

Beyond roll call at Pymble Ladies'

Roll calls are a necessary evil, but if you look a bit closer and tally the time spent taking them and multiply that by a couple of thousand students, very quickly a picture of a lot of teaching time wasted begins to emerge.

Pymble Ladies' College in Sydney, which likes to keep abreast of technology, saw that something needed to be done, realising that roll calls were costing about four hours a week in teaching. They set about creating an attendance monitoring system with kiosks in each classroom; students swipe a card to register themselves at the beginning of classes and before extra curricular activities.

The kiosks are based on IBM hardware. Each is a PC and Pymble's IT department has built further functions into them beyond roll call; databases can be accessed which include information like medical conditions that a particular student might have, as can a video library and resources for the classrooms' interactive whiteboards, not to mention telephony.

From a duty of care perspective, the school now knows where each student is pretty much at all times, which is invaluable during excursions or in case of emergency.

The data being gathered is also important from an academic point of view. Teaching at Pymble is intensive, a lot of material is covered



in a 60-minute class so attendance for the full session is essential, "If a student is consistently late by say 15 minutes, we know and the parents can be informed," IT Manager Rathika Suresh says.

The system's first iteration was based on Java, but given the amount of information being gathered, deficiencies in the speed of processing information became clear to Suresh during testing. She looked to a solution based on the Adobe Flash Platform, which includes



Pymble Ladies' College

the Flex® framework and Adobe AIR®, a cross-operating system runtime.

Adobe AIR lets developers use their skills in Javascript or other programming languages and deploy the applications they make across varied operating systems and environments, either online or on the desktop.

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Suresh says that the project took about 18 months to complete, "Adobe AIR is an anytime, anywhere solution which was compatible and easy to integrate with the IT infrastructure we already had in place."

Suresh is confident that the kiosks' functionality will only increase over time.

"The Adobe Flash Platform with Adobe AIR is clearly a solution which Adobe will focus on in the future and we look forward to seeing how the platform continues to develop," Suresh says.

Virtual farm visits for city kids

A resource for teaching agriculture in Years 7-10 has been released by Meat and Livestock Australia. *The Virtual Farm Visit* is an interactive online tool that allows students to learn about farming through video clips. Research undertaken for the organisation shows that 54 per cent of Australian under 35s have never visited a sheep or cattle farm.

The content is curriculum-aligned, providing a resource across a number of subjects including technology, science, society and environment, geography and sustainable futures. The program is accompanied by teachers' guides and worksheets.



Farms in three locations are visited – The Kimberley (WA), Yeoval (central NSW) and Gippsland (Victoria). At each, a host demonstrates activities around the property. Students will have



access to around 20 video clips for each location, most supported by fact sheets.

www.mla.com.au/virtualfarm

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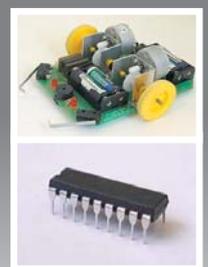
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