JANUARY 2026

ASPENGROVE

MAGAZINE

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ASPENGROVE
MAGAZINE

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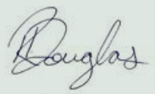
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In my first few months here, it has become clear that this is a community rooted in curiosity, compassion, and a shared commitment to nurturing thoughtful and capable young people. Each day on our beautiful campus, I see students engaged in learning that is not only academically rigorous but also designed to increase the character of the individual, and indeed the community. These moments are a privilege to watch, and after meeting the talented faculty and staff, as well as many of the dedicated parents at the school, I have no doubt that the future will hold many more.

This flagship issue of our new publication celebrates Aspengrove's strong foundation and is designed to bring you, our community, up to speed on current events and initiatives at the school. You will hear from teachers whose passion elevates their lessons, students who are learning new technologies to empower them for the future, and a graduate who is charting an inspiring path in her career. These stories, and those to come in future editions of the magazine, are reflective of the heart of Aspengrove – a belief that education should empower and uplift our youth while equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.

Thank you for joining us in celebrating the achievements, aspirations, and everyday moments that make Aspengrove School such a special place to be a kid. Truly, without the support of our engaged community of parents, none of this would be possible. I hope these pages leave you inspired by the strength of our community and excited for the chapters to come. The future is bright.

Sincerely,



Renée Douglas
Director of Development
Aspengrove Magazine Editor

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & HEAD OF SCHOOL

Aspengrove stands at a defining moment. For two decades, we have been a school where students feel known, supported, and inspired. Aspengrove is a place shaped by dedicated educators and has strong academic foundations and a campus unlike many others. Now, we are ready to take the next bold step in our advancement.

The future we envision is a mature, dynamic, world-class school that offers every student the breadth of opportunity they deserve. The key to unlocking this future is clear: growing our enrollment with purpose and intention.

Enrollment fuels everything at a time like this. It is history in the making. An increase in student population enables expanded course offerings and depth, strengthens co-curricular life, attracts exceptional teachers, adds student vibrancy, and creates the financial stability needed to build the facilities that elevate a school to be exceptional. Our growth from 272 students to 350 in just two years is already transforming what is possible. As we move toward a mature school of 400–500 students with double cohorts, we are already seeing the benefits: new academic pathways, new facilities, stronger teacher recruitment, reduced student attrition, and a more vibrant, diverse community.

As we grow, we are deepening our core program through personalized academics, enriched student life, and a renewed commitment to global citizenship. Enhanced literacy and numeracy in the Junior School, a new Grade 6/7 Middle School, and the introduction of Advanced Placement courses in the Senior School create dynamic learning options and environments for our students that meet and challenge them where they are at. Expanded arts, athletics, clubs, leadership opportunities, and school-wide community programming give students the opportunity to get engaged in ways beyond traditional academics. A focus on cultural awareness leads to self-development of strong character and engagement at home and abroad. These three pillars are the foundation upon which we grow.

We are also opening our campus up in new ways. This year, we have welcomed students from around the world – Mexico, Germany, Japan, and China – and are laying the groundwork for an on-campus Boarding Program that will bring new perspectives and energy to our community.

As our programs grow, so will our campus. A new Dining Hall, a Boarding House, a Sports Center with a Field House and Ice Rink, and future expansions of our Junior and Senior Schools will shape the next era of Aspengrove.

This is more than a plan. It is an opportunity to guide our school into the next echelon of learning centres. Aspengrove is ready to become a cultural, academic, and athletic hub for Central Vancouver Island. We have the vision, the people, and the momentum. Now, we must step forward together.

Best,

Iain McIver
Board Chair

Gary Kern
Head of School / CEO

Aspengrove School: The Vision Through Time

RENÉE DOUGLAS, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Since its inception as an idea in 1998, Aspengrove has evolved into a vibrant JK3 to Grade 12 school rooted in high-quality education, and has established itself among the leading independent schools in the province.

Nearly thirty years ago, five families, the Arais, Ciammaichellas, Fergs, Digneys, and Saunders, came together to open a school that provided an alternate option to what was currently available in Nanaimo. Inspired by the aspen tree, whose saplings grow apart from the parent tree while still

"The decision to create an independent school began with a belief that every community should have an opportunity to allow families to choose schooling that best suits their children's needs."

– Tony Ciammaichella, Founder

receiving important nourishment through its extensive root structure, they called it Aspengrove. With Alan Jackson as advisor to the founding Board and a group of passionate individuals who believed deeply in what they were building, Aspengrove opened its doors in 2003 on Portsmouth Road with just over forty students and a handful of dedicated educators.

As enrollment grew, so did the school's ambitions. In 2006, the school moved to its current location, a spacious 40-acre campus in Lantzville. New facilities, outdoor learning opportunities, and long-term program expansion gave us plenty of room to grow. Over the years, Aspengrove has continued to refine its identity as a university-preparatory school offering the International Baccalaureate framework from Kindergarten to Grade 10, recently phasing in the Advanced Placement curriculum for Grades 11 and 12, and continuing to see 100% university acceptance and high scholarship rates on students' applications.

Today, Aspengrove stands as a dynamic learning community shaped by its past and energized by its future. Its iterations through the years hold true to the founders' values: resilience, curiosity, passion, and a belief in and commitment to the school and its continuous growth.

We hope Aspengrove families continue to share their enthusiasm in creating exciting opportunities that delivers high-quality education to our students. Thank you to everyone who has contributed in our past; you wrote our founding narrative. It is not only appreciated, but instrumental to our start, for without the contribution of the community, there would not be an Aspengrove School.

As we enter the next era of Aspengrove, our vision and aspirations continue to take shape. Together, it is our responsibility to carry forward the founders' spirit and commit to shaping the next chapter of excellence at Aspengrove, where curiosity thrives, opportunities expand, and every learner is supported to go further than they imagined.

