

# SchoolNews

The essential industry guide

Issue 23 | Term 1, 2022

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
School sector  
scrambles, federal  
gov fumbles,  
Omicron surges

**EDUCATION**  
Meet the Victorian  
school leading  
COVID measures

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# Learners come first as Omicron fears grow

**As we go to print, news across the sector is Omicron-heavy: vaccine rates for primary age children are low, and health experts have started warning parents that even a mild COVID infection can have long-lasting effects.**

In children, for instance, infection has been shown to increase the risk of type 1 diabetes and multi-inflammatory syndrome and research is still in its very early days. There is still so much we don't know about long-COVID.

This issue, our special report from Sheetal Singh focuses on situating the Australian school sector as we head into Term 1 and classrooms try to reopen amid the chaos of conflicting government guidelines (page 6). Sheetal also spent some time with Firbank Grammar Principal



**Rosie Clarke,**  
Editor, *SchoolNews*  
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Jenny Williams ahead of this issue, to find out more about her rapid response to pandemic protocols in the lead up to Term 1 (page 14). Firbank was the first school in the country to mandate Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and was one of the first to set up onsite vaccination hubs for students and staff.

Knowing we would head to print as Omicron cases were climbing, we focused our attention on COVID-

related solutions schools were likely to research and require. For instance, with governments rapidly changing the rules around contact tracing and vaccine passports, we sought some suggestions on digital visitor management software (page 20). On page 36, we spoke to air ventilation specialists about problems schools continue to have with poor indoor air quality – a concern that has intensified throughout the pandemic. Also, in our health and safety section, we encourage schools to consider the need for an AED and outline relevant guidelines from St John Ambulance (page 40).

In other news, we have a bumper feature on STEAM classrooms beginning on page 28, where we find out what is required to build a STEAM classroom. We also showcase the emerging on-campus trend that is healthy vending machines on page 46, and consider essential purchasing must-haves for school kitchens (page 44).

Check out the innovation happening in school design on page 22, where flexible furniture is hotter than ever, and flick to page 18 where learning spaces are tackling acoustic health with style. We also check in with assistive technology providers on page 16 for tips on how best to support students with dyslexia, and on page 26, educational theatre moves centerstage.

## High performing school tells all

Don't miss *Principal Speaks* this issue (page 10), where Auburn North Public School Principal Mark Harris talks us through his school's groundbreaking 'distributed leadership' model and other interrelated programs and strategies that caused it to be selected as one of NSW's prized Ambassador Schools.

**Got plans for your school in 2022? Write in and let us know so we can feature you! ■**

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# Sector scrambles, federal gov fumbles, Omicron surges

By Sheetal Singh,  
Industry Reporter

**Hopes for a fresh start in 2022 were swiftly dashed over the new year as the Omicron variant swept across most states.**

Somehow, amid all the conflicting advice from state premiers and federal government, shocking reports of days-long test queues, people being turned away from COVID clinics due to vaccine shortages, and rapid antigen test price gouging, schools have had to figure out a Term 1 strategy.

As of February 15, when this issue was heading to print, 2,543,864 cases of COVID-19 and 4,418 deaths have been recorded in Australia, with 62,390,424 tests carried out. Cases sky-rocketed to an all-time high across the country mid-January, and are now tracking downward, with 19,680 positive cases and 71,992 tests recorded nationally in the last 24 hours. However, all eyes are now on our schools, which re-opened in the last fortnight.

## Primary age vaccination promises

Since the pandemic began, 94,176 boys and 88,357 girls under age 9 have tested positive for COVID-19 in Australia. More

under-9s have tested positive than people in their 50s. The government announced late last year that children between the ages of five and 11 would become eligible for a vaccination against COVID-19 early January. Three million vaccines were then promised to 5-11-year-olds ahead of the start of the school year, with more than 70 percent of 12-15-year-olds fully vaccinated as of January 10.

However, preliminary research described parents trying to get a vaccination for their kids as a 'circus'. Accounting for many parents' experiences across Australia, *The Guardian* revealed a serious shortage of supply for vaccinations in the country.

Speaking to *School News Australia*, Melissa Yan from Melton, Victoria said she had to call her GP at least four times to book doses for her grandchildren but they couldn't get it.

"The surgery asked me to call on January 10 because that's when they'll have more information and they can't take bookings before," she lamented. "When I called that Monday morning, it was chaos. They hadn't received the supply and they didn't know when they will get it,"

"My grandchildren are starting school and they still don't have a vaccination dose. I hope the government has some solutions."

One Brisbane father of two school-age sons wished to remain anonymous but shared his anger with the government's "laughable" late delivery of vaccines and push to open state borders early in the school holidays: "Booked my younger son in to get his first shot, but we all got sick around new year—couldn't get tests but probably had it. I feel for the [school] staff too—must feel like walking into a shark tank. It's a mess."

## What was the back-to-school plan across the country?

Let's do a round-up of what each state and territory promised after the Australian government announced a back-to-school program late-January...

In New South Wales, students and teachers would be required to complete Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) twice-weekly however, enforcing the testing rules was left up to the schools. More than six million RATs were to be distributed to more than 3000 schools in the first week of Term 1. Additionally, all teachers and secondary students would be required to wear face masks while also following COVID safety protocols like maintaining distance and limiting student capacity on school grounds.

According to February NSW

Department of Education data, more than 20,000 NSW students tested positive for COVID in the first two weeks of school, with numbers increasing nearly 50 percent between weeks one and two.

Tasmanian schools would receive RATs and masks as required to protect themselves when school starts. Additionally, parents were set to receive a *Back-to-School COVID Care Package* with detailed information and two RATs to be used when the child becomes symptomatic.

"It is completely understandable that parents may be feeling anxious ahead of school's return, but our Plan will ensure that schools can open as planned and that students, parents, and teachers have as much continuity and consistency as possible as we work through this period," Premier of Tasmania Peter Gutwein said at the time.

