



# The Greatest Gift

Ficino School Prospectus





## Welcome

A Ficino School education is well-rounded, holistic and designed to realise the potential within each child.

Children who come to Ficino School develop confidence, a love of learning and a strong sense of their inner strength, while growing their innate ability to care for others.

Catering for boys and girls Years 1-8, our programme is based on three platforms: striving for excellence, expanding children's horizons through the rich material found in our global traditions, and practising mindfulness, including philosophical inquiry.

The biggest thing Ficino School does differently is to give children space.

**To stop.  
To think.  
To question.**

In all philosophical and religious traditions great weight is placed on the need for inner quiet and contentment. We feel that it is important for children to gain an early taste of their own capacity to experience the quiet within. Using a mindful approach, our students develop self-discipline and the ability to attend, enabling substantial learning.

By fostering a love of learning, teaching the ability to be calm and centred and encouraging children to have respect for all, Ficino School helps students to build strong foundations for life.

**It is the Greatest Gift you can give your child.**



*“There is nothing more wonderful  
nor more lovely than learning  
united with virtue.”*

Marsilio Ficino







## Meet our Principal

Peter has over 20 years' teaching experience at primary, secondary and university level, both in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

After qualifying and working as a Chartered civil engineer, Peter discovered his love of teaching at Oxford University, where he taught engineering for five years, combining this with studying for his Masters degree. He then went on to include his philosophical outlook with his work, teaching for ten years at primary and later secondary level at St James School in London. He qualified as a teacher in the UK during these years.

Peter believes the purpose of education is to bring out the best in people, and that this is especially important in the primary phase, when children's hearts and minds are open but tender.

"Children have enormous potential, and when provided with the right environment, can achieve far more than they, or those around them think is possible. Our aim is to view each child freshly each day in the belief that they are full of unlimited potential; this provides a clean slate for students' learning and development."

Peter joined Ficino School as its Principal in 2010, inspired by the challenge the role offers and keen to bring the fine qualities he learned teaching at St James back to New Zealand. Since his arrival the school has seen the introduction of a more rigorous curriculum, positive behaviour management, more specialist teachers and extra curricular activities.

"What has not changed in my time here are the strong values of the school, such as truthfulness and respect for one another, and the strong philosophical ethos of seeing everyone as essentially full of goodness and truth. The enthusiasm for learning and attentive atmosphere in the classrooms are also remarkable."

"In the next five years I would like to see our school become more well-known and more engaged with other schools and community organisations. We are offering something magnificent: the quality of our Year 8 students when they leave – their confidence, strength of mind, sense of goodness – is highly regarded by the secondary schools they attend."





*“When you become quiet, it just dawns on you.”*

Thomas Edison

## Mindfulness and philosophy

Our motto “Rejoice in the present” gives the children clear direction to attend to what is in front of them and to enjoy the clarity of mind and efficiency which naturally follows. In today’s busy world, the ability to direct your attention in this way is a valuable life skill.

### What do we mean by philosophy?

Put in its simplest terms, philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is the thirst for knowledge and truth that all children are born with. Ficino School aims to foster this passion for inquiry. We are not affiliated with any particular religion, rather, our students study the great traditions of the world, seeking to discover the common ground in all. They explore and establish universal principles for a healthy, happy and rewarding life.







## Mindfulness at school

**Being in the present moment** – The children are encouraged to develop their power of attention. This is to take care – truly focusing on the task at hand – pen to paper, hand to instrument, listening to the person in front of them. The ability to work like this greatly improves the way children learn, and their efficiency while working.

**The Pause** – At the beginning and end of each activity, led by their teacher, the children briefly close their eyes and fall still. They listen to the sounds around them, pay attention to their senses, and are simply in the moment for a few seconds. This gentle exercise refocuses and re-energises the children and teachers for whatever lies ahead.

**Meditation** – Older students are also offered an opportunity to meditate. Following consultation with parents, the School facilitates an introduction to word or mantra-based meditation. Students who do not wish to meditate in this way may use other simple mindfulness practices given by the school.



## Care and respect

The children at Ficino School take care of each other. Courtesy, respect and good manners are part of everyday life at school – from students holding doors open for others, to ensuring their peers have food on their plate at lunch time. Visitors frequently comment on the positive way children behave towards each other as well as adults. Outside of interactions at school, children are given a sense of caring for the wider community through various fundraising events, such as Christmas donations to the City Mission and other charitable initiatives chosen by the children. They also sing regularly at local community centres and participate in environmental clean ups.







### Meals at school

We strongly believe a healthy, balanced diet is central to good learning. All of our students' food is provided by the School, including morning tea. The food served is in-season and vegetarian, and is prepared freshly each day in our kitchen. We serve one hot dish, as well as salads, bread, spreads and fruit.

