



What is Blue Gum?

Blue Gum Community School is a small community-based, secular Independent School offering education programs for 0-16 year olds. Located in Canberra, Australia, Blue Gum is 'Australian-made' and named after a robust Australian native eucalypt tree. Our school values our Australian context, environment and inheritance, but connects globally – sharing with, and learning from, educators in other cultures. Blue Gum adopts a

personalised, strengths-based approach to education where every student can be a successful, robust learner. Our smallness is our strength - students' individual interests and passions can be explored through limitless learning opportunities. Influential reference points – the Reggio Emilia

experience, Big Picture Education, Slow Schooling, Nature Education, Place-Based Education, Positive Psychology etc.

What makes Blue Gum special?

At Blue Gum, we see students as Competent, Capable, Creative,

Responsible, Resourceful & Resilient:

COMPETENT – Students are respected for what they CAN do. They participate in meaningful, real-life experiences with a strong sense of purpose, which is intrinsically motivating.

CAPABLE – Students are given opportunities to initiate and plan experiences and projects; assess options; and make their own decisions and choices.

CREATIVE – Students use an array of media, that become 'languages' through which they explore and express their thinking, to generate new ideas and forms of expression. Lateral as well as logical thinking skills are valued, as students hypothesise about the world around them and test their theories, while tackling real-life issues and problems.

RESPONSIBLE – Students weigh up situations and make choices about how to respond; accept and deal with the consequences of their choices; take responsibility for communicating their own thoughts and feelings; and constructively challenge inconsiderate/unacceptable behaviours.

RESOURCEFUL – Students' wealth of understanding, experiences and personal resources are acknowledged and respected; validated and explored; challenged and extended.

RESILIENT – Students CAN handle difficult situations, at any age. Their resilience is developed and strengthened by allowing them time to respond at their own pace in a supportive environment. Students learn how to manage the inevitable 'ups and downs' of life.

How do students learn at Blue Gum?

Teacher-initiated experiences – Teachers plan for 'possibilities' and prepare an irresistible ever-changing environment, full of open-ended 'triggers for learning', i.e. challenges and situations that invite students to inspect and explore the world around them. Then teachers adopt 'a pedagogy of listening', i.e. they observe closely the way/s students interpret and respond to this environment, which is modified accordingly, to elicit deeper thinking and learning and cross-disciplinary inquiry.

Student-initiated research – Students are encouraged to bring their passions, questions and objects/areas of interest into the classroom for further investigation and research. In such an interactive and respectful environment, students are highly motivated to learn.

The power of Community – Humans are social beings; they need to feel a strong sense of belonging within a community. Students learn best in small groups, through collaborative investigation and discussion, then branching out to refine their own

worldview. Within community, students learn to listen and communicate respectfully; to challenge and extend their own thinking and that of others; and to gain social confidence and the courage to speak out about things that matter to them.

Learning from Life – Students master HOW to learn - how to function independently and interdependently; map out and carry out high-quality research, then present findings/outcomes in persuasive/imaginative ways; and be critical, constructive and self-directed. Blue Gum's outward-looking learning culture takes students into the broader community regularly in diverse ways, for authentic endeavours and targeted partnerships, where learning and life are intertwined.

What is Blue Gum's approach to discipline?

An important part of students' learning is learning how to relate to others – their social/emotional development is as important as their academic progress. Every day, they are making decisions and choices – usually positive ones, but sometimes negative/inconsiderate/harmful ones which can become 'bad habits' which persist. Early intervention is important to break the pattern, so that students learn and practise constructive, rather than destructive, ways of interacting. The challenge for teachers is how to reject the behaviour, but not the student.

Consequently, Blue Gum rejects the traditional punishment/reward dichotomy, prevalent in schools. Instead, conflicts and disagreements are seen as inevitable and normal; our emphasis is on teaching students effective relationship and

communication skills - a repertoire of negotiation and problem-solving skills, so that they can resolve conflicts peacefully! Rather than being the chief disciplinarian and arbiter of disputes, the teacher takes on the role of co-opting and supporting students' active participation in negotiating their way through problems that arise with others. In essence, students learn how to assert their concerns and tackle problems directly themselves; with other students or adults, if needed; and, as a last resort, with the teacher's intervention. Research supports this approach as an antidote to bullying. (See the work of Dr Louise Porter, Alfie Kohn, Dr Ken Rigby.)