The Growing Vision

2003
- After years of dreaming and hard work planning and preparing, Aspengrove School is founded with Ado Arai and Tony Ciammaichella driving the vision!
- The first campus opens its doors on Portsmouth Road in Nanaimo with 42 students and 8 staff.
- Cathy Grunlund serves as the first Head of School.

2006
- Aspengrove relocates to its new 40-acre campus where it remains today.
- The first building opens with classrooms and a gymnasium, with great contributions from the small but mighty school community who gathered every Sunday on campus to get projects done, fences placed, and a playground built.

2008
- First graduating class! Senior level grades were added to the school over the years. Many students in this first graduating class joined the school in its inception days.

2010
- Program offerings expand across academics, arts, athletics, and outdoor education. The school strengthens its identity as an IB continuum institution, earning designation as such from the global IB governing body.

2019
- Thanks to the generosity of donors to make it happen, a new gymnasium opens and is named the Ravens Nest. Today this gymnasium is busier than ever and is a hive of activity all day long.

2023
- The Living Lab opens as another space made possible by the generosity of donors with a vision. This learning space allows students to interact with nature and learn in a tangible way.

2025
- Significant enrollment growth of almost 30% in two years, bringing renewed energy and opportunities for expanded offerings.
- Advanced Placement curriculum is introduced and first courses are offered to Grade 11 students.

Today
- Once again, generous donors come together to make something new-to-the-school possible. The Innovation Studio opens, launching the first academic space of its kind on campus where students will learn hands-on skills in a non-traditional classroom setting.

Aspengrove University

Stats 2023-25

100%
UNIVERSITY APPLICANTS ACCEPTED

85%
RECEIVED OFFERS FROM THEIR FIRST-CHOICE SCHOOL

COMBINED
$539,130
OFFERED IN SCHOLARSHIPS (AVERAGE OF $13,824/STUDENT)

178
UNIVERSITY OFFERS, AVERAGING 4.56 OFFERS PER STUDENT

Advancing Together: A Community Update on Campus Improvements

CATALIN ALBU, CHIEF FINANCIAL & OPERATIONS OFFICER

We are delighted to share a series of exciting developments that are shaping the future of our campus and community. Guided by our commitment to providing an exceptional learning environment, we have undertaken several projects and initiatives that reflect both our strategic vision and the generosity of our supporters.

Classroom Upgrades: A Fresh Start for Learning

This summer, Aspengrove undertook a comprehensive refresh of nearly every classroom across campus. Each learning space was newly painted, fitted with upgraded furniture, and enhanced with improved storage solutions. These upgrades have created brighter, more flexible, and better-organized classrooms, supporting modern teaching methods and providing students and staff with an inspiring environment in which to learn and grow.

Safer Access and Enhanced Facilities

The safety and well-being of our students, families, and staff remain paramount. Over the past year, Aspengrove has implemented significant traffic improvements at our campus. These enhancements include new signage, improved pedestrian pathways, and traffic calming measures, all designed to ensure a safer and more welcoming arrival and departure experience for everyone.

Innovation Studio Transformation

Aspengrove is also embarking on an ambitious upgrade of our Innovation Studio. The transformation of the current art room into the Innovation Studio marks the first phase of our planned Innovation and Science Centre. This new studio features flexible workspaces, advanced technology, including robotics and 3D printing, and dedicated areas for ceramics and student showcases. Our aim is to foster a culture of creativity, collaboration, and technological fluency, equipping students with the skills they need for the future.

The Pavillion: A New Hub for Community and Wellbeing

The Pavillion is not only a centre for gathering at mealtime but also a vital hub for our school community. With its generous space, the Pavillion can accommodate up to 140 students for lunch in a single sitting. This new capacity allows us to bring together larger groups in a comfortable, sheltered environment, enhancing the sense of togetherness and well-being that is central to the Aspengrove experience.

Strengthening Our Programs and Community

Beyond bricks and mortar, Aspengrove continues to expand its external programmes, offering over 50 co-curricular activities and clubs and forging partnerships with local organizations. Our vision for the coming years includes broadening these opportunities, ensuring every student finds their passion and place within our vibrant community.

These improvements are made possible thanks to the unwavering support of our families, alumni, and friends. As highlighted in recent communications, every contribution—large or small—helps us create a lasting legacy for current and future generations of Aspengrove students.

As we celebrate these milestones, we remain focused on what drives us: to provide an outstanding International Baccalaureate education in a nurturing and innovative environment. We invite our entire community to stay engaged, share feedback, and join us in shaping the next chapter of Aspengrove's story.

Thank you for your continued partnership and belief in the power of education.

Welcoming International Students

NICOLE CARPENTER, DIRECTOR OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Aspengrove is committed to global leadership and cross-cultural understanding. Welcoming international students is one of the ways we bring these values to life each day. This year, we are pleased to welcome international students from Japan, China, Mexico, and Germany. Our International Student Program continues to grow, adding energy, perspective, and richness to the learning experience for all students.

Even in these early stages, the impact of this program is evident and meaningful. Cultural exchange happens naturally throughout the school day; Grade 8 student, Luciana from Mexico, supports students' conversational practice in Mrs. Ohly's Spanish class, while Layla, in her senior year, shares her insights with Grade 9 students preparing for their upcoming trip to Japan. Everywhere you look, our international students are eager to contribute in authentic and memorable ways.

Just as we have welcomed others into our community, our local students have been welcomed in turn through a series of international study placements. Our Grade 10 students recently travelled to Germany and our Grade 9 students will soon experience Japan. Learning in another country can broaden perspectives, deepen understanding, and create lasting connections. These everyday moments of cultural exchange help shape a school grounded in curiosity, respect, and global awareness — pillars, we believe, of strong character.