However, mealtimes are about more than just food at Ficino School. All children sit down and eat lunch together with their teachers. Sitting at tables with mixed age groups, the students are taught to serve and care for one another, rather than just helping themselves. Students are able to practise their table manners and learn to use cutlery appropriately. They also learn to engage in good conversation.







## Our teaching philosophy

### An inspired education

Ficino School has a close-knit staff including class teachers, specialist subject teachers, and assistants. We aim to foster strong relationships between families and their class teacher, with both parents and teachers working together to help the children reach their potential.

Our teachers endeavour to present good material in a simple, attractive and systematic way. This means the teacher leads the class' learning while being alert to the interests, needs and capacities of the individuals. Our teaching approach fosters self-discipline in our students; that essential life skill of being able to ignore distractions and focus on the work at hand.

## Our curriculum

Ficino School has a unique curriculum designed to nourish the body, mind and spirit. It incorporates aspects of the Cambridge Primary Programme (for English, Mathematics and Science), the New Zealand Curriculum, and specialist programmes from our sister schools around the world. Together, these provide breadth and depth to the children's learning.

**In the primary school, (Years 1-6)** our curriculum reflects the obvious and natural needs of the young child. To develop the whole child, the students sing fine music, meet great literature, practise mental agility in mathematics, learn about great men and women in history, discover the awe and wonder in science and learn to read, speak and write with sincerity and efficiency.

**The senior students (Years 7-8)** are increasingly taught by subject specialists. They develop an enthusiasm for learning and a thirst for knowledge, which provides excellent preparation for secondary school. The students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, and have ample opportunity to discover their leadership potential.





*“We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet.”*

Swami Vivekananda





# Academic curriculum

## Literacy

Children are taught to read using a phonics system and reading scheme developed at Ficino's sister school, St James in London. Our reading content reflects the purity and simplicity of the child. It contains uplifting passages from the great literary classics of both western and eastern culture. Supplementary readers are also used extensively, predominantly the PM series, Ladybird and National Geographic readers.

**Grammar** – We provide a thorough grounding in English grammar. Children begin by learning the parts of speech, and the different types of sentence. By the time they reach the senior end of the school, they have an excellent understanding of the laws of the language, with a good grasp of grammatical analysis, syntax and punctuation. This leads to greater clarity of expression and understanding.

**Handwriting** – This begins with the basic 'round hand' in Year 1, and by Year 3, the children begin to learn the cursive script. From about the age of nine they are taught how to use a fountain pen. Pupils are encouraged to enjoy the beauty and proportion of letters well-formed, and to write with fluency. High standards of presentation are encouraged through all year groups.

**Spelling** – All year groups take part in regular spelling lessons. Years 2-4 are cross grouped by ability using the SRA Spelling Mastery scheme which develops students' spelling skills through the combination of three interwoven approaches – phonemic, whole-word and morphographic – with emphasis on repetition, aural and oral exercises and games, dictation, written exercises using words in context and regular reviews.

**Written expression** – Creative writing is taught systematically. Learning to express ideas and observations in writing begins with simple sentences, develops into fuller accounts and matures over the years with the support of grammar and the inspiration of classical and good quality literature. From the earliest age children hear Shakespeare, myths and legends and stories from the Bible and other traditions. This greatly enriches their use and understanding of language.

## Language studies

**Sanskrit** – This is one of the oldest classical languages, and a specialty of our school. It has a wonderful system of sound and grammar, which gives the child an excellent base for the study of any language. Children love its order and beauty, and through its sound develop clear enunciation of English. They become articulate and confident speakers.

Practice at the beginning is oral, with the written Sanskrit script being introduced in Year 2. From then on students begin to translate and formulate their own sentences and explore the extensive and rich Sanskrit literature.

In addition to Sanskrit, children also have the option to study French, led by a specialist French teacher (after school).

