The Grammar Tradition

The grammar schools in Queensland owe much of their philosophy, values and customs to their English grammar school heritage and to the tradition of the great public schools of England. Medieval grammar schools, schola grammatica, as the name suggests, established a tradition of teaching Latin and later Greek, to prepare students for the priesthood, university studies and civic leadership through excellence in instruction and scholastic achievement.

In Britain, the eras of the Tudors (1500s) and the Stuarts (early-mid 1600s) were the golden eras for grammar schools. As education became more accessible to a wide cross-section of society, grammar schools were still firmly Christian in nature, but focused on a liberal education philosophy as a preparation for the specialised study of law, medicine or theology. In the seventeenth century there were important developments in educational theory and the school curriculum began to take on a form we would recognise today.

An important feature in the development of a grammar school tradition came with Dr Thomas Arnold of the Rugby School in England, who is attributed with providing the model for great public schools upon which the grammar schools of Australia are modelled. Central to Dr Arnold’s philosophy was the education of the whole student - mind, body and spirit. To this end he is credited with developing the House system and promoting physical education, nurturing leadership in youth, encouraging school spirit and a sense of duty and morality, which feature in modern grammar schooling. The great public schools of England, in addition to a focus on liberal education, developed the traditions of service, community obligation and the encouragement of excellence in all areas of the student's life. This philosophy has helped shape the contemporary approach to education in grammar schools.

A shift in emphasis in grammar schools from the ecclesiastical to the secular occurred during the Renaissance in the sixteenth century, when classics were added to the curriculum in response to the new humanism. In time, grammar schools were established by secular guilds rather than by religious groups.