The Western Australian government reached out to casual and retired teachers to fill in if current teachers need to be isolated due to COVID-19. All education staff must be double vaccinated before the school returns for Term 1 and were also required to get their booster doses within one month of being eligible. Regular visitors to school sites would also need to be vaccinated. ►



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◀ Masks in school would be mandatory for teachers and students in Year 7 and onwards.

Under the state *Safe to Return to School plan*, more than 900 schools in the state were inspected for ventilation and a ventilation strategy has been put in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The Victorian government unveiled a four-week plan of managing the pandemic once the students return to school. The government promised to deliver more than 14 million RATs to schools with 6.6 million tests scheduled for the first week.

Surveillance testing in schools was highly recommended whereas students and staff in specialist schools would be required to test five days a week due to the higher risk of severe illness for medically vulnerable children. Education staff would also have to be double vaccinated before the term started and get their third booster dose within two weeks of being eligible.

"Face-to-face learning is the best option for our kids' learning and wellbeing – that's why we've done the work to get students safely back in the classroom from the start of Term 1 and make sure they stay there," Premier Daniel Andrews said.

Minister for Education James Merlino added: "With vital COVID-Safe steps in place like surveillance testing, improved ventilation and high rates of vaccination, we've done everything we can to make schools as safe as possible – and we can't wait to welcome all students back for Term 1."

The government also reached out to inactive and retired teachers to cover for teachers during any COVID-19 related workforce shortages.

### **Grants and support by state governments to help children get vaccinated**

The Victorian Government initiated its *Primary Care Vaccination in Schools Grants Program* under which GPs and authorised pharmacies would be matched with local schools to deliver vaccinations against COVID 19 to students between January and April 2022.



Under the \$4 million grant, applicants had to nominate the number of schools and students they could help. Successful applicants would get up to \$6500 for staffing and \$5000 for each clinic they establish. In the early weeks of Term 1, the Victorian Government rolled out 30 pop up clinics at primary schools across the state. The pop-up clinics were available to all children aged between 5-11 years, not just those attending the school.

"With 30 vaccination centres at schools, more than 35 vaccination centres in the community, plus grants for GPs and pharmacies to deliver more vaccines – we are doing all we can to get jabs into arms young and old," Andrews said at the time: "Vaccination is the best thing you do to keep your children and family safe – get the kids vaccinated and your third dose at the same time."

Ahead of returning to school, children in Western Australia were able to access an additional 4,700 COVID-19 vaccination appointments between January 22 and 31, 2022, bringing the total available appointments to more than 11,400.

The vaccination blitz in Western Australia was aimed at protecting their youngest before school started.

During the days leading to the blitz, Premier Mark McGowan encouraged parents to take advantage of the program and protect children against COVID-19. He said: "Getting your child vaccinated now is an important step to help keep them safe when schools return for the 2022 year."

Unfortunately, six schools in WA reported COVID outbreaks in the first week of the state's 'safe return to school' plan.



### **Schools gear up for Term 1 amidst skyrocketing cases**

One of the many speculations remains whether schools will mandate vaccines against COVID-19 for children and if there will be a COVID passport required.

A Brighton school in Victoria which was in the news last year for setting up COVID Vaccination Hub on the school grounds and testing their staff and teachers regularly has said that they will not make vaccinations mandatory.

Firbank Grammar School's principal Jenny Williams said that the students and teachers will be required to complete Rapid Antigen Tests twice weekly but vaccinations will not be mandatory for children.

"We don't mandate vaccinations for our children but we have vaccination clinics onsite so we are providing vaccines for our students from age 5-11 years old. Thankfully our community is very understanding and I have not had parents refusing a vaccine for themselves or their children."

"I don't know how many potential outbreaks we have stopped because of the constant testing."

Charlotte, a mum of two children between ages five and eight, said she was glad the school her kids go to in did not have a mandatory vaccination requirement either.

"My partner and I are isolating at the moment because we are COVID positive so we can't take kids out to get vaccinated," she said.

"On the other hand, there is so much rustle about getting an appointment that I have not booked one yet."

She added that the current short supply of vaccines has put a lot of parents under stress.

"Our GPs are so overwhelmed at the moment and when I call them, I can sometimes wait up to 45 minutes just to learn that they are not administering children with the vaccines yet," Charlotte said.

As school-linked COVID-19 cases rise across Australia, education staff remain unsettled about the health of themselves and their students. An eerie air of uncertainty hovers as the 10-week term looms ahead. ■



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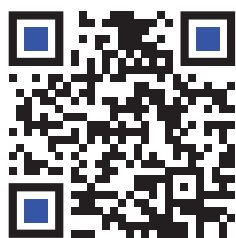
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## 'Ambassador School' Principal Speaks:

# Our high-impact practices that lead student learning

**Last year, members of our Auburn North Public School learning community proudly learned our school had been selected as an ambassador school.**

While we have developed and implemented programs and practices to assist all students develop outstanding literacy and numeracy, technology, and 21st century skills, the main reason we were selected as an ambassador school was because our students achieve outstanding literacy and numeracy outcomes.

The *Ambassador Schools* program is part of the NSW Department of Education's *School Success Model*. This program recognises high-performing schools: our school will work with other ambassador schools as well three universities to identify



**Mark Harris**, Principal,  
*Auburn North Public School, NSW*

and then share highly effective, high-impact practices that we have operating in our schools.

It's expected that this will help generate a strong evidence base on the factors that drive high-performance in schools.

Over many years, we have focused on and allocated most of our resources to the four factors that research and other evidence show have greatest impact on student learning.

Those four factors are the:

1. Quality of the school's leadership.
2. Quality of the individual teacher.
3. Level of collective teacher efficacy and its enabling conditions.
4. Level of parent engagement.

Some of the interrelated programs, practices, and strategies we have successfully developed and implemented in these four areas include:

### **Distributed leadership**

To maximise the positive impact of leadership on student learning, we have adopted a K-6 distributed leadership model, composed of seven executive members and seven grade leaders. All leaders participate in high-quality leadership development programs, with a focus on instructional leadership

and change leadership.

