



Foundation Principal Steven Cook

# Albert Park College rises again

*Inner Melbourne seaside school has been transformed*

**F**or years, the Albert Park College site in beachside inner Melbourne was underwhelming and the school that stood there was as well.

Suffering from the slow death of underfunding and an indifferent community, the original Albert Park College had spiralled downward. Thinning enrolments, slightly toxic grounds thanks to the gas works that had operated there and finally concrete cancer forced it to close its doors in 2006. Only 206 students attended in that last year.

That was then, now Albert Park College mark two, which opened in February 2011 is an example of what can be achieved with the vision and collaboration of teaching staff and designers.

It needs to be impressive, the area, while still working class in patches, is largely wealthy and its gentrification has placed a certain burden on any project to be stylish and leading edge.

The school's final form and progressive learning approach has largely been driven by Principal Steven Cook who has no illusions about where Albert Park College needs to be, "We are in direct competition with private schools," he says.



For Albert Park College to find a place within the community, a premium had to be placed on academic results, progressive learning approaches and smart facilities, \$26 million later

Albert Park College has ticked all of those boxes.

The kind of teaching that happens in the school's open plan classrooms is cutting edge. Students are arranged in groups of four





*Albert Park College's buildings and interiors were created by some of Melbourne's leading architects and designers*

or five around circular tables to encourage collaboration and communication.

Every student has been issued with an Apple iPad, which underpin lessons and streamline learning. Cook says that the school's curriculum is fluid, adjustments to its academic approach are continually being made.

"We have a strong relationship with Apple, they visit regularly to see how we're using the iPad to teach," he says.

Students lease or buy the iPad so they carry the same one from lesson to lesson, texts and learning materials are stored on the machines with curricula for every subject available online.

"The system is very efficient, we can make adjustments to course materials easily," Cook says.

An important part of the school's attraction is its accelerated learning program, which is



attended by 50 students, a third of the total. The college is currently teaching a Year 7 level of 150 students with enrolments building to a final figure of 900.

"The trick is to set an appropriate pace of learning while giving the students an opportunity to fully explore the subject matter," he says.

With five year levels yet to arrive, the school is still something of a work in progress and





### ***Albert Park College is a symphony of open spaces, light and vegetation***

Steven Cook's plans are many; most of the school's students play a musical instrument and a school orchestra is in the works, there's a growing relationship with the boating fraternity in the area, a leadership program, school camps, better integration with the community...

Physically, Albert Park College is a symphony of open spaces, light and vegetation, even the uniforms designed by MEME Design and Studio Round – in grey, yellow and sky blue – are colour coordinated with the buildings.

Every room on the upper levels has an incredible view, towards the city skyline on the northern aspect or out to sea on the other side.

Leading architects Woods Bagot designed the school buildings with the interiors the result of a collaboration between MEME Design, Studio Round, Pip and Co, MAP Furniture and Egans Auctions. Andrew Ashton of Pip and Co came on board to design dynamic wayfinding and signage and the interiors were designed by MEME's Megan Hounslow.

Furniture is a combination of new pieces bought from MAP and

refurbished classic office furniture sourced at Egans Auctions.

"We were able to take delivery of a load of refurbished furniture at a fraction of what new ones would have cost, it aligns with our environmental approach," Cook says.

Water for all the gardens and toilets is supplied by roof run off into 160,000 litres worth of water storage. It has worked a bit too well, with all the rain that has been falling recently the school had to have some of the water siphoned away.

The campus is also festooned with artwork, which ties in with Albert Park College's focus on creativity. Located close to the Gasworks Park Arts Centre, many of the sculptures at Albert Park College were made by its sculptor in residence, the highly regarded John Meade.

The students also have access to the Gasworks Park art facilities.

This is not new ground for Cook, he was involved in a similar makeover for Williamstown High and he has applied what he learned in that role to Albert Park College.

The approach seems to be working, he says that the students the school has managed to attract since it opened for Term 1 this year are motivated and talented and enrolments are on target with 300 students applying for the 150 places on offer in 2012. **ET**