SOFOS – The Tasmanian Catholic Education Office online Gifted and Talented Program

Purpose

to provide activities that enrich and challenge children who have been identified as highly able/gifted

to encourage social communication between these children even when they are situated in geographically different locations

to engage students from Grades 2 to 6 with a rich combination of online interactive and offline hands-on learning

to pose meaningful questions and challenges that can be investigated enabling students to become more aware of different inquiry methods

to support the integration of a global perspective across the curriculum.

Sofos Support Persons

The Sofos activities are organised online by Erica Halley and Jenny Noble who develop the work, maintain the site and work with the students on-line.

Additionally, each child or group of children in the program needs a support person in their school. This person may be a teacher, parent or aide. The role of the support person is crucial to ensure that the students get the most out of the program. Children need to know that there is an expectation that they will choose and complete activities. It can be easy to flit from one thing to another without committing to anything. Children may need guidance in using their time effectively. They may need reassurance that they are “on the right track”, e.g. with a problem solving task. They may need help or permission to print things and work on them away from the computer. They may need help locating materials (e.g. novels, maths equipment etc.) that are needed for activities that they have chosen. They may need technical support if their machine won’t function correctly. In all these ways the support person is vital.
Expectations

1. Time

Students need a minimum 30 - 40 minutes of school time each week for Sofos. This may all be on-line or mostly doing Sofos activities accessed on another occasion. It is expected that children will have off-line time to do activities. They are also welcome to use this site from home if they have access. Students may wish to work on Sofos at other times during the school day and this is encouraged, especially if the student has completed all class work.

2. Group Work

Children in the same school or class should be able to work together at times to discuss, collaborate and present their work.

3. Acceptable use

It is assumed that children working in Sofos will have signed an ICT Acceptable Use Agreement in their school. Such an agreement asks the students to agree to keep their password safe, use e-mail and internet appropriately, respect other student’s privacy, follow school rules about computers, etc. Repeated incidents of inappropriate behaviour would result in a student’s removal from the Sofos group.

How to use the on-line classroom

The Online classroom is a safe environment and students have their own email that is to be used in conjunction with Sofos.
To find Sofos: go to http://sofostas.ning.com
Passwords have been set and it is not expected that students change these.

The Virtual Learning Environment

Sofos is divided into a number of different areas. It is important to ensure children know how to operate in each area.
When commencing Sofos it is a good idea for the support person to familiarise themselves with how to use each area and then give students a thorough orientation ensuring they know how to send and read e-mails, use discussion and forum postings and find the activities.
Student 'My Page’

Each student has their own page and should make his/her own page in order to have a visible presence in the (sofos) class. Please ensure that students do not put personal details such as mobile numbers on their homepages. Although it is a pass-word protected area, it is not a good practice to encourage in students working on the internet.

The easiest way for students to e-mail others in the class is to click on the homepage icon then click the little envelope next to the student’s name. The e-mail box will come up immediately.

Please note that the support person should check the content of their students’ homepages regularly, to ensure that no inappropriate links are added to external websites. Children wanting to add a link should discuss the potential educational value of the link with their support person.

E-mail:

Children can e-mail via the homepages section as mentioned above, or by clicking the e-mail icon and using the browse button to see who to e-mail. Note that this e-mail operates only within the Sofos class. Students cannot e-mail people outside the class (such as Dad at work).

As fostering social interaction among these children is one of the purposes of Sofos, children are encouraged to e-mail each other and are welcome to do so from home as well if they have internet access. As short discussion of what constitutes an acceptable e-mail is useful. Any child receiving a silly or inappropriate e-mail should forward it immediately to Mrs. Halley who will follow it up with the child and school concerned. This has not been a problem in the past. Children are encouraged to e-mail Mrs. Halley or Mrs Noble with any questions, with answers to problems, work they would like published or just to say hello.

Classroom Teachers

Classroom teachers are encouraged to make use of this resource which can provide activities and challenges for students who have been identified as gifted and talented. A student should be free to go online when classroom work is completed rather than, as so often is said by these students “I do more of the same/ I wait / I read”. In some cases it may even be preferable that a student work on a Sofos activity rather than doing work that they already know. Teachers can encourage these students to share some of their activities with the remainder of the class.