More than 20 school leaders participated in a seven-month leadership development program, all members of the executive team participate in three-day coaching and mentoring workshops each semester with our two education consultants, grade leaders participate in a fortnightly leadership development program that is coordinated by our Deputy Principal, and the executive members meet weekly to further develop their instructional leadership knowledge and skills and to share information about their present projects and programs.

All assistant principals and instructional leaders are 'off-class', but 'in-classes'. Each leader supervises a grade or stage, and they utilise a range of strategies to work shoulder-to-shoulder with their teachers. Strategies include lesson



Images courtesy of Auburn North Public School





Images courtesy of Auburn North Public School

demonstrations, team-teaching, lesson observations, and the filming of discreet parts of lessons for shared analysis.

### Process to select temporary teachers

We advertise all temporary vacancies and invite some applicants to school to teach for one day. We observe each teacher teach one lesson and during the observations we assess the quality of the teaching and the way in which the teachers engage students in their learning.

We also look for teachers with whom students will want to spend 1000 hours a year, teachers who will develop trusting and mutually respectful relationships with students, staff, and parents, and teachers who will become excellent teachers within three years given the quality of training, coaching, and mentoring they will receive.

Most members of our leadership team and our permanent classroom teachers began their teaching careers at Auburn North as temporary teachers.

### External school reviews

Over the past 15 years we have participated in six external school reviews.

Each review had a specific focus such as leadership, teaching and learning, reading, and school culture and climate, and was in response to data and other evidence that showed those areas required further development.

The reviews were conducted by education consultants and involved lesson observations, program evaluations, data

analysis, staff surveys, and focus group meetings with students, parents, teachers, and leaders.

The implementation of all sets of recommendations and our continuing work with our education consultants have significantly improved the quality of our leadership, teaching, learning, and parent engagement outcomes.

### Orderly learning environment

We have cultivated a positive and orderly learning environment where *teachers come to teach*, and *students come to learn*. We have very few behaviour issues, with maximum time spent on teaching and learning.

Programs and strategies that have developed and maintained this environment include the consistent promotion of our six school values of 'respect, responsibility, kindness, honesty, fairness and friendship' within our school-based positive wellbeing programs such as

our Gold Badge program.

Our values are promoted during our daily 10-minute whole school morning assemblies where values-based principal's awards are presented to students. Prior to COVID, each assembly was attended by more than 120 parents.

Teachers have developed a repertoire of strategies to develop and maintain orderly learning environments within their classrooms and across our school by participating in professional learning workshops in areas such as classroom management, building and nurturing positive relationships, and establishing and maintaining efficient routines.

### Instructional teaching model (IM)

In response to a recommendation from our 2015 review, we developed our school's instructional teaching model (IM). It's based on research, including John Hattie's

Visible Learning research.

This explicit teaching model, which is used in most literacy and numeracy lessons, features high-impact teaching strategies such as teacher clarity through student-friendly, syllabus-referenced learning goals and success criteria, scaffolding through modelled, guided, and independent instruction, questioning for a variety of purposes, differentiation, and feedback.

We also developed an accompanying graphic to serve as a visual representation of the model and a rubric that was designed as a tool to assist in the provision of feedback to teachers on each section of the IM.

Our executive team has prioritised professional learning in the IM during whole school workshops, grade-based lesson studies, and during one-on-one coaching and mentoring sessions to improve teacher capacity to plan and implement lessons using the IM. ►



Image courtesy of Auburn North Public School





Image courtesy of Auburn North Public School

### ◀ 'Locked in literacy' strategy

We utilise the 'locked in literacy' strategy during the first two hours of each school day. Release from face-to-face teaching does not occur during this time. Instead, all teachers, including specialist support teachers, are in classrooms to support student literacy learning.

Specialist support teachers participate in high-quality professional learning to ensure they develop the necessary knowledge and skills to assist students develop high-quality reading and writing outcomes.

This is also the time when our Year 1 – Year 3 and Year 4 – Year 6 New Arrivals program operates.

### Videos for self-reflection and peer-reflection

Auburn North strategically uses videos for self-reflection and peer-reflection. This involves leaders reflecting on videos of themselves leading teacher professional development programs, workshops, and sessions, and teachers implementing lessons. Leaders and teachers also receive feedback from colleagues after they've watched the videos.

Filmed sessions include my data meetings with leaders, and leadership development workshops led by our Deputy Principal.

Supervisors are filmed teaching literacy and numeracy lessons and conducting one-on-one student reading and number

formative and diagnostic assessments. These videos are used during grade-based teacher professional learning sessions and during coaching and mentoring sessions. Supervisors are also filmed leading data meetings.

Grade leaders are filmed leading collaborative planning sessions, grade professional learning workshops, and leading parent information sessions.

Teachers are filmed teaching reading, writing and maths skills using our school's IM, and during our triad lesson study strategy where small groups of teachers film and observe each other with the focus being explicit teaching, differentiation, questioning, and feedback.

### Integrated plans, targets and assessment

We utilise a whole-school, integrated approach to plan, implement, monitor, assess, and evaluate literacy and numeracy teaching and learning programs. Our K-6 scope

and sequence plans, our K-6 targets, and our K-6 assessment schedule are important components of this approach.

We have developed K-6 scope and sequence plans in all subject areas and last year we developed a phonological awareness, phonics, and spelling scope and sequence to implement this year. Our school's literacy and numeracy scopes and sequences ensure a well-ordered progression of literacy and numeracy learning for all students.

We have developed and use K-6 term and annual literacy and numeracy targets. These have evolved over time as the quality of teaching and learning has improved. The targets are effective in assisting teachers develop programs and lessons, and to assist grade teams set future directions.

Our K-6 assessment schedule is aligned to our literacy and numeracy targets and assists our leaders and teachers gather

valid student learning information across all grades in the school at pivotal times each term.

During data meetings, supervisors assist individual teachers and teams of teachers further develop their capacity to use appropriate assessment tasks, and to analyse literacy and numeracy data to celebrate achievements and to develop future differentiated teaching and learning programs.

### Collective teacher efficacy

We have used a range of programs, practices, and strategies to achieve a high level of collective teacher efficacy by ensuring its enabling conditions flourish at Auburn North.

