

Frankston High on technology

ET staff



Frankston High has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to technology, about 20 years ahead of the curve. Long before the sound and fury around the one-to-one student laptop program, Frankston High had its own low key and very progressive one-to-one laptop program, making it one of the first high schools in the world to do so.

The school has jumped into technology with both feet but not without careful consideration, research and a clear idea of outcomes for its students. And given the way things have panned out it looks like Frankston High has got it right in a lot of ways, blending high technology with more traditional ideas of what should happen in teaching towards the creation of a happy, successful school.

As in many cases, it began with some vision. Former principal Ken Rowe's keen interest in technology and its transformative nature led to the establishment of several innovative programs. The ground-breaking laptops initiative was one, as was the school's aeronautics

class where students design and produce an aircraft, all ambitious, courageous stuff.

That innovative, tech-friendly approach has continued on, current principal John Albiston has supported the decision to roll out hybrid tablet devices to all students which underpin the school's approach to education.

Frankston High was quick to become a member of the international FabLab movement out of Stanford University in the US, which is gathering quite a following around the world. The FabLab encourages deeper exploration and collaboration within education through the fabrication of projects in a dedicated lab.

"While our FabLab isn't as extensive as some, we have a core group of students who really enjoy it and spend a lot of time there. We like to get the community involved in the school as much as possible. A handful of interested parents have reached out to offer assistance, one who is a helicopter engineer has even repaired a couple of our printers which we are grateful for," teacher and director of e-learning Greg Heale says.

Frankston High likes to base everything it does on research and that research has indicated that hand writing notes assists with deeper understanding and retention, which informed the school's decision to take up Microsoft's Surface Pro 3 as a standard device for Year 7. Year 8 to 12 mostly use Toshiba hybrid tablets.

"The Surface Pro 3 allows students to colour in, annotate documents and draw on them which helps with their learning. We first moved to hybrid tablet/laptop devices in 2006, and in 2015 we expanded our program to all students including Year 7 with a 98 per cent take up, which we expect to repeat next year.

"Surface Pro 3 is better than every device we've used in the past. We can remove the keyboard in an instant and the stylus is the first that we've found to really work as a pen does in writing and drawing", Heale says.

Frankston High is a big fan of Sharon Oviatt's *The Design of Future of Educational Interfaces* and drew heavily on that text when formulating their strategy for their students' devices.

Oviatt's work is well worth reading, she has published over 130 scientific articles in a wide range of venues in the computational, learning, and cognitive sciences. She is an associate editor of leading journals and edited book collections in the field of human interfaces, including *The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook*. She was a founder of the International Conference on Multimodal Interfaces (ICMI), and in 2007, founded Inca Designs (<http://www.incaadesigns.org/>), a Seattle-area nonprofit that researches, designs, and evaluates the impact of innovative new educational interfaces.

"Her research supports that keyboard input is not that great a technique, students tend to take notes verbatim when they are typing," Heale says.

Generally, the school expects students to get three years out of a device before it has fallen too far behind to be useful. The accent is on inclusiveness and the school does its best to provide a Surface Pro 3 to every one of its Year 7 students.

"It is a fully parent funded program, we're really conscious of price because we're in a cash constrained area, some parents will pay up front, others use a finance program provided by our partner suppliers or there is a layby available through the school. For parents who absolutely can't afford the devices we have a loan program



Teacher and director of e-learning Greg Heale

but there are very few who have taken up that option."

Frankston High students have taken the technological ball and run with it, they produce content using the school's green screen facilities, program whiz bang websites using HTML 5, collaborate using their devices and, overall, help

to create a vibrant education for themselves, leveraged with technology.

They begin to learn code in Year 7 using online resources like Scratch, increasing their coding ability to a level of real sophistication by the time they reach their senior years.

Whether all that technology has had a direct effect on the school's results is still to be determined.

"We have been using technology here for a long time, and the school's academic results have been maintained at a very high standard throughout," says Heale.

Frankston High's approach has seen it join that select group of high achieving schools like Balwyn High and McKinnon High where parents who are keen to get their children in have either bought into the area, pushing up property prices, or have elected to move within the school's catchment and rent.

"The parents that enrol their children here are aspirational, that has underpinned our approach and has resulted in increased engagement."

That engagement means that pretty much every student that graduates from Frankston goes on to university or some type of further education which is the best endorsement of what the school has achieved in what can be a tough part of Melbourne.

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