"This week in Germany has been the best week of my life."

– Ronan & Grace, Grade 10 Students

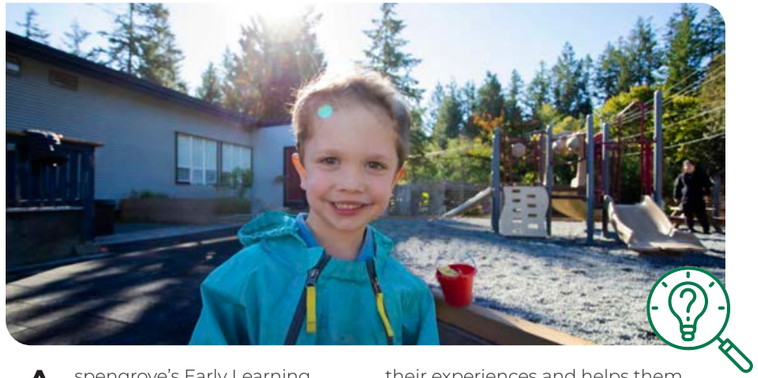
When our Admissions team connects with partners around the world, we are proud to share that Aspengrove is an inclusive and connected community, committed to embracing international students and diverse cultures.

Our international students strengthen our community and highlight our shared commitment to learning with and from one another. We look forward to seeing this program grow further in the years to come.

Junior School

Aspengrove's Early Learning Centre: Where Curiosity Begins

YUKO ISHII & JESSICA MCRAE, EARLY LEARNING LEAD EDUCATORS



Aspengrove's Early Learning Centre is a special place. Founded on the belief that young children thrive when they are given a safe environment to explore, question, imagine, and connect, the ELC encourages curiosity, age-appropriate independence, and celebrating the unique strengths within each child.

Each day begins with a rhythm that balances structure and free-play. Starting with the IB curriculum in these early years, Independent Inquiry is a daily practice for the children, giving them time and space to explore activities that spark their interests. As an early childhood educator, Jessica McRae explains, "It's important that children have agency in their learning…children are already curious beings and allowing them to explore the world through our Units of Inquiry fosters their creativity."

Alongside inquiry time, students participate in one specialist class each day, such as Library, P.E., Music, or French, which broadens their experiences and helps them discover new passions. These classes are taught by dedicated specialists who introduce children to early literacy, movement, rhythm, and language in joyful, unintimidating, and age-appropriate ways.

Outdoor learning is another defining feature of the ELC. Aspengrove's 40-acre campus offers forests, fields, playgrounds, and natural spaces that become extensions of the classroom. "Outdoor play is one of the most important parts of life at Aspengrove," says Yuko Ishii. "Whether on our playground, the Junior playground, or exploring multiple locations across the 40-acre property, students spend time outside every day, rain or shine." This daily immersion in nature supports development, resilience, and fosters a deep sense of connection with the physical world.

Connection is woven into the fabric of the program through the school's beloved buddy system. Each ELC student is paired with an older buddy, meeting regularly to read together, work on crafts, and engage in activities that encourage social skills and strengthen friendships across grade levels. These relationships help young learners feel rooted in the broader school community, building a sense of belonging that lasts well beyond the early years.

As children progress through the program, they develop the self-help, communication, and social-emotional skills that prepare them for the transition to Kindergarten. JK4 students celebrate this milestone with a graduation ceremony that marks not just readiness for the next grade, but the confidence and independence they've built along the way.

Families often remark on the warmth of the ELC environment, something the educators take to heart. "We want every child to feel safe and cared for while they are at school," Mrs. McRae says. "So from the moment they join us, we take the time to get to know them and understand what makes them unique." This individualized attention, combined with small class sizes and a nurturing team of early childhood educators supported by the entire school, creates a setting where children feel secure enough to take risks, ask questions, and grow.

Aspengrove's Early Learning Centre is more than a preschool program. It is a starting point for joining the community, forging friendships and building a support base that will carry students through their years as they discover the world around them and develop the confidence and joy that will carry them forward into their school years and beyond.

Junior School

Teaching our Youngest Learners

SUSAN RIORDAN, JUNIOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL & DIRECTOR OF THE ELC

"I am a thinker because I really like to draw, so I make books with my drawings and add words."

– Finley, Gr. 1

REFLECTIVE **Communicators**
PRINCIPLED
Balanced
RISK-TAKERS
CARING **Inquirers**
Open-minded
KNOWLEDGEABLE
THINKERS

While the senior school phases into its new AP curriculum, the IB Learner Profile is woven into everything we do in the Junior School. It guides us as we nurture young learners to grow both academically and as curious, caring, and confident young people who know and value their uniqueness and place within the world. The ten attributes of IB provide a shared language for growth that even our youngest students can understand and embody.

In the early years, the Learner Profile comes to life through play-based exploration, gentle guidance, and daily opportunities to practice kindness, independence, and thoughtful decision-making. By introducing these values at the JK level through to Grade 5, we lay a strong foundation for students to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally through the years and beyond.

"When people need help, I help them. That's when I am principled."
– Norah, Gr. 1

"I am caring when I help someone up when they fall on the playground."
– Fiona, Gr. 1

Junior School

Leadership in Action: Inside the Junior School

SUSAN RIORDAN, JUNIOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL & DIRECTOR OF ELC

At Aspengrove, lifelong leadership skills begin in the Junior School with small, meaningful opportunities that empower students to take initiative, collaborate, and share their voices with confidence. Through student-led initiatives, our young learners discover how to communicate their ideas, plan next steps, and support one another through the process to bring ideas to life and in our Big Buddy-Little Buddy pairs. As they practice these skills, the students begin to understand that leadership is not always about being in charge; it can also mean working together, listening thoughtfully, being a role model for others, and helping a group succeed.