We have created a range of opportunities for meaningful teacher collaboration, where teachers exchange ideas, methods, opinions, and resources, and we have used classroom observations and videos to enable teachers to develop a deep knowledge about each other's work. Our school has also enabled teachers to make vital contributions to the development of our school's goals, and we have empowered teachers by facilitating opportunities for shared leadership and for teachers to have a real voice in important school decision making.

### Parent engagement

We have utilised a range of programs and strategies to assist all parents develop the confidence, knowledge, and skills to become active participants in their children's learning. Prior to COVID, one program had been our 'Parents as Partners in Learning' program.

This is a grade-based literacy and numeracy workshop program, consisting of approximately 18 workshops each year. They are connected to grade learning targets and during the workshops parents participate in learning activities that are the same as those in which their children participate.

Parents are provided with resources to use at home with their children and on our school's website, parents can watch videos of Auburn North teachers and students using the teaching and learning strategies and resources. ■



Image courtesy of Auburn North Public School



# Smashed delivers underage alcohol education

**"This course is an amazing resource. I wish there was something that had existed like this at my school when I was a teenager and had to navigate these kinds of pressures. Liam and I were able to discuss some of the issues raised in the program and talk openly about how he would approach the same situations."**

**– Susan, Parent**

Smashed was launched in Australia in 2018 and is delivered as a live performance via Gibber Education and online via [smashedonline.com.au](https://smashedonline.com.au). The live program has so far reached more than 104,000 students,

with 563 performances across 474 schools. In July 2021, the program was further extended with the launch of the online version, a free one-hour session that follows the same three characters in a fun and interactive e-learning module.

Tim Watt, Gibber CEO has been able to see first hand how effective the Smashed program is at helping young people understand the risks of underage drinking. "Smashed Live has been and continues to be an incredibly effective way of connecting with young people around the risks of underage drinking and alcohol misuse. The online extension of the program enables us to continue this conversation but on a much bigger scale. Smashed can now empower young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to make healthy

life choices around alcohol, regardless of where they live."

"We know there are teens across Australia who are having to isolate due to the ongoing COVID-19 implications or who live in regions where Smashed doesn't yet visit, so by providing this education program online we're hoping to reach these vulnerable young Australians and prevent them from experimenting with risky behaviours and alcohol."

Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) President Andrew Pierpoint has also endorsed the program, "Smashed is an important program which teaches high school students about the dangers of underage drinking and the risks of this destructive behaviour. "I encourage all schools and students to take part in the Smashed Online program, especially those who won't have the opportunity to see the Live performance at their school." ▲



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**- JESS, TEACHER**

Smashed online is a powerful 60-minute e-learning experience, completely free of charge. Fresh, fun and engaging, Smashed online offers interactive e learning, student assessments, certificates and teaching guidance to help teens avoid risky behaviours and better understand the dangers of underage drinking in a flexible format that can be accessed anytime. The course can also be accessed through ClickView.

▶ ClickView



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# Meet the Victorian school leading COVID measures

By Sheetal Singh,  
Industry Reporter

**Firbank Grammar School's rapid response to pandemic protocol made headlines last year as the first school in the country to mandate Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and one of the first to set up onsite vaccination hubs for students and staff.**

*School News* caught up with Principal Jenny Williams in December to find out what Term 1 preparations the school had underway for 2022.

## Confident and undeterred

Located in Brighton, Victoria, Firbank Grammar School started RAT testing everyone entering the senior school site back in October. Students and staff were tested twice-weekly in a move to maintain COVID-safe teaching and learning environments on school grounds.

Principal Williams said the school will be back to normal in Term 1 with all the extracurriculars still taking place.

"We have a group of students going on rowing camp, and we will be testing them before we go so we've still got a supply of



*Firbank Grammar Principal Jenny Williams updates the press*

tests so we're going to make sure that each staff member and student are going on that rowing trip are tested, so that we can be assured that when they have been together for five days, they will be COVID-free," she said.

Williams said setting up the vaccination clinic and opening the school's testing site came as a big relief to parents and students alike. She told us: "It not only maintained a healthy and safe classroom but also gave our students and parents confidence

that the schools won't shut down.

"We were really keen to ensure, particularly for our senior students who were about to take their VCEs, that they would have some confidence [and] they'd be safe to complete their exams without schools having to be shut down."

Determination to give their senior students as conducive an environment as possible to complete their studies seems to have paid off. Despite spending

more time 'at home learning' than in the classroom in their final two years, the school's class of 2021 received excellent VCE results: 90 received a score of 40 or above in at least one subject, and 58 students among the cohort received an ATAR of 90 and above.

Over the school holidays, the school quickly set up booster clinics for staff and opened vaccination clinics up for primary students, aged 5-11. Williams remarked: "I'm really



*Images courtesy of Firbank Grammar School*



pleased that we are able to do this, and the aim is to maximise the number of vaccinations given before the school even comes back for Term 1."

At the time of interview, Australia was facing a short supply of vaccinations for children and scarcity of Rapid Antigen Tests across Australia, but Firkbank Grammar School's early preparation meant they had rapid antigen tests in stock and were a little less worried about the prospect of opening their school doors for Term 1. Williams reiterated that everyone entering school grounds in Term 1 will be required to follow the protocol they established in 2021, including QR code check-ins and proof of double vaccination.

She added that said the school has not mandated vaccines for students, but has done so for staff.

"We are very fortunate that the school staff has been very supportive of us doing the vaccines and they are very grateful that we are doing the vaccines on school grounds," she added.

"For students, we do not check a COVID passport because vaccines are not mandated for them but any adult coming on the school site has to be double vaccinated, needs to produce a COVID vaccination certificate, and has to do a QR code check-in.

"We ensure the safety of our students and staff by testing, but we also focused on other areas," Ms Williams said.

### **Communicating COVID protocol**

Starting in late-2021, the school has long been proactive in spreading information about safe habits around COVID-19.

"In our regular newsletters, we talk to the community about safe COVID practises so in there we talk about social distancing, wearing masks and of course the value of vaccinations in our community," said Williams.

