

ISTE group learns from Australian schools



Top: Ray Paxton and ISTE Delegation Leaders. From left Kari Stubbs, Board Member, Holly Jobe, President; Ray Paxton, Headmaster, Waverley College; Susan Larson, Affiliate Program Director, ISTE
Right: Lance Wilhelm, President of ISTE affiliate ITEC Iowa and a Waverley College student



Members of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) in the USA visited Waverley College NSW in October as part of a study tour of schools in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

The 25-member group, from schools across the US, anticipated returning to their respective schools with insights gained from Australian schools and educators, with the view to improve critical thinking and blended learning components based on successful case studies such as Waverley College.

“Many schools and curriculums, particularly in the United States, are focused more on teaching to standardised tests, rather than helping students develop critical thinking strategies, and blending the use of technology across all of their learning experiences,” said Ray Paxton, Headmaster at Waverley College.

He said that staff member Dominic Hearne returned from last year’s ISTE conference to report that Waverley’s educational strategy paralleled ISTE’s objectives.

The school has embarked on a strategy of creating a 21st Century learning environment where education is being supported by technology “enhancing not replacing conventional learning.”

“It’s about transforming the school into a blended learning culture where each student can learn at his own place, supported and mentored by teachers,” Paxton says. “Essentially, students can learn from any place in the world, but they still need to come to school for community.”

As part of the process, solid 1960s classroom walls have been replaced with glass to create what Paxton calls ‘glassrooms’.

“Students and teachers were wary at first and unsure of people being

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able to look in to the classes and see what was going on but the classrooms have been accepted and the change has had a very positive effect on behavior.”

One-to-one PCs have been a feature at the school for several years and in March this year the school commenced a roll out of MacBook Air notebooks. Years 7 and 10 students were the first to receive their notebooks, which have been financed through a three-year leasing program with parents paying a levy to cover the cost of a carrying case, portable hard drive and insurance.

“This has been a big decision for the school,” Paxton said. “The teachers had to retrain to use Macs but now they are saying that they wish all of the students had their own notebook.” The roll out will continue in 2013 and is planned for completion in 2014.