This type of learning happens constantly within the Junior School through classroom projects and co-curricular activities. Two of the more prominent examples our community may have seen, however, include the Junior School assemblies, which are led by students, and the Junior School Talent Show, arranged by grade 4 students Ava, Bellamy and Alana.

By seeing their ideas through from planning to conception, the students learn that leadership is rooted in responsibility, empathy, and teamwork. These experiences help our students develop the skills and self-assurance that will carry them forward as they grow into thoughtful, capable leaders and participants within the Aspengrove community and beyond.

"I was very excited at the opportunity to plan and host our Junior School talent show. It was a huge success! It was both hard work and lots of fun telling students about the show, running the auditions, writing the script, organizing the lineup for two shows, and hosting each show. I hope we can do a show again next year, and I would love to be able to be involved again!"

– Bellamy, Gr. 4 Student

"[The Junior School Talent Show] was fun and exciting, but I thought if I did something wrong, I would be embarrassed, so I was also excited and nervous all at the same time."
– Pippa, Gr. 3 Student

"It felt nerve-racking to perform in the talent show, but after I got the hang of it, it was fun."
– Zane, Gr. 3 Student

Middle School

Roots & Routines: Building Middle School Traditions that Matter

ANGIE NIXON & KYLE NYSTAD, MIDDLE SCHOOL FACULTY

The launch of the new Middle School, a dedicated grouping of grades 6 & 7, marked more than a structural change in 2024-25; it opened the door for students in these grades to transition out of Junior School, take on more personal responsibility in a safe environment, and form a community uniquely their own.

Today, with thoughtful planning and intentional programming, Aspengrove's Middle School faculty have designed a calendar of events that act as rites of passage and foster a strong sense of belonging and connection. These events are becoming traditions and points of celebration within these grades. Here are some examples of these connection points. We are always happy to share more about them with you.

- **Pumpkin Run:** A fun 3km cross-country trail run in October. The top three Grade 6 & 7 boys and girls each win a pumpkin!
- **Winterfest:** A joyful winter celebration that brings light and laughter to this time of year.
- **Ravens Deca:** A more challenging 10km trail run through our beautiful campus backwoods. Participants who cross the finish line receive a coveted Ravens Deca medallion.
- **Arts Cafe:** A recurring music showcase, happening December, March & June, where participants have a chance to get on stage in front of their peers to sing, play instruments, and share their artistic skills.
- **Strathcona Trip:** This Outdoor Educational Experience trip happens annually in October. This trip stretches students' comfort zones and builds their resilience while strengthening friendships.
- **Sabresfest Ultimate Tournament:** Middle Schoolers take a trip to Vancouver to play in the longest-running elementary school ultimate tournament in the province!
- **Speeches:** In February, the students flex their presentation and public speaking skills to grow their confidence in a friendly environment.

Feature

A Place Where Ideas Take Shape: Celebrating the Innovation Studio

RENÉE DOUGLAS, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

When students returned to campus after the winter break, something was different. The Treehouse building, long known as the place to find the art room at Aspengrove, had undergone an enhancement – the start of a transformation into a bright, creative hub buzzing with possibility. Thanks to the generosity of our community, the Innovation Studio, the first phase of Aspengrove's future Innovation and Science Centre, opened its doors earlier this month and is already becoming a place where curiosity and imagination can take root.

The moment you step inside, you can feel the shift. Open sightlines and new flooring brighten the space, and beautiful storage units keep it organized. Worktables, robotics stations, ceramics equipment, and flexible spaces designed for hands-on exploration zones allow students to move around and explore more freely. It is a room that invites students to try, test, build, and create. It is also a room that exists because our community believed in what it could become and invested in it for the possibilities it unlocks.

The Innovation Studio is going to reshape how students learn. For example, the ceramics program is underway. Recently, grade 10 students spent an afternoon designing simple pottery, creating textures with rollers and glazes. Grade 7s created clay busts of inspirational people, moving easily from painted portraits to shaping clay into 3-dimensional representations of historical and contemporary figures. Meanwhile, younger students have been experimenting with circuits, discovering how light, sound, and movement can be controlled through their own designs. Senior students are beginning to imagine projects that blend art, engineering, and storytelling in ways that were not possible before.

This is the power of having the beginnings of a makerspace on campus. It gives students permission to think differently. It encourages them to take risks, embrace mistakes, and see learning as something they can shape with their own hands. It also brings together disciplines that are often kept apart, helping students understand that creativity and technology are not separate worlds but partners in innovation and design.

The studio is more than an open room filled with tools. It is a place where students can discover what they are capable of; a space where a robotics field sits beside a pottery wheel, where a 3D printer hums next to a table covered in sketches, and where students of all ages can see their ideas move from imagination to reality. It is a place that reflects Aspengrove's commitment to preparing students for a world that values adaptability, collaboration, and inventive thinking.

None of this would have been possible without our community. With individual gifts and our community's contributions to the *Bright Futures Fund* annual campaign, we not only met our goal, but we exceeded it! This is a remarkable achievement that speaks to the belief our families, alumni, faculty, and supporters have in Aspengrove's vision. Every contribution, large or small, helped bring this space to life. The studio stands as a testament to what can happen when a community invests in its children and their future.

As the year unfolds, the Innovation Studio will continue to grow into a central part of student life. Faculty are already planning interdisciplinary projects and clubs so students of every age can build foundational knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the real world. The studio will also serve as a gathering place for exhibitions, demonstrations, and celebrations of student creativity.

The Innovation Studio is only the beginning. It marks the first step toward a larger Innovation and Science Centre that will support generations of learners and other projects on the horizon for Aspengrove. For now, though, it is an exciting start to stand in this new space and hear the excitement of discovery and problem-solving as new projects come to life. This room, built through generosity and shared vision, will shape bright futures for years to come.