"Obviously, the big one was COVID-safe behaviours; keeping away from each other and wearing masks. The next one was early identification and we felt that if we could do

the rapid testing, that would enable us to keep the school site open because, at that time, everything was shutting down and every time a school had a case they had to shut down."

The rapid tests, "interestingly", did not produce positive results but maintained a COVID-safe behaviours in the community, noted Williams.

"Everyone realised that they need to be aware of how they are feeling and one of the big things of course is that if you're not feeling well, not to go to school or work and I think us saying that we're doing this testing means that people are very aware of their health," she said.

The principal said she has been happy with the response of the community which led to high vaccination rates. However, she also understands and respects the opinions of those who do not want to get vaccinated: "One of the things is that our community is really on board with this and so we have very high vaccination rates and therefore very high support for the actions we are taking.

"In any community, there would be some people who don't support vaccinations and we understand that. It's not compulsory for students to get vaccinated but I would think that at least 95-98 percent of our students would be vaccinated.

"Unvaccinated students are still able to attend school."

The on-site nurses in schools assist the healthcare staff to successfully run the hubs in school.

The school has more than 1200 students across its campuses and was able to go through with testing and vaccinations with the help of TLC Healthcare staff, a fully integrated healthcare that provides support to the local community.

"For the testing, we're using the staff from TLC Healthcare who are providing teams for us to come on site," said Williams.

"When we were doing rapid testing last year, we were also using our healthcare staff to assist with that process but the staff from TLC are really fantastic and they have been doing all the medical work for us." ■

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# How to assist learners with dyslexia



Image courtesy of Scanning Pens Australia

By Rosie Clarke, Editor

## Dyslexia is a continuum and students with dyslexia can experience reading difficulties in a variety of ways.

It also seems to be wildly under-diagnosed: the Australian Dyslexia Association (ADA) suggests that one-in-five Australians experience mild to severe dyslexia, and the condition does not account for all reading difficulties.

When diagnosed, there are believed to be six types of dyslexia: phonological, surface, visual, primary, secondary/developmental and trauma dyslexia, also referred to as acquired dyslexia. The disorder is recognised in Australia under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and by the Human Rights Commission. Teachers and schools therefore have a duty of care to help students access the support they need and facilitate testing where reading difficulties become apparent.

A child whose dyslexia has not been identified may show frustration, low self-esteem, have a loss of motivation for learning and social and emotional issues, including attention difficulties.

Before they are diagnosed, many children develop coping strategies to try to disguise their dyslexia.

Negative coping mechanisms include students pretending to be less capable than they are, in order to hide this gap in their otherwise strong abilities. Or they may channel their efforts into other pursuits, often in artistic or sporting areas, which do not require any reading – a positive coping mechanism.

Research carried out by the Dyslexia Research Trust (DRT) in the UK found 52 percent of teachers reported having had no dyslexia training at all. And nine out of 10 of those that said they did receive any training say it lasted for less than an hour. Figures on dyslexia training among Australia-based teachers are hard to find, suggesting more work needs to be done in this area to make sure teachers feel empowered to support students with dyslexia.

For teachers, aiding the growth of a student with dyslexia can be an extremely rewarding part of the job. However, without the right tools, resources, and professional development it must become a challenging task for the teacher and potentially a frustrating one for the pupil.

The ADA recommends: "Learn[ing] about the common characteristics of dyslexia, trust your gut feelings and do something about it. Effective screening for dyslexia will tell you a lot about the type

of teaching [a] child requires."

Teachers should, of course, discuss any difficulties with the child's parents or guardians and could recommend an assessment. The ADA offers a thorough pre-assessment service for students of all ages. This can assist the school and assess the relevant needs of the individual student, providing a report containing information for personalised understanding and support. Once a diagnosis has been received, teachers and aides can facilitate support for the student; for instance, ideally, your school will have access to assistive technology the student can use.

## Industry perspectives: assistive technology implementation and its impact

David Campbell is Country Manager at Scanning Pens, a company supplying assistive technology to school around Australia. He spoke with us about the challenges schools face when trying to access and implement resources for students with dyslexia.

"Without a formal diagnosis, it is difficult for teachers to differentiate whether reading difficulties are due to dyslexia, low reading level, or something else," says David. "However,

there are some great teaching strategies, training resources, assistive technology tools and support for literacy that, when combined, make a big difference."

## David's tips for best practice when teaching students with dyslexia:

- Develop an inclusive classroom.
- Use a structured, consistent literacy approach.
- Support students with assistive technology where possible.

## "Here are some useful strategies I've identified to support the adoption of assistive technology:

- ensuring the support provided is not 'special' but rather it is universal and can support any learner;
- adopting starts with teachers who model tech tools daily and to all learners;
- focussing on the function of the technology not on the learning need that is being supported; for example, you might say, 'let's use that white pen to explore new key words today', rather than 'Jimmy-- take out your Reading Pen';
- including students in 'tech club' where they explore new tech and strategies together, and can review videos of the tools and resources being introduced;
- developing a peer mentor program to encourage reluctant students and build comradery.

"There are many great tools available to assist students with dyslexia," David said. "Don't treat them as resources only to be used occasionally; rather, incorporate them in day-to-day teaching with all students. Sometimes dyslexic students can feel self-conscious about using assistive technology but by making these tools available for all students it makes them more acceptable and therefore more likely to be used." ■



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– Learning Support Team, Bossley Park High School, NSW

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# Creating learning spaces with balanced acoustics

By Rosie Clarke, Editor

## Australian schools have an acoustic health problem.

A Brisbane-based study of primary school classroom 'acoustic health' found a 92 percent "failure rate for occupied sound level and STI against research recommendations for teaching spaces in primary school classrooms in Australia", meaning students would struggle to process information in these environments. Published in *Geohealth* journal, the research by scholars from The University of Queensland and Monash University was part of a project on 'Improved Classroom Acoustics for Autistic Children', and notes that this evidence "supports long-standing and ongoing calls around the world to systematically improve classroom acoustics". With acoustic health generally poor, the challenges are significantly greater for students who are neurodiverse, hard of hearing, or who speak English as a Second Language (ESL).