Education options at Blue Gum

Playgroup (0-2 year olds)

An Early Childhood educator meets weekly with small groups of parents/carers and their young children. An early introduction to, and immersion in, Blue Gum's philosophical approach which influences parenting, relationships and learning. Strong emphasis on exploring the natural world and real materials.

Pre-School (3-5 year olds)

- Children can begin at 3 years of age
- Full-time or part-time
- Highly-qualified educators; high staff:child ratio 3:25
- Extended-day option 8:30am-5:30pm
- Exciting School Holidays Program
- Open 49 weeks per year
- Child Care Benefit available



Primary School (5-12 year olds)

- Begins at 5 years of age, with a 30 April cut-off
- High teacher/student ratio, 1:14 or 2:25
- Small, mixed-age classes, where students work in small groups
- A 'hands-on' learning environment filled with enticing opportunities to explore, extends outdoors
- A rich curriculum imbedded in real challenges, real experiences, real learning and real life skills
- The Scientific Method (observe → hypothesis → predict → test → theory) is integral to all learning areas
- Classrooms open 8:30am–3:15pm
- Blue Gum staff run a small After-School program 3:15-6pm; & an adventurous School Holidays program

Teaching teams attached to Classes ensure stability and continuity. Mixed-age classes target the benefits of collaborative peer-learning and mentoring. A strong multi-media Arts focus invites students to explore and communicate ideas visually and orally, within and across all 8 Key Learning Areas: English; Mathematics; Science; Studies of Society and the Environment; Arts; Technology; Languages other than English (Italian); and Health and Physical Education. Outdoor Education is an essential learning experience for all students, including camps for extended periods in 'the great outdoors'.

Middle School (12-14 year olds)

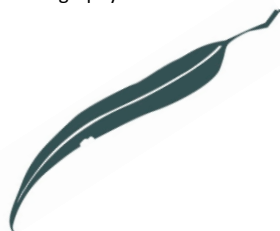
- Small class size – 14 students; high core teacher:student ratio 1:14
- Core Teacher Advisor co-ordinates a diverse education program for the group and for students individually, and offers a very high level of pastoral care at an emotionally-charged time of life
- Every student feels valued within the small group, as peers learn to tolerate and value individual differences and different ways of viewing the world
- Curriculum negotiated between students and teacher – a mix of mandated outcomes, group experiences and individual preferences
- Core study skills are the focus of targeted small group workshops
- Students negotiate rigorous, individual Self-Initiated Projects, to pursue a personal interest or passion over an extended period
- Learning occurs on-campus and off-campus, alongside scientists, artists, coaches, authors, poets, musicians, and other experts, as needed
- Safe, supportive environment develops a strong sense of belonging, while holding students accountable and challenging inconsiderate behaviour – students can't get lost in the crowd or be invisible!
- Students experience a high level of control over their learning environment and their life, which supports their growing independence

High School (14-16 year olds)

- Similar structure to the Middle School, except that students have greater freedom to work and socialise independently
- Increasingly, students venture into the broader community as a group and make use of the vast array of institutional resources in Canberra e.g. to carry out research at the National Library or take a glass-making course at Canberra Glassworks
- Students undertake intensive and personally-demanding Community Research Internships, where they negotiate with an expert/business/community group to undertake a mutually-beneficial authentic research project off-campus over an extended period
- Each student's personal control over, and accountability for, their learning is celebrated/tested through an individual presentation to peers, teachers, parents who act as 'critical friends'
- As part of their reflecting on their sense of identity and acknowledging/nurturing their strengths, and as they get ready to transition to larger educational settings, students are encouraged to write their own story, following immersion in the world of autobiography

Where can I find out more?

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