Senior School

The *Advanced Placement* Advantage

MIKE VINCENT, SENIOR SCHOOL FACULTY

Aspengrove School is excited to pursue a significant enhancement to its senior academic offerings, transitioning from the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme to the globally recognized Advanced Placement (AP) system. This strategic move is driven by a commitment to providing students with greater flexibility, tailored academic rigour, and expanded elective choices crucial for success in a rapidly evolving post-secondary landscape.

While the IB Diploma Programme provided a valuable framework and significant academic rigour, its fixed, six-course structure limited room for individual student customization. The all-or-nothing model meant that students had to commit to the full breadth of the Diploma, regardless of their personal interests, specific university target, or career aspirations.

The AP system, by contrast, operates on an *à la carte* model, dramatically shifting the power of choice back to the student. This flexibility allows each student to design a high school transcript that is more aligned with their strengths, interests, and future goals. Students can now precisely customize the amount of academic rigour they undertake by selecting the specific number of AP courses they wish to challenge themselves with. A student focused on a specialized arts program might choose two AP courses, while a student aiming for a highly competitive engineering program could take three or four—all while maintaining the flexibility to pursue necessary provincial courses and electives. This also provides students with the flexibility to pursue non-academic goals such as high-performance athletics or the arts.

Furthermore, AP enjoys stronger and broader recognition, particularly among North American universities. Due to its long history and standardized scoring, admissions officers across Canada and the United States are intimately familiar with the AP curriculum and exam results, often leading to more straightforward advanced credit and placement opportunities.

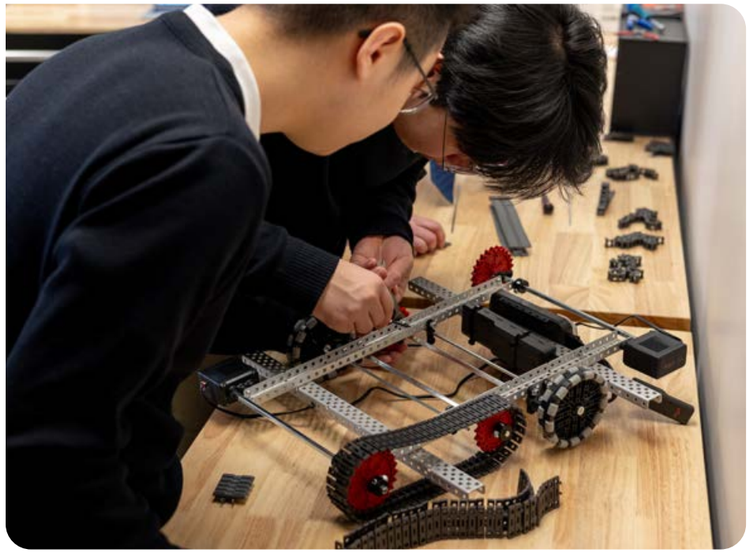
Perhaps the most exciting benefit of this transition is the ability to introduce a host of innovative courses that were difficult to integrate within the constraints of the IB Diploma. Aspengrove is now able to offer engaging, career-relevant academic pathways, including: AP Psychology, AP Computer Science, AP Language, and AP Bio, as some examples from this year and next. These new electives allow students to explore emerging fields, discover new passions, and build transcripts that truly reflect their diverse interests before they even apply to university.

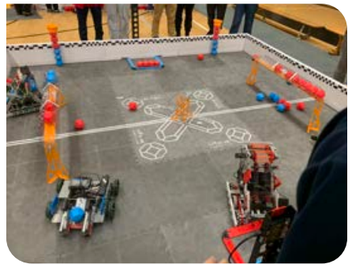
The switch to the AP system reinforces Aspengrove's dedication to individualized education, ensuring that every student has the optimal structure and resources to pursue academic excellence on their own terms.

Senior School

Design: CAD, Coding, & Robotics

DUSTIN ORSER, SENIOR SCHOOL FACULTY





Design education builds skills that allow students to become thoughtful, capable creators and problem-solvers, which can be applied across many career disciplines. In addition to learning essential skills for technical proficiency in fields like engineering and architecture by using current industry standard software, courses in Design foster curiosity and self-agency, and strengthen a resilient mindset.

Last year, Aspengrove acquired Vex robotics equipment to develop a Robotics curriculum and began offering learning opportunities to students from grades 3 to 12. Increasing these offerings this year using the new Innovation Studio space, through this hands-on experience in designing, building, and programming, students gain experience with concepts and skills vital for technical careers from an early age. Robotics projects encourage teamwork and close collaboration, essential skills that are highly valued in modern engineering and design workplaces.

"Robotics...is a [new] club where we build, code, experiment, and just spend our time together. It's a great opportunity to gain a priceless experience with STEM and make lifelong memories. I have learned skills like collaboration, team-work, and persistence while doing something that I love."

- Tim, Grade 12 Student & Robotics Team Lead

Coding adds another dimension to this learning. As students write and refine programs, they sharpen their logical reasoning and analytical skills, enabling them to approach problems methodically and approach challenges with patience and creativity.

By incorporating these skills into the curriculum, Aspengrove School ensures students gain both technical fluency as well as critical soft skills, such as teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving, needed to thrive on any path. This holistic approach, driven through a Design curriculum, prepares students exceptionally well for diverse career pathways.

Senior School

Under the Winter Lights: Senior School Winter Formal

LAYLA YABUKI, GRADE 12 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

The decision to attend the Winter Formal came easily for Grade 12 student Layla. As a student council member and the prefect responsible for decorating, the night was already flagged in her calendar. The decision to attend, however, was more personal than her duties. Layla knew this would likely be the last dance she would experience with her peers, and she wanted to make the most of it. This Winter Formal evening was precious time for her to be with friends and capture some of those core teenage memories.

