



CHESTERTON ACADEMY

OF ST. ISIDORE

What We Offer: A Joyfully Classical Catholic Education **Chesterton Academy of St. Isidore Learning Center (SILC)**

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”
—G.K. Chesterton

Are you interested in making sure your child has an education that teaches them about the greatest works of the literary canon?

What about a rigorous grounding in math, science, Latin, philosophy, and theology as well as the freedom to learn from home at a flexible pace?

Most importantly, do you want your child to learn in a school where Jesus Christ is at the centre—one which places strong emphasis on the development of Christian virtues and an appreciation of truth, beauty and goodness?

We offer a hybrid (online and in person) classical education from a Catholic perspective for Grades 9-12. Our content is informed by the Chesterton Academy program, while our categories and learning outcomes are taken from the Alberta Program of Studies.

Just as medieval educators adapted the classical model they inherited for the new technologies and media of their day, our pedagogical approach takes the ancient and medieval program of learning and assessment while allowing students the flexibility of learning from home.

What is Classical Education?

“Classical education is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness and beauty so that, in Christ, a student is better able to know, glorify and enjoy God.”

—Andrew Kern

The classical model of education was founded on the trivium, which is Latin for “three ways.” All students needed to master the trivium, or liberal arts, as preparation for their future studies. These were the “tools” and skills they needed to understand, interpret, and apply the knowledge they would receive and construct over the course of their learning—the “ways” that led them to meaningful learning and personal development.

The three arts of the trivium are:

- **Grammar**
- **Logic**
- **Rhetoric**

To better understand the trivium and its order, we should look at each art more closely.

- **Grammar**

“Philosophy is written in that great book which ever is before our eyes -- I mean the universe -- but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols in which it is written.”

–Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*

Grammar does not just mean the rules of language. The medievals saw the universe as a book that could be read and understood, and that every fact was full of meaning. We could learn to read this book by studying the world and interpreting what we see through the great tradition of thought and art that precedes us. (This was the focus of the quadrivium, the second part of the classical education model; these were the “four ways” of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.)

Our patron, St. Isidore of Seville, was a seventh-century grammarian who did this in his *Etymologies*, the first Christian encyclopedia. For example, his entry on rivers gives a detailed scientific explanation of how they flow and offers several examples of rivers throughout the world, but his definition is filled with quotes from ancient poets like Virgil and church fathers like St. Jerome.

In classical education, the meaning of words and the meaning of the world are intertwined.

Every subject has its own grammar. For example, “The grammar of History should consist, I think, of dates, events, anecdotes and personalities...The grammar of Mathematics begins, of course, with the multiplication table...and with the recognition of geometrical shapes and the grouping of numbers” (Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*).

In short, grammar is the facts of the world and the categories we organize them into, as informed by the classical tradition of art, science, and learning.

- **Logic**

“The school disputations of the Middle Ages...were intended to make sure that the pupil understood his own opinion, and (by necessary correlation) the opinion opposed to it, and could enforce the grounds of the one and confute those of the other....the present modes of education contain nothing which in the smallest degree supplies the place [of the disputation].”

–John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Logic, also known as dialectic, captures what modern education means by “critical thinking.” It means reasoning about and finding applications for what has been learned in the grammar stage.

However, importantly, this was always meant to be done in a group setting as part of a dialogue. The medieval classroom was characterized by the disputation, a practice in which the instructor would offer the students a question during the lecture and then spend the rest of class time debating that topic with them. Students could ask questions and challenge their instructor. This not only helped students understand what they were learning, but also taught them to understand both sides of an issue, come to an informed opinion themselves, and build a community of inquiry with their teacher and their peers.

- **Rhetoric**

“Rhetoric is the master art of the trivium, for it presupposes and makes use of grammar and logic; it is the art of communicating through symbols ideas about reality.”