## How to design learning spaces with good acoustic health: industry explainer

A specialist in school acoustic design, Autex Australia representative Rob Jones advised *School News* on some of the most central considerations to factor in 2022.

"Core learning spaces must be designed to allow clear verbal communication between teachers and students while minimising noise disturbance. This means for good speech intelligibility a reverberant sound field cannot exist!

"With increased use of glazing and open, or visually connected spaces there is less surface area available especially vertical surfaces to control reverberation and noise build-up. With limited available wall surfaces, the ceiling area has to do most of the heavy lifting regarding reverberation control. It's important to ensure noise is minimised across the



Macquarie University, Image courtesy of Autex Australia

entire frequency range to help ensure good levels of speech intelligibility are achievable. This can be accomplished with high NRC rated broadband direct fix panels, ceiling tiles or, increasingly, by using absorptive baffles and fin systems that better suit modern visual design and environmental principles that encompass material reuse via ease of disassembly and high recycled content. Lateral reflections and echoes in larger open spaces still must can be controlled with acoustic wall linings, or screens where visual separation is required.

"There are two primary type of noise absorption products available," he explained: "Porous and resonant types. Both are used on ceilings and walls. Porous absorbers are the most common and usually the most cost effective. Thicker versions offer broad band absorption for direct

fixing to the substrate or fitted into ceiling tile grid systems. Baffles and fins can be clustered together more densely or made deeper to suit the unique requirements of the space. For education environments, highly durable PET linings are ideal for wall applications as they can provide not just noise reduction properties but also functional display areas.

"The second most common type of absorptive products are called resonant absorbers. These options often take the form of perforated or slotted panels. Offering often significant variations in performance based on the airspace behind, perforation diameter and open area. Typically used as ceiling linings and for walls in larger auditorium or gymnasiums."

Acoustic classroom design has also had to adapt to new flipped/

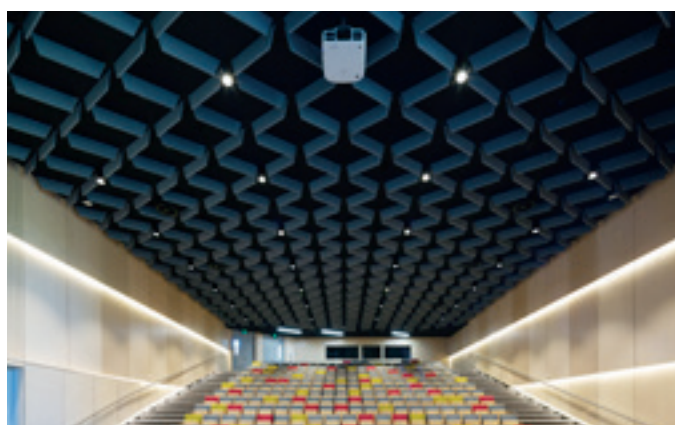
digital learning needs. On this, Rob suggested "more three dimensional, suspended custom designed ceilings rather than drop in ceiling tiles. These options can provide both visual delineation to assist in spatial zoning while being highly efficient at controlling reverberation and reducing noise flow within these acoustically coupled spaces. Spaces specifically for video conferencing have specific acoustic requirements and specialist design advice from an acoustic consultant should be obtained.

## New facility acoustics versus retrofit acoustics?

Rob advised us that the acoustic objectives in each case are effectively the same. He said: "Learning spaces must be designed to allow clear verbal communication between teachers and students while minimising noise disturbance. If it is a major refit, then the performance requirements prescribed in the local education departments design guidance are the same as a new build.

"If it is more of a cosmetic upgrade, there is some leeway in achieving the acoustic performance. However, it should as closely meet the performance requirements as possible. Significant improvements in performance can be obtained by installing continuous acoustic wall coverings to all available vertical surfaces. This option provides more meters of acoustic absorption lowering reverberation, improved acoustic separation between adjoining spaces, and provides large areas of display space. Especially useful for primary schools, these solutions typically don't require high levels of surface preparation and don't require any further finishing, such as painting meaning they can be very cost-effective solutions.

"For all acoustic treatments, always ensure that fire and acoustic ratings are checked before installing. An audit revealed budget retail brands often don't have the required compliance or performance information available for use in educational facilities." ■



Taronga Institute of Science and Learning, Image courtesy of Autex Australia





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<sup>^</sup>Seep, Benjamin., Glosemeyer, Robin., Hulce, Emily., Linn, Matt., Aytar, Pamela. (2009) Classroom Acoustics - A Resource for Creating Learning Environments with Desirable Learning Conditions. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED451697.pdf>

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Image courtesy of Passtab

# Managing school visitors safely during pandemic times

By Heather Barker Vermeer  
Industry Reporter

**A visitor management system is technology that tracks visitors entering your school and allows you to monitor their whereabouts on your premises. It replaces the old-fashioned handwritten visitor record with a more efficient, more secure system.**

With COVID protocols shifting rapidly, sometimes on a weekly basis, having a digital system that can immediately implement new restrictions is not just handy but potentially lifesaving. Vaccine certificate requirements for entry are the most recent example of this—a school with a digital visitor management system can enforce the regulation automatically. Further, this may



Image courtesy of Passtab

also prevent some potentially uncomfortable interactions between unvaccinated arrivals and staff, who can point to the digitised system as a means of de-escalation.

From contact tracing to touch-

free entry and health screening, to denying access when someone does not fit within your onsite policies or has completed their authorised visit, there are clear benefits to a digital visitor management system.

Features such as pre-registration and arrival alerts can facilitate a much smoother 'check-in' process. Configuration settings can also be shared across sites so that visitors can be managed from a reception workstation or remote 'kiosk', such as an app via an android or IOS device.

Sign-in and out processes can be customised with school branding too, a professional touch that may impress prospective parents and special guests and can provide a warm welcome to international arrivals from a sister school or visiting sports team.