Walking into the event, the school felt alive. The only way to describe it was that Layla immediately knew it would be a night to remember. As she walked in, there was a blur of chatter and joking between students and teachers, some who did not often get a chance to hang out together. Music played in the background, and lights twinkled around the room. The Hive was transformed into an elegant and cozy space where the students would start their evening with a shared meal. The sprung gym was elevated into a giant dance floor! This year, more students than ever attended, and their presence added energy to the evening. Layla was proud of the decorating committee's hard work and was happy to hear other students commenting on how magical the atmosphere felt and appreciating the fun balloon arch as a focal point.

Events like this stay with us long after we leave school. They become the stories we carry into adulthood and memories of the "good old days" in our teens. For Layla, the Winter Formal and other school events are not just dates in the calendar – they are celebrations with peers and important milestones. It is why she encourages every student to show up when they can, step into that room, and be part of making nights like this bigger than any one person.

"Winter formal and events like this matter because they tend to empower students to create more connections between grades and help build a sense of community within the school. These events also help strengthen school spirit and make students feel more positive about being a part of the school community."

– Layla, Grade 12

Senior School

Breaking New Ground: Aspengrove Pilots University-Level Case Competition with Partners in Health

BERTIN BAHATI, SENIOR SCHOOL FACULTY

As part of the students' education in developing a global leadership lens that enables them to be knowledgeable about the world and view issues through different perspectives and contexts, we are pleased to have forged a partnership with the Canadian wing of Partners in Health (PIH), an international organization dedicated to bringing the benefits of modern health sciences to those most in need. Over the past few months, students participated in a co-curricular that investigated global health crises and ways in which we might begin to tackle them.

The crux of this co-curricular was a Case Competition with Partners in Health. Usually a programme offered only for university students, Aspengrove was the first Senior School in Canada to host this type of competition. We are thrilled to share that it was a successful day of learning and participation from our students.

On a Pro-D day in November, the Hive was packed with enthusiastic Senior School students who put their critical thinking and newfound global health knowledge to the test. The case competition challenge presented to the students required them to work in groups to design a creative and practical solution to a complex Tuberculosis outbreak in Lesotho. This real-world scenario asked students to delve into the social, economic, and political factors that shape health outcomes in the country.

Throughout the intense process, students demonstrated outstanding skills in public speaking by delivering compelling, well-structured arguments, problem-solving by analyzing a complex health crisis, and critical thinking by formulating multifaceted interventions. Their final presentations showed excellent teamwork and leadership.

The culmination was a series of excellent presentations judged by a panel of experts. The event provided all participants with a deeper understanding of global health and justice, and the immense effort required to address health inequities worldwide. This structure of case competition also gave them experience with a university-level curriculum.

Congratulations to all the PIH co-curricular students and participants for their hard work and passionate engagement with this vital topic. We look forward to continuing to offer these types of opportunities for our students and to building on our partnership with PIH.

Senior School

Senior School Athletes Rise Through Teamwork and High Performance

LUKE HOLMES, DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS

Aspengrove's athletics program continues to be a vibrant and meaningful extension of student learning, providing opportunities for students to pursue sport with purpose, commitment, and integrity. This year, our student-athletes have demonstrated exceptional dedication across all athletics teams: basketball, volleyball, and hockey. Further, we've launched the High Performance Program (HPP), designed to support students striving to balance academic excellence with competitive sport.

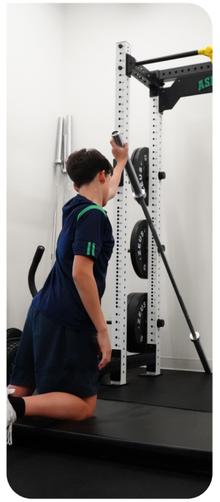
For students involved in any of these teams, daily training, competitions, and co-curricular commitment have strengthened their resilience, teamwork, and leadership skills both on and off the court. Students are challenged to push beyond their comfort zones, manage adversity, and contribute positively to their teams and school community.

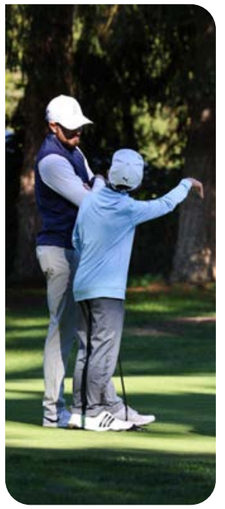
The High Performance Program further supports students competing at advanced levels by offering structured training time and access to expert coaching around goal-setting, recovery, and leadership. Participants learn that high performance is not just about results, but about preparation, accountability, and consistent effort over time. Across all programs, students are encouraged to lead by example, support their teammates, and represent the school with pride. Whether competing in a championship game or committing to early-morning training, our athletes embody the values of teamwork, perseverance, and respect.

We are proud of all Aspengrove student-athletes for their commitment to pursuing excellence through sport and for the leadership they continue to show within our community.

"Some skills I think I've learned over the years are having lots of patience with myself and others. I was, and still am, fairly hard on myself, but each year I grow in confidence and remind myself to be patient as a learner. When there is something I'm struggling with, I believe I have the skills to help me keep on practicing and pushing through it."

– Suuvi, Gr. 9 Student





Alumni

From “Tunes at Noon” to Biomedical Innovation:

Interview with Alumna, Laura O’Keeffe

What is your best memory of AGS?
We used to have an event called “Tunes at Noon” during lunch once a week. People would play music that they’d been working on in class or on their own and I loved seeing people perform and have fun with each other.

