

Colegio San Andres

Thea Wedgewood

St Andrew's College is a Christian school in the heart of Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. St Andrew's was founded in 1963 by Thea Wedgewood, an English missionary who wanted to provide a bilingual Christian education in English and Spanish, with the aim that every pupil should come to know Jesus as Saviour, Friend and Lord. Thea also wanted every pupil to obtain a Christian worldview and lifestyle, and so contribute to the welfare of their family, their nation and the wider world. These remain the stated aims of the school and our reason for being. Hence, all aspects of education in St Andrew's have a solid Evangelical Christian foundation and the school is part of the work of the Anglican Diocese of Paraguay.

St Andrew's was started as a means of reaching the middle to upper classes of Paraguayan society with the Gospel. This group of people was particularly hard to reach, and so the kindergarten was started with just five pupils, and classes took place

One great joy of ours has been to see pupils come to know the Lord

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at the back of the little Anglican chapel. Because some of the first parents were people of influence in Paraguayan society the school gained credence and was able to grow.

God's provision

Growth was slow and dependence on God was vital. Money was needed to buy land and build. God's provision and faithfulness was seen all along the way. One lady in England mortgaged her house to pay for the first new buildings as she believed so strongly in the school. As the school grew it needed to incorporate a Paraguayan education too, and so Paraguayan Christian teachers were found to work alongside English staff, and the school gained recognition with the Paraguayan Ministry of Education.

Life wasn't without its difficulties and a few times it nearly closed due to lack of funds. But despite these challenges the school grew until, in 1981, it had its first graduates; a class of about a dozen girls – many of whom have chosen to educate their own children at their alma mater. Three students from the class of 1981 are now working on the staff at St Andrew's.

Core aims and purposes

The aims of the school are still very dear to us and still the main focus of our attention. We try to employ only Christian staff and these come from the different Christian churches around us. We have daily Bible studies and in the primary classes they have two a day, one in English and the other in Spanish. We have assemblies, camps and special activities and whenever the children perform we try to have a message for the parents too.

We like to pull together – especially when the going gets tough!



We aim to work with the whole family. When a child is about to come into the school we interview the family and make it very clear what we will be teaching their children; we are thrilled to find at this time that there is an open door for the Gospel. In fact, some parents come in asking for more. We realise that God has given us a special opportunity and we never know how long this will last.

New buildings

Over the years the school site has grown with the addition of new buildings here and there. In 1996 a new block of flats was built next to the school thus undermining our foundations and almost causing us to close. In the end the builder offered to help us rebuild, and so the face of the school was changed and modern buildings appeared. We now also have a four-lane, 25-metre heated swimming pool. The idea of this was to give good exercise in a small space. Being in the city (still next to the church) means that space is at a premium.



Easter bonnets come in all shapes and sizes

In 2003 we celebrated 40 years and it was lovely to welcome back our founder 'Aunty Thea' to be with us. At the same time we were able to buy a six hectare piece of land about half an hour from the school where we have created a sports ground. The primary and secondary children spend one day each week in this open space and, for many pupils, it is the highlight of their week. Over the last few years three more classrooms and a big roofed area with bathrooms have been added. We look back and marvel at God's provision for us over the years.



9th grade girls make time for a little blue sky thinking

Global dimensions

Today, St Andrew's has 370 pupils ranging in age from 3 to 18 years old. The school employs a full Paraguayan staff plus a dozen English speaking teachers mostly from England. St Andrew's is the only school in Asunción to provide the full Paraguayan curriculum and internationally recognised qualifications, eg International GCSEs and AS Levels.

Over the years the pupils have come to realise the value of these exams as they find they open doors to university here in Paraguay and in other parts of the world. Most of our pupils go on to university and many of them are able to go abroad to study. Many go to the USA, Argentina and Brazil. We also have ex-pupils in Chile, Germany and one studying for a Master's degree at Oxford.

Christian professionals

We try to instil in pupils a love for their country as well as an appreciation for the wider world. We help Paraguayan pupils understand that they can do something to make their nation a better place. Therefore, our aim is that when they go abroad to study they do so with the intention of returning. Our goal is always to give pupils a vision of what they could do as Christian professionals.

Many ex-pupils have returned to work in Paraguay after studying abroad. We have a good number of doctors, lawyers, architects and business people. We also have a few who have gone into politics

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Everybody looks their best at a whole-school gathering

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and even become senators. We had three ex-pupils very involved in the political campaigning this last year and, who knows, one day we might have a president among them!