Software can provide a comprehensive audit trail of all visits, securely maintained on a command server. Data is a beast that can run wild should you have insufficient ability and capacity to maintain it safely and effectively. Outsourcing your visitor management system service ensures data is legally stored and remains in safe hands.



## In-depth industry view

Passtab Operations Manager, Laura Hunt advised **School News** that COVID-19 regulations have created a new layer of compliance to the school's visitor management processes "that are now vital to the health and safety of the whole school environment".

She explained: "The school system must rapidly adapt to continually changing COVID-19 directions set by the Government. My team, for instance, now has a dedicated staff member whose role it is to monitor and interpret governing body advice and mandates in each state—all to ensure schools have the most up-to-date processes in place.

"A visitor management system will make screening for COVID-19 risk and health declarations a simple process by ensuring each person arriving at the school understands what is expected of them. Each person will be presented with the school's terms of entry and an "I agree" check box then sign the declaration electronically as part of the check-in process.

## Manage vaccination status by adding a dedicated vaccination module within the digital system



"School terms of entry generally cover that the person is feeling well, they are not COVID-19 positive, and are not a current close contact. The system stores all declarations with other visitor information making it easy to access if required. The most effective way to manage vaccination status, for example, is to add a dedicated vaccination module that operates within the digital system. People attending the school on a regular basis, such

as teachers, visitors, volunteers, contractors, and relief staff sign in, set their vaccination status within the system, and provide the appropriate evidence. The system monitors their status at each sign in, relieving school staff from the ongoing checking process. Casual visits can be collected and checked as a once off. The system must be able to adapt to each state and governing body regulations and the individual requirements that may occur at various schools.

"For booster shots, likewise a dedicated school system should have provisions to alert the school during sign-in if the visitor is not up to date with their booster shot. These timeframes are a moving target and an automated system must be designed to seamlessly adapt in real-time."

For schools, the visitor management system they use is really their "first line of defense", according to Laura, which is why "using the iPad to display a message like 'Please Sanitise' is helpful, along with listing COVID-19 safe practices visitors must agree to during sign in."

Contactless mobile sign ins and QR codes have become standard now, so "this is a good option for schools looking for a contactless sign in process either permanently or periodically during high-risk times". However, "there are other no contact or low contact sign in methods such as RFID which allow people to tap in and tap out with a key FOB or card", and these options can have additional security benefits. ■

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SIGN-IN & COMPLIANCE



# Free the furniture

## flexible learning design for 2022



Seaton High School, Image courtesy of Resource Furniture

By Rosie Clarke, Editor

### Education trends have a knack for getting ahead of the curve, and flexible furniture design is no exception.

Flexibility has driven pandemic survival over the last two years and given this, school staff and students are now retuning to the classroom with heightened awareness of what environment they need to help them teach and learn effectively.

Flexible furniture design has never been more relevant, so this issue we sought out emerging trends, and then caught up with some leading flexible furniture suppliers to solidify purchasing tips for Australian schools.

### Ergonomics rule: shake up student seating

Mixed seating options are increasingly essential in every classroom: soft and hard chairs, as well as high and low options for different learning activities. Learner agency drives this trend, encouraging students to choose a seat they feel will best enable them to complete the task at hand.

Relating to this emphasis on student agency, analysis on 'Children's behaviour and the design of school furniture' from ergonomic researchers Grenville Knight and Jan Noyes in *Ergonomics* journal found that: "In the absence of radically redesigned furniture, it is suggested that children should be given more choice in their

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## Creating Your Space

With so many choices available, selecting school furniture for various age groups and learner types is more necessary than ever. Why not get assistance from the experts with the most cutting-edge knowledge in the field?

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Image courtesy of Sebel Furniture

seating, and better guidance should be given to individuals involved in education in order to inform their decision-making about classroom furniture and the postural, anthropometric and orthopaedic aspects of sitting and related activities.”

Active seating continues this flexible seating trend by encouraging students to make use of a much wider variety of seating options. Seen particularly in Europe, these options can stretch as far as classroom exercise bikes, and seek to

benefit physical health as well as focus. Stand-up desks are another seating option that continue to grow in popularity – more specifically, desks that can be lowered and raised from sitting to standing. These provide lots of versatility for older students in particular who may be moving from group work to individual study and for longer periods at a time. They can work well for staff – particularly school administrators and management teams who spend much of their day seated.

At their core, these flexible options ask students to be more aware of their own needs as learners and as people. For instance, if a child recognises that they are feeling overwhelmed, they can decompress on a fitness ball, or sit with a book on a beanbag; if they are overstimulated, they may find it easier to focus while seated on a wobble stool, bicycle-style pedal chair, or in a quiet booth.

When consulting with a furniture supplier, ask about ergonomic

fundamentals and whether their products have been designed with this in mind.

### **Move stuff more: why schools are ‘hot desking’**

Collaborative learning activities and hybrid classrooms, which combine in-person teaching with technology, are rapidly on the rise. Hot desking encourages collaboration by opening up the floor—instead of being assigned an individual desk for the year, learners move around as required (and so does the furniture).

Colourful configurations abound, ottomans, beanbags, modular tables, booths, and cubby-style hubs are all commonplace in schools that are actively hot desking. Rather than designate one teacher to a small classroom, this approach favours larger open-plan environment where multiple teachers might co-facilitate a variety of different projects. Visual appeal is significant here as colour coded furniture and carpet design is often used to ‘zone’ different areas rather than enforce hard borders between learners.►

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Seaton High School, Images courtesy of Resource Furniture

◀ *What schools want is tips to help them create extra learning areas, according to Sebel Furniture's Stephanie Cox.*

She told us: "They are allocating any space around the site they can; looking for any that are currently under-utilised and trying to convert them into learning environments. Unused office rooms are being reinvented to cater to small working groups. Hallway areas

between classrooms are also being redesigned as breakout areas, and I believe this is directly linked to COVID as it provides more space between students to work without being cramped together in one classroom.