What is the most important thing you learned at AGS that prepared you for the future?
I think Aspengrove gave me confidence in my ability to learn. Between AP classes, volleyball, and all the different types of art (woodworking, stained glass, jazz ensemble) I had a lot of opportunities to be a beginner at something and then watch myself improve. Those experiences taught me that I have potential for growth if I take the time, and that lesson has been super important in all my adventures since Aspengrove.

Can you describe your work/what you’re doing now?
I’m now doing Research and Development for a medical device to help people with Type 1 diabetes avoid dangerously low blood sugar events. I get to design, fabricate, and test all the devices we work with, so it’s a super hands-on, arts and craftsy corner of biomedical engineering. Other than work, I do a lot of rock climbing, and I’m really looking forward to the outdoor summer season starting!

What is your best advice for the high school students of Aspengrove?
Pick a direction/goal and go for it. As you work on it and learn more, reassess your goal and adjust as needed. (See: my convoluted education/career path - I’ve learned a lot along the way!)

Can you briefly summarize your post-AGS education/experiences and highlights?
After graduating from Aspengrove, I attended McGill for a Bachelor of Science degree. I knew I wanted to study math, and after my first organic chemistry class, I decided to double major in math and chemistry. By the time I graduated, I had decided that I didn’t want to work in either math or chem, so I spent some time working and learning Spanish, stretching my brain in ways I hadn’t for a long time.

I then pivoted and did a master’s in Biomedical Engineering at Trinity College Dublin. COVID happened, I couldn’t find work in my field in BC, so I started looking elsewhere and wound up at my current job on a really cool project at MIT in Boston.

Expanding Opportunities Through External Programs at Aspengrove School

ALISON STROBL, DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL PROGRAMS

Discover your passions and build connections in your community!

As Aspengrove School continues to grow, so do the opportunities we offer our students and the wider Nanaimo community. This year, we introduced a new role—Director of External Programs—to support families, expand community partnerships, and enrich student life both during and beyond the school day.

After nearly 20 years at Aspengrove, I’m thrilled to step into this role and guide the next phase of program development. My work focuses on coordinating a wide range of offerings, including our Out of School Care Program, After School Lessons, and School Break Camps for Pro-D Days, school closures, and seasonal holidays. These programs are designed to help every learner feel connected, engaged, and supported at school.

Aspengrove’s out-of-school programming is open to all families in the Nanaimo region. Each camp is thoughtfully designed to spark curiosity, encourage hands-on learning, and offer a balance of STEM exploration, artistic expression, and athletic engagement.

“Both our children participated in the Musical Theatre Summer Camp and it was an amazing experience! They were both fully engaged all week, rehearsing their lines, learning choreography for several song and dance numbers, and designing the sets and costumes. At the end, the performance was so fun and impressive to watch. Both our kids have already asked when the next Musical Theatre Camp will be!”
- Marcy and Chris, parents

In addition to camps, Aspengrove offers a wide selection of private and small-group After School Lessons, also available to the broader community. Families can choose from subjects such as Bass, Voice, Piano, Taekwondo, and Mandarin. With both one-on-one and small-group options, these lessons provide flexible, high-quality instruction tailored to each learner’s pace and interests.

“I really liked learning the songs and singing in the Summer Camp. It was so fun [playing the part of] the Sea Star! I want to go again!”
- Wyatt (Kindergarten)

A key focus of External Programs is building strong partnerships with exceptional organizations and instructors in Sports, Arts, and STEM. We are proud to collaborate with outstanding local leaders—including the Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo Gymnastics, Nanaimo Science, and several individual instructors—who bring high-quality, hands-on programming directly onto our campus. These partnerships create opportunities for students to explore new skills, gain confidence, and cultivate their talents in a supportive environment.

With an expanding lineup of programs, Aspengrove is proud to serve as a vibrant hub for enrichment throughout Nanaimo. Each program cycle brings more families onto campus and strengthens connections across the region. Our goal is to provide exceptional learning experiences that inspire curiosity, creativity, and personal growth for students and the wider community.

Registration for upcoming camps and lessons is now open. We encourage you to explore, learn, and connect with us at Aspengrove and share this with your friends!

Celebrating Those Who Helped Shape Us:
Interview with Aileen Saunders

It was a very exciting time! In the early days everyone (teachers, students, parents) was open to ideas to grow the school, willing to learn from each other, and curious to see how our young school could nurture a small group of students. It felt like one big family, and everyone knew each other. The school is now going through very exciting times again with growth and new faces and programs in the school that are sure to engage each student both in and out of the classroom. The campus looks great and the new spaces show the school's commitment to growth and enriching the school experience.

What's a memory from the first years that makes you smile? Is there a story you love telling about the school's beginnings?
A few memories and events stand out.
- The school productions and musicals were impressive. In our early days, to see a small school put together such polished shows felt wonderful. They were a collective effort all around with some students working on the production, directorial, or technical roles too. Events like those allowed quieter students to participate in different ways and sometimes, even surprise themselves (and their parents!).
- Students vs. Teachers' games ranging from sports games to board games and Magic the Gathering. These show the close relationship that the students have with their teachers and that they can have fun and share interests in common with each other.
- Lastly, the first few Intercultural Days also come to mind. These involved the whole school and all grades participated in the activities, costumes, and sharing of food from around the world. Parents enjoyed volunteering because it was a chance to meet other parents and enjoy the good food.

What motivates you to continue volunteering after all these years? What part of volunteering brings you the most joy?
I started volunteering to get to know other parents, but it has also allowed me to get to know the teachers and administrators. It's a great feeling when we all look back and see that working together can accomplish many great and fun things to grow our school.