Practical Christianity

Many of our pupils come from comfortable backgrounds and do not really get a first hand view of their country and the poverty in it. As an Anglican school we are privileged to have contacts, through the work of the churches, with poor and marginalised people. Each year we try to take groups of older pupils to the Chaco, an area of scrubland where there might be drought or flooding and where the indigenous people live. Our pupils stay in the basic conditions of the Anglican centre there and then go out to dig water tanks, latrines and paint the schools. They visit and share with local people and get to see life in these communities first hand.

Others pupils from St Andrew's are taken to stay in the church in Concepción in the north of Paraguay. In the last few years they have painted rooms in the regional hospital and dug latrines and even constructed a simple wooden house. The younger children visit orphanages, homes for blind, deaf and old people, AIDS patients, etc. In some ways we hope these things will open their eyes to the profound needs of their country and help them to see that they can make a difference.

Shanty town school

In addition to the main school, St Andrew's incorporates an Annexe school for shanty town children.

The Annexe was founded in 1972 by another English missionary, Glenys Williams. The idea was that St Andrew's should tithes its income to help others and so a site was sought near Chacarita shanty town area. This is an area on the edge of the river that floods regularly but where many people build their homes in order to be near the centre and find work. A piece of land was found on the higher ground and the school was started. This is also a Christian school with similar aims to St Andrew's College, although the pupils don't have English lessons. Some of the same staff teach in both schools and standards are high.

Today the Annexe school has 250 pupils, mostly from the shanty area. Many of these are now children of ex-pupils too. Classes range from a nursery class for four year olds up to the highest primary class for 15 year olds. Although some staff now receive government salaries, St Andrew's is still responsible for finding most of the wages for the staff and for the upkeep of the buildings.



Making a difference by digging holes for water tanks in the Chaco

Food, love and hope

The Annexe has a small canteen that sells food in the school and to outsiders, thus providing an extra income to help pay some of the bills. The pupils are also asked to pay the equivalent of two or three pounds per month, depending on their age. This is a low price even compared to the state 'free' schools. Even so, some families cannot afford

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We're just one big happy family

to contribute anything and so some children are allowed in free.

In some cases children attending the Annexe school are malnourished and staff will make sure they are given food and will even send food home with them. Others need medical treatment and there is a special fund for that purpose. In God's provision the Lord sent the Annexe a headteacher who trained as a nurse. Recently he was able to diagnose a pupil with TB.

Some of the pupils have been awarded scholarships to a Christian secondary school and have gone onto higher education. Slowly many of them are able to leave the shanty area. In St Andrew's College one of our administrative staff is an ex-Annexe pupil who now has a degree in accountancy. Another former Annexe pupil is active in the Anglican Church and finishing his theology degree.

Moving forward in faith

Over ten years ago Patrick and Rosie Butler started Youth Encounter in The Spirit. For this they took a group of our pupils to Chile to take part in an encounter. Then, on their return they started meeting in Asunción using the school buildings. Young people are invited to spend a weekend together where they learn about relationships and have a lot of fun. These meetings have really taken off and we often get parents asking how their child can participate. Many young people through the city have been touched by these Youth Encounter weekends, including our pupils. Now Patrick comes to take assembly once a month at St Andrew's

Sports day – a chance to celebrate body, mind and team spirit

Colegio San Andres
Casilla 1124
Asunción
Paraguay
T: (595) 221647 or
(595) 208878
E: admin@csandres.com
W: www.csandres.com

College and the older pupils go to the Anglican Cathedral.

One great joy of ours has been to see pupils come to know the Lord and become active in various churches. Recently, some have even joined the Anglican Church and it is wonderful to see some of them taking up positions of responsibility there.

Please pray for us

We would love you to pray for our work here in Paraguay, that we might make the most of the open door that God has given us at this time; that many young people might come to know Him and then might go on to make a difference for God in their country. Pray that we might always have the staff we need.

And, if there are any English teachers out there looking for a new challenge, please invite them to get in touch with us. We are always looking for more English-speaking staff. We need trained primary teachers, secondary English for foreign language teachers, or qualified TEFL teachers. At the present time we also need a secondary ICT and Maths teacher. The work is not always easy and life can be frustrating at times but God is faithful and is working amongst us.

Looking back I think what stands out most is God's faithfulness over the years and for that we give Him all the glory.

■ Gwen Carlisle
Headteacher, St Andrew's College

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