

FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Junior Thinkers Conference 2026

Inspiring Minds,
Shaping Futures: Age 11-14

CURIOSITY CONVERSATION & CHANGE

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About



About Junior Thinkers Conference 2026



We are delighted to announce the **AU & NZ Junior Thinkers Conferences for 2026**, designed for **very bright and curious students aged 11–14** who are ready to stretch their thinking and grow in confidence.

The Junior Thinkers Conference focuses on developing the intellectual foundations that support long-term success: curiosity, disciplined reasoning, clear communication, and the confidence to engage with challenging ideas. Through a carefully structured programme of talks, debates, and collaborative inquiry, students are encouraged to take intellectual risks, test their thinking, and learn from others.

Across the day, students engage with rich and demanding questions that invite them to examine assumptions, weigh evidence, and refine their ideas. The emphasis is on depth of understanding rather than speed, helping students develop resilience, independence, and ambition in their learning.

The conference provides an inspiring environment in which students begin to see themselves as capable thinkers whose ideas matter. The aim is to equip them with the confidence and habits of mind that enable them to flourish academically and to approach future challenges with curiosity and purpose

“This conference helped our students see themselves as confident thinkers whose ideas matter — a crucial step in developing future leaders.”

“The discussions were my favourite part — everyone had different ideas and you were actually allowed to disagree.”

Programme

The Science of the Origins of the Universe

How can scientists tell what stars are made of — and how fast galaxies are moving — using nothing but light?



Why does looking into space also mean looking back in time?

And how did these discoveries lead to the idea that the universe had a beginning?

In this intellectually demanding session, students explore how astronomers use **Fraunhofer lines** to identify the elements inside stars, and the **Doppler effect** to measure the motion of distant galaxies. These ideas underpin the discovery that the universe is expanding — a conclusion that reshaped modern science.

The talk draws on the work of key thinkers including **Albert Einstein** and **Georges Lemaître**, showing how evidence, mathematics, and imagination combine in real scientific discovery. Students are challenged to think carefully about how scientific knowledge develops, and where its limits currently lie.

Well-suited to high-attaining students with strong STEM interests who enjoy abstract reasoning and thinking beyond the curriculum.

Do I Have a Soul?

What do we actually mean when we use the word “soul”?



Is it a separate part of us — or simply a way of talking about who we are?

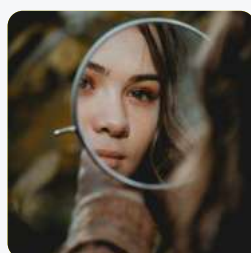
And is belief in a soul still intellectually defensible today?

This lively and thought-provoking session invites students to explore one of the oldest and most fascinating questions in philosophy: what kind of thing is a human being? Rather than starting with beliefs or answers, the talk begins by clarifying what people have meant by the word “soul” — and why the question still matters.

Students explore different ways of understanding the soul, from views that see it as something distinct from the body to approaches shaped by a scientific, materialist picture of the world. The session also asks whether the idea of a soul might offer **an elegant explanation for certain puzzling aspects of human experience or whether such extraordinary claims require extraordinary scrutiny**

The session is interactive, idea-driven, and designed to stretch students' thinking. It models careful reasoning, intellectual honesty, and the confidence to explore bold ideas without abandoning rigour.

Well-suited to very bright students who enjoy big ideas, playful argument, and thinking hard about what it means to be human.



Programme

Community of Inquiry: Can bad luck make you a bad person?

Should a person be morally judged by what they intend - or by how things turn out?



Is it fair to blame someone for consequences shaped by bad luck?

And what does this reveal about the true nature of morality?

In this carefully structured Community of Inquiry, students explore the idea of **moral luck** through powerful stimulus material, including a classic philosophical scenario from **Jean-Paul Sartre**. Using this and other thought-provoking examples, students test their intuitions about blame, responsibility, fairness, and moral judgement.

Through guided dialogue, the session challenges the assumption that morality is simply about outcomes. Students are encouraged to distinguish **intention from consequence, character from chance**, and to consider whether good or bad results genuinely reflect moral worth. Along the way, they grapple with deep questions about justice, responsibility, and what it means to act well in an uncertain world.

The Community of Inquiry format develops careful listening, reasoned disagreement, and collaborative thinking, helping students move towards a more mature and nuanced understanding of morality.

Ideal for very bright students who enjoy ethical puzzles, subtle distinctions, and discovering that moral questions rarely have simple answers.

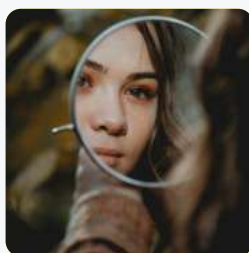
Debate

This house believes that patriotism is a virtue.



Can it be morally right to care more about "our own" than about others, simply because they are ours?

A balanced ethical debate exploring whether patriotism is a genuine moral virtue, what it requires of us, and how it should shape our responsibilities to others. The session develops rigorous reasoning, respectful disagreement, and the ability to argue both for and against deeply held assumptions.



Speaker



Julie Arliss

Julie Arliss is an outstanding Gifted Educator, nurturing brilliance through a holistic approach. At the heart of Julie Arliss' philosophy lies a deep commitment to unlocking the unique potential within every gifted student. She believes that gifted education is not just about cultivating academic excellence but also fostering holistic development, instilling a love for lifelong learning, and nurturing the well-being of each student. Thriving Minds provides talented students with the tools necessary to cultivate critical thinking, analyse complex problems, and innovate. This philosophy encourages students to question the status quo, explore new ideas, and develop solutions to real-world challenges. In placing great value on mentorship and guidance students benefit from the wisdom and expertise of educators who not only teach but also inspire and support them on their educational journey. Through steadfast commitment to this philosophy, numerous more able and ambitious students have not only achieved academic excellence but have also grown into compassionate, innovative and socially conscious individuals. Julie Arliss' legacy extends far beyond the conference platform, influencing the lives of students who carry these values with them throughout their lives.

For almost three decades Julie has collaborated with some of the greatest living thinkers delivering outstanding programmes for more able students across the UK and Australasia.



“It didn't feel like school. It felt like being part of a big conversation.”

“Our most able students returned more willing to take intellectual responsibility – to lead discussions, challenge ideas, and think independently.”



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Bookings and Admin



Additional Detail

Booking Process: All bookings must be made by schools, not by individual participants. To secure your place, please fill in the booking form and select your preferred venue. You will have the option to pay online (recommended) or request an invoice.

Payment Information: The cost is \$55 per student, with one free staff place provided for every group of 12 students.

Important Information:

- Students should attend in school uniform.
- Students and staff need to bring their own refreshments and drinks for the day.
- Bookings are not guaranteed until payment is received. If payment has not been made, we reserve the right to offer the places to other students on the waiting list.

Event Timings: Please note that event timings may vary slightly. Full details will be provided closer to the date of the event.

We look forward to welcoming your students to this inspiring event!



“An exceptional experience for students with real potential, helping them develop the thinking skills that will serve them far beyond school.”

“The conference nurtures intellectual ambition and maturity in a way that directly supports future leadership and contribution.”



**BOOKINGS AND PAYMENTS ARE
COMPLETED ONLINE AT:
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