## Numeracy

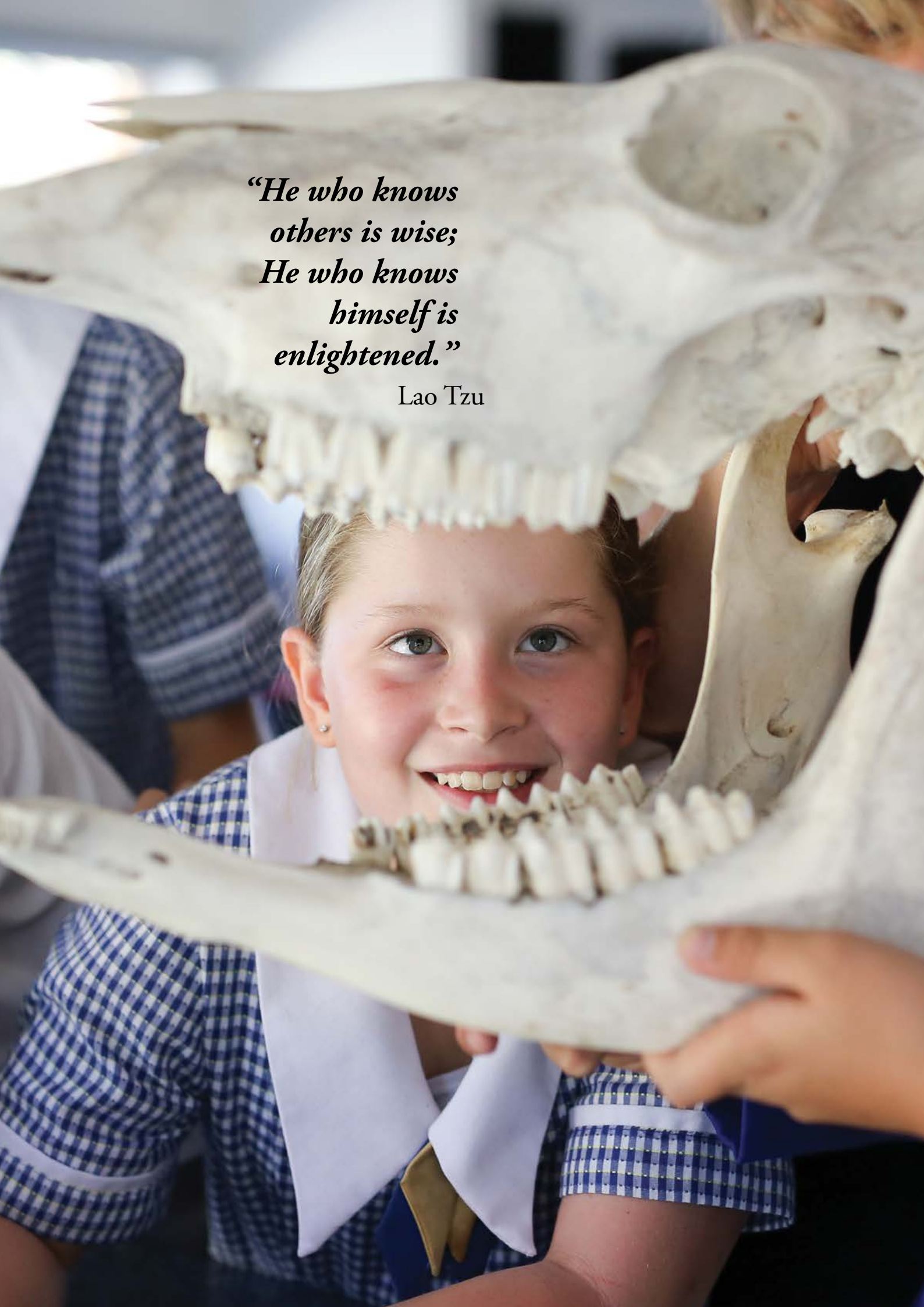
Mathematics forms the basis of all scientific knowledge and trains the mind to operate clearly and systematically. Our students begin learning their multiplication tables in Year 1 and take to them easily. The traditional four rules of calculation are taught in a systematic and lively way. The emphasis at Ficino School is on delight in the magic of numbers and the development of a strong base in numeracy. The Cambridge curriculum is followed for all Year groups in the school.

Extension students are taught in ability groups within each class and extension mathematics classes are provided regularly for those who are mastering their year group's curriculum. An important part of the school's mathematics programme is the study of Geometry. The curriculum has been developed especially for the school and aids the students' appreciation of accuracy, proportion and beauty.

All students have the opportunity to sit the Australian Mathematics Competition, in which the School achieves exceptionally well overall. Selected students also compete in local Mathex competitions.





A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a blue and white checkered school uniform with a white collar, is smiling and holding a large, white animal skull. The skull is positioned in front of her face, partially obscuring it. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in similar uniforms.

*“He who knows  
others is wise;  
He who knows  
himself is  
enlightened.”*

Lao Tzu

#### **Nature study / Science**

For Years 1-4 our nature study programme is designed to encourage observation and also put back into science a sense of wonder and awe. It begins simply with the senses and the elements and then develops into study of plants, animals and the harmony of the universe. A very practical approach is taken and there are frequent outings to engage with nature and the man-made world.

From Year 5 onward the Cambridge curriculum is followed; this includes scientific enquiry modules that underpin biology, chemistry and physics knowledge. Environmental awareness and scientific concepts and thinking are also incorporated as are components of IT (Information Technology). Students take part in off-site technology orientated trips and enter regional science and engineering problem-solving competitions.

