Kingswood College has world class ICT

If Kingswood College's technology program is anything to go by, Australia is doing ICT well by international standards, *ET Staff*

"Preparing students for jobs which don't yet exist," seems a challenging remit but Kingswood College, the co-ed Melbourne-based Uniting Church-backed school, through a major overhaul of its procedures, teaching and ICT, is looking to do just that.

Recently appointed Principal Elisabeth Lenders believes that relentless innovation and thought about the kind of students they are producing and how they will fit into the workplaces of the future should be core to the way Kingswood delivers education.

"Education has been focussed on identifying a student's suitability for university, trying to make them the same, which isn't as relevant today as it has been in the past, teaching needs to be adjusted to reflect that", she says.

Creativity is at the heart of the College's thinking and the introduction of digital tools and software has had a profound effect on the way things are learned and made; education at Kingswood College has been lent a playfulness which breeds innovation and collaboration.

Kingswood College has always prided itself on its progressive approach and it makes sense that that attitude extended to the College's ICT program. However, the consequences can be unforeseen.

Lenders recalls approaching the school's smart science facility with two prospective parents in tow. The group was met with the sight of some of Kingswood's finest Year 11 Physics students throwing their mobile phones off the balcony.

It, apparently, wasn't as bad as it looked, an experiment on motions, forces and gravity was being undertaken in fact. Ms Lenders says, the students had downloaded an app that graphed forces in action when the phones were in freefall from the first floor mezzanine down onto a beanbag.

Technology has reached far into Kingswood's culture, both in education and in communication between staff and students. It's common for staff to receive emails after hours from students with questions about homework or an assignment due imminently.

"If someone hasn't done their homework there is less room to wriggle free, I'll often ask them 'you have two arms and two legs and you're breathing: how could you not have had the courtesy to email and tell me?' the lines of

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communication are open at all times."

"ICT is also great for the quiet kids who are hesitant to speak up in class – it is a way of asking questions that isn't embarrassing," Lenders says.

The iPad has become the device of choice, they are easy to use which was a huge plus for both the students and faculty.

"I bought 10 iPads in April 2011 and gave them to the teachers for six weeks and I told them 'If you can show me what you did with

the tablet after the trial period you can have them' all you have to do is report back to a staff meeting with what you did."

"The first one that came in was a very long standing head of maths who had two daughters in the school, he was clutching the iPad to his chest, saying 'please don't make me give it back'", Lenders says. He loved the iPad for its graphing feature, after years of drawing them by hand iPad's application made it a doddle. He also loved the many ways in which his daughters had played with and learned from the iPad.

"We will decide after a three year appraisal
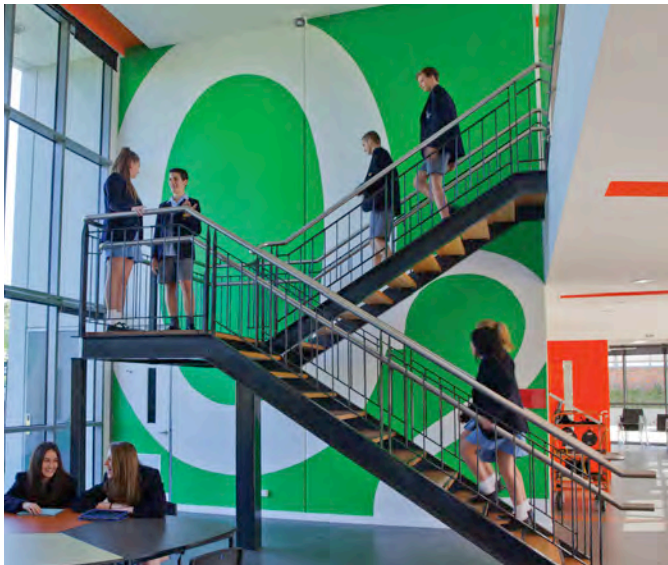
whether to continue with iPads at Years 4–9. At Years 10–12 we allow students to bring a device of their own choice. We've also guaranteed that the implementation of iPads will be revenue neutral to parents," Lenders says.

Following a successful trial of iPads at Years 4 and 7, Years 4–9 all now require their own iPad.

Kingswood College is hopeful that iPads belonging to students currently in Years 4 and 7 will last for three years: they've found tablets, with no moving parts, have worn much better than laptops.

Assessment at the College has been transformed through ICT, commonly students submit a draft of their work, which is marked up and emailed back.

"Tracking changes and having post it notes is magic for an English teacher, if a student is lagging a bit their work can be marked up and a reserve copy stored. If the changes haven't been made in the final work it's a great resource to have in a conversation with the student or perhaps the student and their parents", Lenders says.

Kingswood College still uses printed texts alongside electronic versions as Ms Lenders says it gives the student "something different", not to mention being helpful in assisting staff to make the transition.

"There were some teething problems initially with downloading ebooks, but that has been addressed with the publishers," she says.

Lenders is reluctant to attribute academic results directly to the ICT program but the College's performance has improved massively, coincidentally or not. Of the 2013 VCE students, 23 per cent achieved over 95 per cent, 49.3 per cent over 80 per cent and three managed perfect scores.

"Results are never the outcome of one activity alone. Learning culture is the key, but technology helps to develop that culture, they're working harder and more collaboratively", she says.

Trevor Bailey who is the Senior Director Worldwide Education and Government for Adobe Systems [Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign] comes into contact with more tech savvy schools than most and says that Australia is doing very well with regard to ICT when compared to many countries.

That includes the United States where he says that adoption and focus on technology is better in some areas than others, "Cypress Fairbanks in Texas is doing it really well, but other major education administrations like LA Unified want to do it but seem to misallocate funds," Bailey says.

"Most of the schools we speak to want to teach with a creative tone, lessons delivered with a strong graphical content are a great way of engaging students and fostering recall, it has a powerful effect, even in subjects like science and maths.

"Our problem is how to get the teachers comfortable generating content with a creative focus. It can be a challenge but we're trying to open the conversation through initiatives like the Adobe exchange where teachers can post lessons and curricula, share what worked and how it was done and access education into how digital tools can be used."

Technology and the creativity it fosters are increasingly being seen as a huge plus when students get into the workforce, proficiency on applications like photoshop are seen as baseline skills along with literacy and numeracy.

"By the time students reach university they are expected to have proficiency in programs like photoshop, it's the K–12 schools and community colleges that are expected to do the heavy lifting," Bailey says.

That doesn't mean teaching with and for technology is being done well, a recent survey conducted by Adobe found that 87% of schools surveyed globally said that there wasn't enough emphasis on creative expression.

Overwhelmingly respondents felt that creative tools help students to better understand theoretical concepts and enhance their overall understanding of coursework. Almost half said that students with a proficiency in digital media skills have a better chance of being recruited. **ET**