

# Holy Cross gets flexible

Holy Cross College's new flexible learning space has been a hit, **ET Staff**



**T**his year, Holy Cross College in Ryde NSW celebrates 125 years in education. The school's sandstone buildings by the Parramatta River have been a fixture on the landscape for a very long time but the type of education that's being delivered there is far from static.

As have many of the schools in NSW's Catholic system, Holy Cross has embraced flexible learning, chalk and talk has been mostly replaced with a deformed, student driven way of learning.

The traditional classroom has mostly been dispensed with and replaced by a large open learning space in which students are encouraged to self direct, work together, learn from each other and be accorded some responsibility with the result that markedly improved learning outcomes have been achieved.

Holy Cross' Principal Adam Taylor says that the new flexible learning precinct has been an unqualified success.

"It is a wonder that the old system of placing students and teachers to work alone in what amounts to a 'cell' has persisted as long



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as it has. The flexible learning area has been transformative. In the 14 or so weeks it has been running we have had only one incident of misbehaviour from a student; they have reacted well being given some responsibility and a university-like environment. Students are

encouraged to stay on task because there are eyes everywhere.

"The saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' has proven to be true here, rather than one teacher being left alone to contend with a class of students there are many staff members on hand at any given time. The teachers themselves say that being able to talk to other staff members while teaching has been a huge advantage, it has quickly become our teachers' favourite place to work," Taylor says.

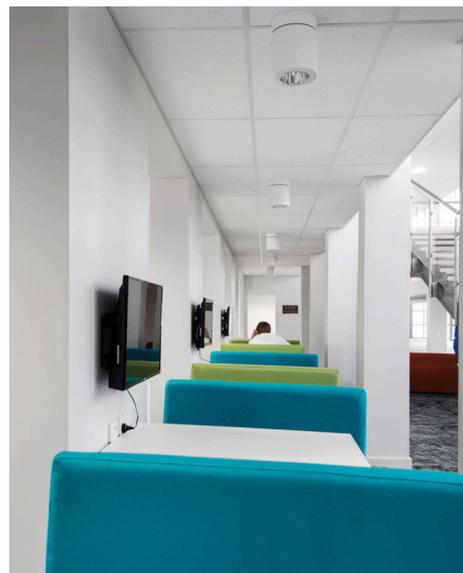
The flexible learning area has turned traditional learning facilities on its head, students are able to collaborate on their work in compact glass-fronted rooms while the area's open, u-shaped staff rooms feed back into the area to ensure that there is staff contact at all times.

The facility can hold about 250 students or 10 classes worth which is around a third of the total students at Holy Cross College.

"I can make one pass of the flexible learning area and get a feel for what is happening in the school," Taylor says.

Holy Cross' flexible learning area was purpose built with Alexander Coutts and

## buildings and grounds



Associates contributing the architectural design and Co-Wyn Building Contractors taking on the building. The open, light-filled space is meant to be malleable and as such the furniture plays an important part in how it works.

Supplied by Civic Australia and manufactured locally, the seating is modular and on castors and so can be rearranged and used in playful, creative ways. A popular unit is the 'Wigwam' where seating is arranged in a circle, fostering an environment where ideas are freely exchanged.

"The Campfire furniture has been a great success, students and teachers are face to face for instructive elements of a lesson, with the flexibility to separate into smaller groups to work through what has been presented," Taylor says.

While the middle of the flexible learning precinct is dedicated to modular, movable seating, the sides of the area are occupied by banquet learning pods which Civic calls 'Cave Units' where students can tuck themselves away to study quietly.

Tables in the area are adjustable so they can be used at different heights, students can choose to stand, sit on a stool or use the tables from an Ottoman, the mechanism is gas based so it's very quick to adjust. Civic also installed Domino lounges and Unison executive chairs.

Sales Manager Ben Rowland from Civic Australia says that the company has been intimately involved in the transition to flexible learning.

"There have been three modes in the progression towards flexible learning, mode one was the traditional teacher in front of a blackboard, mode two began in the early 2000s and was a combination of the traditional with some elements of flexible learning and mode three is where we are today, flexible, open plan learning areas," Rowland says.

He says that consultation with the client is critical to the way that Civic approaches any new installation.

"The process begins with a face-to-face meeting from which we get the client's ideas about the space which is important as they often come up with novel, interesting approaches and applications for our furniture. Once we've established a picture of what the client has envisioned we go away and apply our expertise to their ideas and make sure that they are feasible."

The entire process usually takes around one or two months, Rowland says that the project's architects were more than willing to allow Civic to take on the interiors of Holy Cross's flexible learning area.

"The best source of information is the client, we see ourselves as a partner in realising their vision for their school, there's often several iterations and changes required so our local production facility is an advantage in that we can quickly turn those requests around," Rowland says.

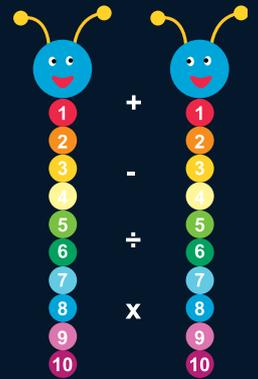
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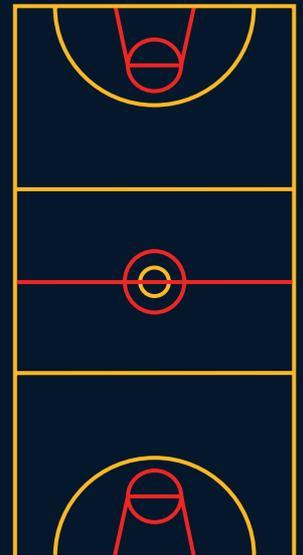
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