On alternate years, large numbers of our young scientists participate in our own School Science Fair, entering accounts of their own scientific discoveries. High achievers can enter local NIWA competitions.

#### **Geography**

Our senior students (Years 7-8) study geography, including topics such as weathering and erosion, river systems, world biomes, population and settlement, natural hazards, tourism, mapping skills and LECD (less developed) and MECD (more developed) countries.

Relevant local topics are introduced at specific times such as the Olympic Games and national elections.





## The Arts

Children engage in a comprehensive arts curriculum that encompasses music, dance, drama and visual mediums. Children explore these subjects through investigation, interpretation and communication.

**Visual Art** exposes children to different media and artists and provides opportunities to discuss and reflect on their work. It provides hands-on experience to aid mastery of successful techniques. It includes instruction in drawing, use of paint, pastels, collage and 3-D construction. The Arts programme encourages students to look more closely and to work with finer attention. This provides them with opportunities to appreciate all that they observe and to express themselves creatively.

**Music** is a powerful expression of the heart of Ficino School. As such all children learn to sing, doing so thrice weekly from Year 1. The Ficino School Senior and Junior Choirs are growing in popularity and repute as students across the school meet weekly to take part in practices and prepare for regional competitions and festivals. They are also introduced to musical notation and the elements of music theory, and are encouraged to play musical instruments, both individually and in an ensemble. Public performance both in and out of school allow children to share their musical experiences. Our itinerant music teachers teach a range of instruments from Year 2 upwards - piano, violin, flute, recorder, trumpet, voice and guitar/ukulele.



## Presenting the best material human history has to offer

**History, Myth and Culture lessons** – Ficino School's unique history, myth and culture syllabus goes far beyond most primary social studies programmes. Through exploration of great civilisations, their social histories, art, myths and legends, our students learn to develop as informed, confident and responsible citizens. They gain the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in local and global societies. They will discover how individuals, communities, kingdoms and nations influenced large populations through creative endeavour, responsibility and the rule of law. Every year students will also study aspects of NZ history and the development of our national identity including the arrival of Māori, our early colonial history and the Treaty of Waitangi.

**Introduction to Drama** – The children perform several plays throughout their time at Ficino School from ancient Sanskrit texts, Greek mythology, and stories by influential writers.

**The Shakespeare play** – This dramatic training culminates in their final year with a comprehensive Shakespeare play. All students participate and enrich the school with their engaging, mature performances.

This discipline builds character and emotional maturity, and it teaches the children teamwork, tolerance and empathy.





## Physical education

Beginning with play, children love physical activity. Ficino School provides a full and balanced programme. A wide variety of daily physical activity gives children the opportunity to continually develop their skills. Our programme encourages and reinforces character building qualities such as self-discipline, respect for others, honesty, fair play, competition, teamwork and leadership.

All PE lessons are taken by specialist PE teachers. Lessons include large and small ball skills, athletics, gymnastics, adventure education, and a variety of team sports. Students visit the local pools for swimming lessons with experienced independent instructors, leading to a swimming gala in Term 4 for Years 3-8.

From the age of 5 children are introduced to team games where they learn teamwork and sportsmanship. There are competitive matches within the school and against other schools. In addition, daily games, gymnastics, cross country running and challenging field trips ensure that boys and girls stay fit and competitively motivated. High quality local venues are used for a wide range of specialist instruction including basket ball, orienteering, badminton and table tennis.

**Hockey** – The Ficino School hockey teams compete very strongly and successfully each season. We have boys and girls mixed teams across all age groups.

**Netball** – We have netball teams to cater for all year groups, boys and girls in the winter season (and in summer when there is sufficient demand).

**Athletics Day** – Athletics Day is held at Mt Smart Stadium. All children take part, competing within their own year groups, where they are encouraged to strive for their personal best.

**Cross Country** – The annual cross-country races are normally held on Mt Eden, which offers a good course for all age groups and excellent viewing for spectators.





## Our graduates

We are frequently asked where graduates go when they leave the school, and how they get on in the larger Secondary School environment. Our students are well received and valued in the best independent and state secondary schools. Schools our recent graduates now attend include St Kentigern College, St Mary's College, Mt Albert Grammar School, Epsom Girls Grammar, Auckland Grammar and ACG Parnell.

Our graduating families often stay in contact with Ficino School. Feedback over the last few years confirms that our graduates perform at a high level academically, participate enthusiastically and confidently in lessons and other extracurricular activities and make good friendships in the larger environment of secondary school. Please see the testimonials page on our website.



*“We are the opening verse  
of the opening page  
of the chapter  
of endless possibilities.”*

Rudyard Kipling





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Philosophically inspired education  
for boys and girls

 **CAMBRIDGE**  
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OF NEW ZEALAND