



Drab library becomes a dynamic learning centre

Principal Mal Cater describes the process of transforming Mentone Grammar's Senior School library

Schools are good at developing outstanding new facilities but history suggests that they are not good at revisiting the function of these facilities often enough to ensure that each continues to be efficient and effective. Often this reluctance comes about because of budget limitations or because of poor asset management.

It is important to undertake an audit of facilities on a scheduled basis. The regularity of this audit depends on the function of the learning centre, the capacity of the organisation to undertake refurbishments and the pedagogical approach being undertaken at the school. Often, facility effectiveness will be reviewed as part of a master planning process but, regardless of whether a school has such a plan or not, it is critical to the effective deliver of programmes that facility use be reviewed and, where necessary and where financially viable, upgrades be undertaken.

Library to learning centre

Recently a review of our facilities at Mentone Grammar identified our Senior School Library as a facility in need of review. The culture of the library had become negative and the use of the

facility as a resource for staff and students was not as effective as the facility had the capacity to provide.

The review looked not only at the overall layout of the facility but, with a long serving staff member moving into the management of school archives, there was also an opportunity to review the human resource needs in this area.

Consultation was undertaken with staff and students to find out what they wanted in the facility and a needs analysis was prepared. This feedback, combined with an investigation of contemporary library facilities in schools led to the school's architect being briefed.

One of our goals for this facility was to revolutionise library usage in the Senior School and to make the library a central resource to our learning programmes.

In consultation with the architect we identified that we had an outstanding learning space, but it was poorly laid out. The furnishings were generally satisfactory but some additional items such as comfortable reading chairs were needed. The space had become "tired" and in order to "breathe life back into it" we needed to start at the floor and work up.

New carpet, the removal of a significant wall

down the middle of the library, paint, graphics, new shelving to open the sight line up, the provision of some contemporary furniture, enhanced display space and the reconfiguration of the layout which, for example, saw the computers in the room spread around rather than being clustered, and all of a sudden, we were well on the way to having a much more effective, user-friendly learning centre. All of the fittings in the refurbished library are flexible so the configuration of the space can be changed on a regular basis. The bookshelves, for example, are on castors so they can be moved around as required.

Teacher-librarians

Two new teacher-librarians were employed to ensure that the new culture – which was to attach to this space, would be embedded from Day 1 of 2010. They are dynamic, user-focussed librarians who will facilitate good use of the space by staff and students.

In order to assist them in developing this improved culture, an education program was undertaken with staff and students to ensure that past misconceptions of the library were

eliminated. A review was undertaken by the deputy principal to ensure any activities that had previously been 'dumped' in the library were removed and that its sole function would be a central learning centre in the Senior School.

Extended hours

As part of the change in library culture the hours of operation are also under review. The goal is to have the library functioning from 8 am to 7 pm Monday to Thursday and 8 am to 5 pm on Friday. By opening up the hours of operation, it is hoped to further enhance the strong study culture that exists in the school. Students will be encouraged to stay on at school and complete their homework in study partnerships, in a well-resourced facility. Teachers will run tutorials after school in this space. These hours of operation are also seen as being more family-friendly as the school has a large number of double income families.

Cost-effective positive outcome

At Mentone Grammar we had an excellent space for the library but it had a negative culture and was not user-friendly in its layout. By identifying this as a priority improvement that would enhance the education of students and provide staff with improved access to researchers, we have developed, in a very cost effective manner, a much-improved library for all members of our school community. The development was totally consistent with the school's master plan and has ensured that our strong academic and pastoral focus areas are enhanced.



Mal Cater is principal of Mentone Grammar on Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne. He is a regular contributor to Education Today.



Students are completing their homework in the new look library before they go home

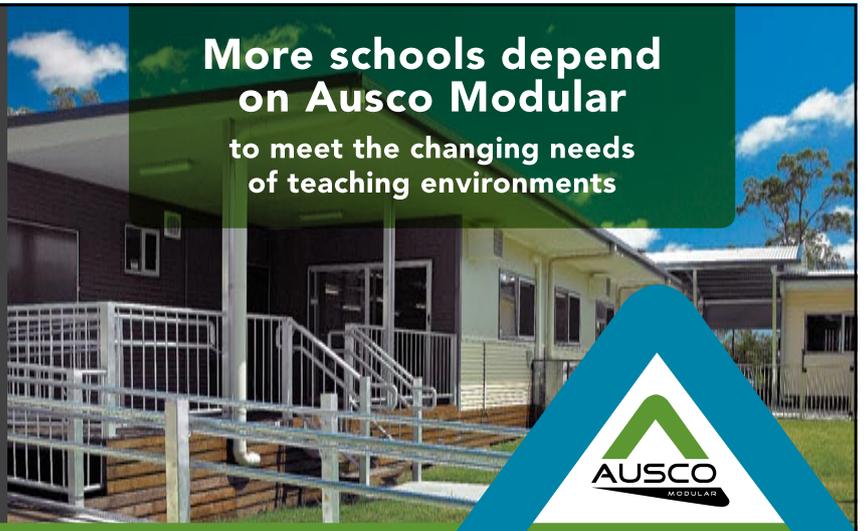


Mentone Grammar's old library needed a lift



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