brochure is designed for students with a Chinese language background who are moving from an intensive English language course or a secondary school preparation program into mainstream secondary school education.

The brochure provides some information about the Australian secondary schooling experience and shares the experiences of students from a Chinese language background who have made the successful progression into Australian secondary schools.

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QIEU thanks the students and staff of the following schools for their kind assistance:

- St Joseph's Nudgee College, Boondall
- St Edmund's College, Ipswich
- John Paul College, Daisy Hill
- Clayfield College, Clayfield

QIEU gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the **Shanghai Municipal Trade Union Council** and the support of the **Shanghai Education Union** in the development of this brochure.

Authorised by T. Burke, General Secretary, QIEU
2004

What is Australian school life all about?

Chinese students have highlighted a number of differences between the Australian and the Chinese school environment:

- The school environment will be less academically intense than in China although it will encourage students to strive for excellence in academic and extra curricula activities.
- The school day in Australia is shorter and usually runs from 8.30am to 3.00pm.
- Schools try to be like a community and will try to create a friendly and warm environment for their students, teachers and parents.
- Extra curricula activities take place outside normal school hours and on weekends and often focus on sports; however, they can also have an academic or cultural base. Students are encouraged to participate in such activities.

“Australian teachers want you to do your best but there is not as much pressure here as in China.”

Ping Yu, student from Clayfield College

“You don’t get as much academic pressure here as in China. There is more freedom ... they encourage you to be more creative.”

Frank Li, student from Nudgee College



“It is much more relaxed and there is more free time.”

Bowen Huang, student from Nudgee College

Many Australian schools are run by a religious group and therefore religion is very important in all aspects of the school. Students may be required to study religion as one of their subjects and students may also be expected to participate in religious activities.

How is the Australian classroom environment different?

Students find several major differences between the Chinese and Australian classrooms. These differences relate to the size of classes, asking and answering questions, timetable, classroom structures and homework.

Size: As Australian classes have fewer students, teachers are generally able to provide students with assistance in class and answer students’ questions during the class.

Asking and answering questions: You are free to ask and answer questions in class after raising your hand and being directed by the teacher to ask the question. Teachers will often ask you to answer questions during the class.

You should not be concerned about giving the wrong answer when responding to questions in class. If you are reluctant to ask questions in class, you may approach teachers after the class to ask questions.

“All students need to learn from watching others in class when it is appropriate to ask questions.”

Andrea Back, teacher from Clayfield College



“Students in the classrooms here are very free. Students ask any questions they want even questions about me and my family.”

Yao Wei, a Chinese teacher on exchange at St Edmund's College

Taking notes: It is important to take notes in class. However you also need to listen to what the teachers say in class and think about the topics and issues raised. In assessment tasks you will be asked questions on a great deal more than what you have written down in your class notes.

Timetable structures: It is essential that you have a copy of your timetable with you throughout the school day as the timetable structure may vary from day-to-day and week-to-week. Australian students also have difficulties with this when they start at a new school and at the start of each year or a new semester.

Classroom structures: Students usually move to a different classroom for each lesson rather than the teacher coming to your classroom. It may take some time for you to remember the location of all the classrooms. Don't be concerned by this as all students and teachers have trouble with this when beginning at a new school.

Australian classrooms may appear more relaxed and the workload may appear less compared to China; however, schools in both countries emphasise and promote the achievement of high academic results.

Homework: There are fewer hours of day-to-day homework expected of you in Australian schools. However, you will still need to do a lot of homework.

Homework in Australia consists of two types. The first type of homework will be set day-to-day for you to complete by the next lesson. The second type of homework will consist of a research task, spread over several weeks with the expectation that you will work on the research task on a daily basis.

Homework may not be collected or checked on a daily basis; however, the teacher will have methods to check that you have completed it correctly. This homework is designed to reinforce your classroom learning and to encourage free thinking and creativity.

Homework can be adapted to suit the different abilities of students and may involve researching beyond the set class text to find a variety of sources to complete the homework tasks.

Homework focuses on developing your ability to evaluate and justify your opinion and is an extension of your classroom work. You will be expected in most tasks to be able to do the following:

- Recall information.
- Explain ideas or concepts.
- Use the new knowledge in another familiar task or situation.
- Differentiate between the parts which make up some knowledge or information.
- Justify a decision or opinion or course of action.
- Generate new ideas or ways of viewing things.

What is the role of Australian teachers?

Australian teachers may teach several subjects across a variety of areas of knowledge. This means that you may have the same teacher for more than one subject.

- Australian teachers move around the classroom rather than only standing at the front of the classroom to teach. They try to interact with the students during the lesson.
- Teachers try to create a caring and friendly classroom environment by working alongside you in the learning process. Teachers will often try to develop humour in the classroom and as a result teachers will sometimes even make jokes in class. However, they will expect the class to return to the task quickly.
- The role of the Australian teacher differs from Chinese teachers as they encourage self-directed learning and this is reflected through differences in teaching styles.

Like Chinese teachers, Australian teachers have high expectations of students. They realise however, that not all students learn at the same pace and will offer additional assistance to students who require it. In the senior years of high school, the relationship between the teacher and students is more open and teachers become more approachable and will try to work more closely with you.

“Teachers in Australia are very helpful and friendly.”
Ping Yu, student from Clayfield College



“The teachers are more approachable.”

Bowen Huang, student from
Nudgee College

“(In Australia) teachers give students an understanding of the way to succeed.”

Cao Qiutang, a Chinese teacher on
exchange at St Edmund’s College



“There is no barrier between the teacher and the student and you can communicate easily.”

Frank Li, student from
Nudgee College



How will the teaching style differ?

Australian teachers have a different teaching style from Chinese teachers.