I can see that volunteering enriches the school experience for the whole community, so that motivates me to continue doing it after all these years. It's heartwarming when we hear comments from students and parents about how much they enjoyed an event or that they feel welcomed to the school or have made life-long friends. It's also fun to get to know and interact with the students and marvel at how they all grow so fast and follow them through the years and after graduation.

What's something about volunteering at the school that people might not expect?
The APA is a very friendly and supportive group of parents. We work together to organize programs such as hot lunch, social and community events, and fundraising initiatives. I've enjoyed meeting many parents and getting to know teachers who have become my life-long friends. Also, volunteering can look different for those that are unable to do it in-person - being part of a brainstorming committee, donating food or materials for different initiatives, promoting events, and many more.

Aspengrove at-a-glance

21 STUDENTS IN 2025-26 GRADUATING CLASS

100% UNIVERSITY ACCEPTANCE RATE

16 # OF ATHLETICS TEAMS

63 # OF FACULTY

351 # OF STUDENTS K-12

IB UNTIL GRADE 10 AND THEN AP PROGRAMME GRADES 11 & 12

55 # OF CO-CURRICULARS & CLUBS OFFERED FOR ALL STUDENTS K-12

8 # IN FIRST GRADUATING CLASS

40 ACRE CAMPUS

2003 FOUNDING YEAR

214 # OF ALUMNI

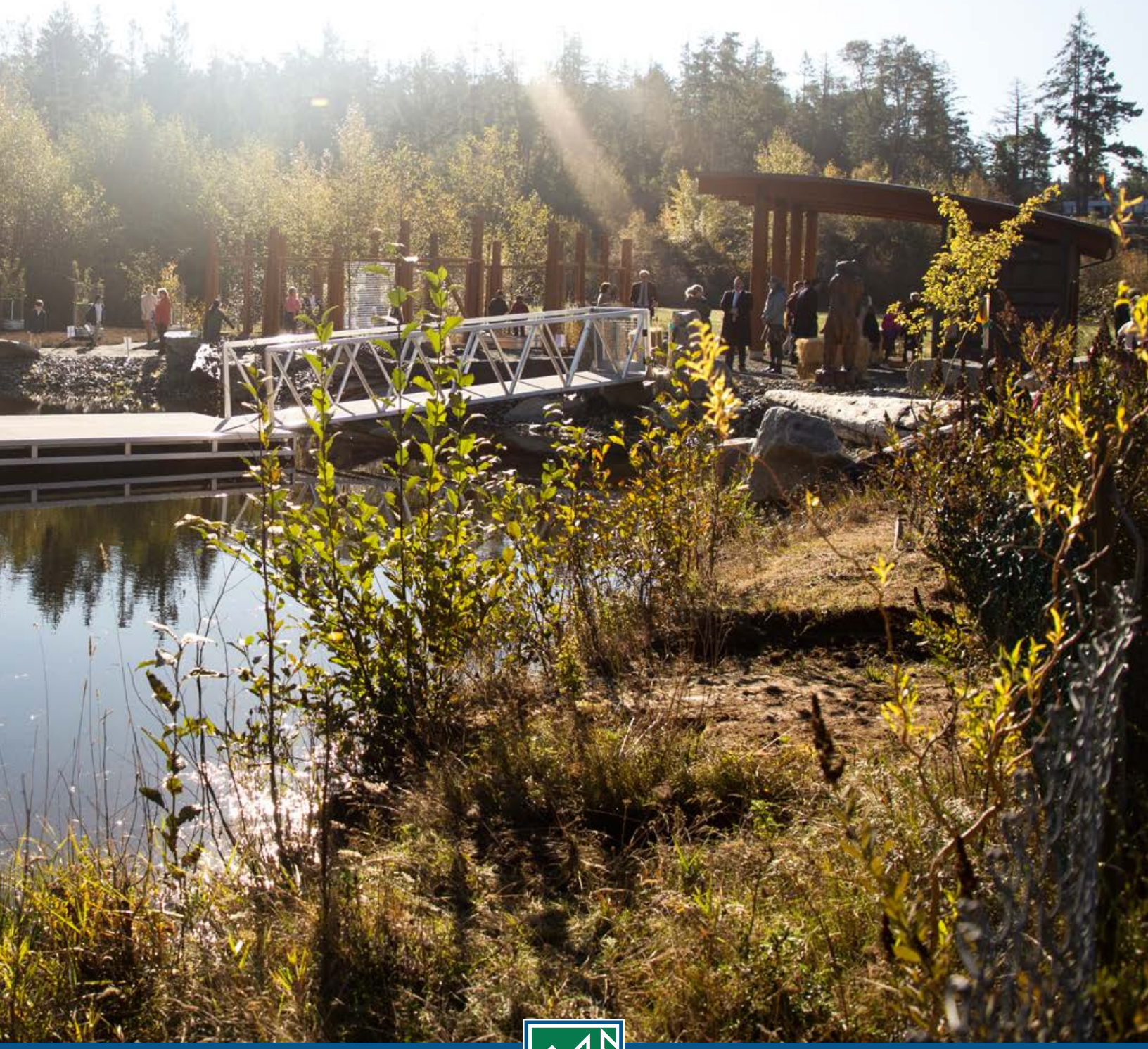
SAVE THE DATE
Mark your calendars!

Re-enrollment opens on February 9th,
and we are looking forward to welcoming your family back for another wonderful year at Aspengrove.
We kindly ask that you pay close attention to the re-enrollment deadline of February 20th.
Your timely response helps us plan thoughtfully for next year and ensures we have the information needed to make decisions about facilities, programs, and the spaces our students rely on every day.
We will be sharing more details with you very soon.

ASPENGROVE CAMPS

Scan me!

Strong *Roots*, Bright *Futures*



7660 Clark Drive
Lantzville, British Columbia
Canada V0R 2H0

P: 250.390.2201
aspengroveschool.ca