Introduction

In order to better meet and align with the educational and community needs of the Junior School K to 6, it has been decided to replace the current Mandarin Chinese Program with a Spanish Program as the (Languages Other Than English) LOTE offered within these year levels from the beginning of the 2016 academic year.

This change acknowledges:
- the recommendations from the recent Radford College LOTE Review;
- the stated aims of the Junior School in relation to LOTE;
- the age appropriateness of potential LOTE languages;
- the research evidence of the value of an apprenticeship language at the primary level of schooling.

Rationale

When the Junior School first opened, a clear decision in its LOTE approach was that it would not be a bilingual setting. Rather, the College would aim to provide a rich, engaging program in which the students enjoyed language learning and wanted to continue in any LOTE program in the Secondary School. Unfortunately, this is not currently the case, as evidenced in the LOTE review findings.

Literature from Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009, ACER) proposes that schools should adopt the approach of an apprenticeship in learning how to learn languages. An apprenticeship language is one that is relatively easy to learn. It is selected for early/beginning language learning experiences to support students to move beyond the limitations of speaking one language, in preparation for later mastery of a different language or languages. In studying the language and culture of an apprenticeship language, students grow in international-mindedness, experience a foreign language for motivation and effective subsequent language learning, make the most of the early start where students are more open to new sounds, experimentation, role play, songs and writing. Through cultivating this rich potential to learn languages among the younger students, they will be more likely to successfully transfer such skills to different languages when offered the opportunity to switch languages. The learning required for an apprenticeship language better aligns with student awareness and knowledge of English and its literacy, building transdisciplinary usage.
For native speakers of English, Spanish is relatively easy to learn. The rules for spelling and pronunciation are reasonably simple and consistent. English and Spanish both use the Latin alphabet, and some Spanish is already familiar. Spanish also provides a bridge to other Latin based languages. A significant number of people and countries learn or speak Spanish across the globe.

The ACER Review detailed above, also notes that the ultimate target of all language education planning and policy work is the effectiveness of the teacher. Whilst good teaching is always a priority, this is especially so for language teachers in Junior Schools where rapport, positive relationships, creation of safe learning environments, differentiation and flexible pedagogy are paramount. To add to this, nearly all qualified LOTE teachers are secondary trained, rather than primary qualified.

The recent Radford LOTE Review has provided the College with much needed feedback and recommendations. The Executive Summary notes that whilst the stakeholder survey saw a desire by parents to value Asian languages, they also sought to have a European language added to the curriculum in the Junior School, with Spanish the favoured language. Junior School students found Mandarin more difficult to learn.

This change in language offerings attempts to best meet the vast majority of concerns and recommendations from the LOTE Review as follows:

- The introduction of Spanish across the Junior School best meets the Review’s recommendations.
- Time within an extremely crowded curriculum is always a challenge. The model described above enables the Junior School to provide two languages within a tight weekly schedule.
- Asian connections within the curriculum are already comfortably accounted for through our PYP Program of Inquiry and are not currently included in our Mandarin program.
- We can better assist the growth of LOTE across the College, by transitioning engaged and motivated students of LOTE to Year 7. At the same time this would allow for a more equitable transition for all Year 7 students as they would start secondary LOTE on the same footing.
- The provision for Mandarin in the Junior School and Spanish in the Secondary School will, in the first instance, be considered through co-curricular offerings.