Higher order thinking skills: Teachers will emphasise higher order thinking skills such as developing, evaluating and justifying your opinions in addition to developing your comprehension and knowledge. They will encourage you to extend your knowledge and understanding.

Therefore, during your studies you will be expected to analyse and evaluate information instead of just being able to repeat what was taught in class.

It is still important that you understand the information and concepts raised in class. In order to achieve this, teachers will ask many questions to help your understanding as well as encourage you to ask your own questions.

Group work: Teachers will use group/team work and oral presentations to ensure a greater understanding of the classroom materials and encourage you to think of creative solutions or ideas.

Assignment topics: Teachers also promote creativity by sometimes allowing you to choose your own assignment topics. Most assignments will give you some options from which to choose.

Class environment: Despite the fact you can be more relaxed and have fun within the classroom setting, it must be emphasised that the learning objectives of that class must be met and as a result you will be expected to return to the task quickly if there has been some distraction.

How do I make subject choices?

Students in Australia need to make subject choices.

Australian schools offer a greater choice of subjects than in China. Examples of subjects offered include accounting, information technology, economics, history, geography and a variety of science subjects. You can choose subjects from a variety of disciplines and you will be responsible for choosing the majority of your subjects.

You should seek advice from a guidance counsellor or careers advisor at school when deciding which subjects to choose as they can explain information about the subject and provide you with recommendations to consider.

Subject choices can act as prerequisites for university courses and it is vital that your subjects be chosen not only because of interest but with future plans in mind. Although most students aim to attend university it must be stressed that university isn't the only tertiary option available to you. Teachers and career counsellors will be able to assist you in assessing your tertiary options.

“In China all the subjects are chosen for you and you can't choose. I enjoyed being able to choose my subjects (while studying in Australia).”

Liang Yu, student from
Nudgee College



What assessment will I have?

In Queensland there are two types of assessment – regular school-based assessment and centralised reference tests.

Final results: Your final results are largely determined by the regular school-based assessment. This school-based assessment is then combined with a centralised reference test in Year 12 called the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) test to give you an overall position (OP). The QCS test examines higher order thinking skills which are embedded in your school subjects.

This OP determines tertiary placements. Most of your assessment in Year 12 will count towards your OP as will some of your Year 11 assessment.

Assessment styles: Assignments and exams are the most common forms of assessment. However, teachers will also assess you through oral presentations, practical experiments and other means.

These forms of assessment are often completed over the term, with several different subjects having assessment items due around the same date. You must be self directed and set your own work schedule to ensure that due dates are met.

Assignments: Assignments often have real life relevance and you may be able to choose the assignment topic. As assignments are designed so that you gain a greater understanding of the subject area, you must conduct your research using such resources as the library and internet.

You will need to research ideas and concepts from many different sources and then put the ideas from these sources into your own words to write your assignment.

As these ideas are not your own, the author of the ideas should be referenced using the appropriate referencing method approved by the school. If the assignment is not referenced properly it may be viewed as plagiarism. Plagiarism has serious consequences and if you have plagiarised, your work will be marked down or even rejected.

Assignments should be seen as ongoing homework for the subject and you should use your time management and organising skills to schedule research and writing over the available time.

What will homestay be like?

Students highlighted that a significant difficulty in adjusting to the Australian homestay environment is adjusting to the different food style. Some suggested that you discuss having Chinese style dinners occasionally and/or purchasing food to allow you to prepare your own Chinese style foods.

Homestay parents will often treat you like one of their own children and some families may want you to participate in all of their activities. Be courteous and talk to them if you do not want to participate in an activity. You will need to talk with your homestay family to establish a balance between the family activities, your studies and other social activities.

It is important to give your homestay parents any correspondence from the school such as newsletters as this keeps them informed about happenings at the school. Also keep your homestay parents informed about how you are going at school and any problems you are having.

Find out who the contact person is at the school in case you need to discuss homestay concerns or issues.

Homestay can be a wonderful experience. Embrace it. Be open, honest and considerate of your homestay family and they should treat you the same way.

What advice can you give me?

“Improving your English is very important.”

Cao Yang, student from St Edmund’s College

“Speaking English with friends to practise the language and asking questions especially in class is very helpful.”

Peter Zou, student from Nudgee College

“More reading for English is useful; especially the newspaper.”

Long Xiao, student from St Edmund’s College

“I tell them (International students) to watch things like Cybergirl, Neighbours and the news on television. Although, it is not good television, it is useful for learning English.”

Leonie Harris, teacher from Clayfield College

“Be yourself and express your personality.”

Frank Li, student from Nudgee College

“Don’t worry if people think you have different ideas.”

Yang Xinhao, student from St Edmund’s College

“Study hard.”

Yin Gu, student from Nudgee College

“Don’t be too shy. Ask questions.”

Ping Yu, student from Clayfield College

“Don’t be embarrassed or shy to ask a question.”

Jerry Xiu, student from Nudgee College

“I would suggest that students tape the lessons, so that they can take them home and listen to them again.”

Narelle Ward, teacher from Clayfield College

“Students should hand in drafts, so that the teacher can make comment on them before final submission.”

Andrea Back, teacher from Clayfield College

- Try to make Australian friends.
- Become involved in school activities as they will help you with the transition into an Australian school and may assist you in making new friends.
- Practise asking questions to assist you in building confidence to ask them in class.
- Time management skills will be useful when you are completing assignments.
- Utilise the computers that are available to you at school. Use them to enhance your computing skills.
- Australians will be interested in your experiences and enjoy finding common interests with you. Use these opportunities to make new friends and practise your English.
- Try new foods - especially those considered ‘Australian.’ Be aware that Australian food is quite different from Chinese food.
- Take advantage of the opportunities for you to have more one-on-one personal assistance in the school from teachers and tutors.



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