–Sister Miriam Joseph, *The Trivium–The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric*

Rhetoric is the art of presenting your knowledge and ideas in a clear, persuasive, and appealing way. This is perhaps the most “practical” of the arts, because it not only demonstrates a student’s learning to their teacher, but also prepares them for their future lives and careers, in which the way they present themselves will be essential for their success.

How Does Chesterton Academy of SILC Do Classical Education?

The great Catholic media scholar from Edmonton, Marshall McLuhan, who wrote his dissertation on the trivium, recognized that the digital age offered huge potential to, as he put it, turn the city into a classroom. In other words, electronic media allows students to learn these three arts outside the confines of a traditional brick and mortar schoolhouse. The entire world is now a place where learning can happen.

At the Chesterton Academy of SILC, we recognize the potential that online learning has to unleash the power of the trivium for our students. Our pedagogy is thus both classical and cutting-edge.

Our model works this way:

- **Grammar: *Online Modules***

Each subject is presented with in-depth and detailed content. Students learn to understand and interpret what they are learning using the great texts of the classical and Catholic tradition, ranging from Euclid to Homer to Augustine to Aquinas to Dante to, pre-eminently, G.K. Chesterton.

The categories into which this content is organized are taken from the Alberta Program of Studies. Chesterton was a great advocate of localism, and, as an Albertan school, we are proud to offer a universally applicable classical education from our uniquely Albertan perspective.

Thus, for example, History class consists of learning chronological history as delineated by the Chesterton Academy program, presented using themes taken from Alberta's Social Studies curriculum. This also prepares Grade 12 students to take Alberta's diploma exam.

Course content is posted in weekly online modules for students. This gives them time to familiarize themselves with the material so that they can be prepared for the disputation phase of their learning.

- **Logic: *Live Meets, Seminars, and Discussion Boards***

Our students can be either in-person or online.

The atmosphere of the medieval disputation is created through seminars, live meets, and discussion boards. Students are given the grammatical material in advance of these discussions and are thus given time to study and ruminate on them. They then discuss and debate what they have learned with their teachers and peers.

In-person students come twice a week to our classrooms at Holy Spirit Catholic Elementary School for fellowship and for learning. This learning either consists of seminars, which are in-person Socratic conversations, or hybrid classes, which are also live streamed and recorded so that online students can also attend. (These lessons are recorded and uploaded to Canvas so they can be rewatched, or viewed by students who were not able to attend.) Classes may also include online forums where students can engage in Socratic discussions about the material.

In this way, the online setting allows students all around the world to engage in dialogic and collaborative learning, despite their disparate schedules and life situations.

- **Rhetoric: *Assignments***

Students demonstrate their learning through completing assignments which call upon them to demonstrate the rhetorical skills necessary for the 21st century. This means everything from written essays to slideshows to video presentations, since each of these involves the sort of communication abilities they will need for the modern world and workplace.

Each assignment is assessed on the basis of the trivium, i.e., we evaluate how well the content has been mastered and understood (grammar), how persuasively the student has reasoned for their position (logic), and how clearly the assignment conforms to the rules of presentation (rhetoric).

Our model not only teaches students factual knowledge and practical skills but also takes advantage of the online format to allow them flexibility in their studies and to invite parents to observe their learning. It allows teachers and parents, school and family, to effectively collaborate as co-educators.

A Joyfully Classical Catholic Education

“Every education teaches a philosophy; if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not education at all...The fundamental concept of Catholic Education is part of our demand for a complete culture, based on its own philosophy and religion.”

–G.K. Chesterton, “The Completeness of a Catholic Education”

Not only does our classical education model teach students to think deeply about the meaning of what they are learning and to root them in the greatest ideas and artworks of human civilization, it is also meant to orient them towards Christ. The use of Chesterton’s writings gives a Christian context and interpretation to everything we teach, and students are regularly invited to join with the community in ChesterSessions (guest lectures on various religious topics), in-person retreats, and in prayer events throughout the school year.

We hope and pray you will consider allowing your children to join us on our journey of Christ-centered, classically-based 21st century learning.



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