"Flexible learning spaces offer useful solutions here. Often, I design a classroom where students can collaborate in groups of different sizes, then the furniture can be moved for

individual study when required. The key is to design the area so there is room to move--don't overcrowd the area and consider storage if the classes have a lot of resources to house. Another tip is to not to over stimulate students with classroom colour, especially if student art will be displayed. Use colour intelligently – for example, science labs are often quite clinical in appearance, so this is one area where the stools could be brightly coloured."

*A "hybrid approach" to flexible learning is the latest design trend Resource Furniture's Creative Manager Michael Merlino has noticed.*

He reveals: "We are now seeing perimeter classroom spaces with more functional furniture and softer, more natural tones." Another growing trend is "a central collaborative space with a range of modular breakout furniture, such as soft seating with pops of colour."

Michael notes: "The more 'conventional' classroom furniture includes rectangular tables, but these are often now mobile, flip tables that provide versatility, coupled with lightweight sled base chairs and high stacking capacity. The central collaborative space provides a choice of learning with surfaces at varying heights, modular soft seating, and study pods for focus work."

"My top tip is for schools to consider how their teachers and students want to use each space. Ask for their opinions, get their feedback, and involve them in the process. They will love the opportunity to be included and feel a stronger connection to the space. Most importantly, keep it simple but clever: you can have a great, 'less is more' design with careful consideration of the practicalities involved." ■



Image courtesy of Sebel Furniture



# The big return to school

## and how electronic access is helping in the fight

**For schools across Australia, security of students and staff is an increasingly high priority. Knowing who is on your premises has always been essential to ensure a safe working and learning environment. It is important to be able to manage access and even be able to rapidly lock down a classroom or the whole campus in the case of an emergency.**

With limited resources, schools want to manage security whilst minimising staff time - for example, being able to automatically lock/unlock perimeter gates, or to be instantly alerted if any gate is left open. If you hire out school facilities, such as sports halls or performing arts spaces, giving automatic



access to users at their specific booked times saves having to have staff present to open up.

The current rollout of anti-covid measures, combined with the frustration of limited resources has given schools yet another challenge as the new educational year starts - keeping groups separate, managing traffic through the building and having 'audit trail' visibility of who has been where.

These demands mean that many

schools are now considering electronic access control (EAC) not just for physical security, but also as a way to address covid measures.

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# Research backs educational theatre



Image courtesy of Alpha Shows

By Rosie Clarke, *Editor*

## As an educational tool, theatre works.

A review of evidence surrounding the use of theatre in education by Edith Cowan University and the Child Health Promotion Research Centre found that an overwhelming majority of students not only “demonstrate enjoyment and enthusiasm through watching educational theatre”, but “listen attentively, and can correctly identify the educational messages being portrayed”.

Whether students are watching a production staged for them as part of an incursion or performing in a show themselves as part of a drama or other school production, they learn a slew of valuable lessons and develop empathy for others.

Incursions are an effective choice for schools wanting to engage theatre directly as a vehicle for socially conscious personal development. They are an especially valuable tool for schools lacking the resources or community support to stage their own school production.

Whether a school is hosting their own performance or inviting another company to perform, plenty of preparation is required. Engaged, enthusiastic staff provide fuel for the process and the performance itself, and benefits to staff can also be huge. As well as being a creative outlet, production time offers staff many leadership opportunities, requires excellent organisation, communication, and an ability to motivate and inspire.

Confidence is king, or queen, for performers and the courage it takes to grace the stage for some can be a huge barrier to overcome. The self-belief, sense of pride and joy that can come from this can impact students for life. Teamwork is promoted, memories and friendships made.

## Using theatre to teach students about their emotions

### **School News spoke with Alpha Shows Founder and CEO, Ben Jackson about what it's like to work with schools on the stage.**

For teachers, he acknowledged: “It’s an eternal struggle in the classroom as well as the playground to guide students to treat each other with more respect, dignity, and even love.”

Sometimes, dysregulated emotions can cause children, just as adults, to make choices and pursue actions that lead to conflict and discontent.

“This is not conducive to a great learning environment, to say the least,” Ben noted. “Rather than talk down to students or drill into them a set of rules that they are forced to obey, I believe in

theatre and performance as a way to model conflict resolution and frame emotional regulation.”

He added: “It’s not a new idea for schools to use a dramatic performance to tackle bullying, for example, but Alpha’s immersive theatre takes this to a new level.”

For example, Ben said: “At all our shows, the actors take students on a roller coaster ride with state-of-the-art costumes, lighting, sound, creating a ‘rock-concert’ like atmosphere”.

“When students are entertained, they enjoy engaging with educational content, personal development, or even more complex subject matter like bullying and social justice. They just don’t want to be talked down to; if you get them laughing, you can lead them

to a new place emotionally.

“We usually perform one of our ten shows sequentially every year at a school and then cycle around again. The results stack from year to year and evolve over that time to respond to student needs so they have maximum impact,” Ben told us.

“We know from experience that if you put on the right show and keep it fast and loud and funny, as well as profound and powerful, they’ll stay with you on the journey to new understandings about themselves and the world.”

A final piece of advice from Ben: Finish the show with some question time to drive home central themes and messaging—it also gives students a chance to engage with the performers. ▲





Images courtesy of Alpha Shows

Backstage, too, there are many opportunities for students of varied talents and interests to get involved. Tech-minded pupils may enjoy working on sound and lighting, hard tech students might get on board with set construction and design students may wish to work on set and costume design.

The school show represents a chance for the whole school – and wider – community to come together. Parents may get involved in costume creation, prop sourcing and ticket promotion, while the wider local

community is invited to along to support the school and enjoy some local theatre. Guests may include local dignitaries and school alumni, representing an opportunity for renewed engagement and support.

Music scores and scripts must be obtained by licence to avoid copyright infringement. For some schools, performance art and theatre departments are well resourced treasure troves of treasures and technology. For others, equipment, costumes, and sets must be sourced externally. ■



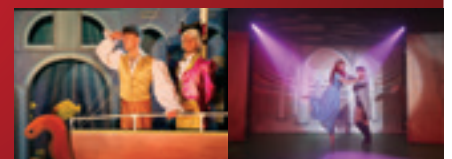
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## STEAM Classrooms:

# Creative spark and critical rigour

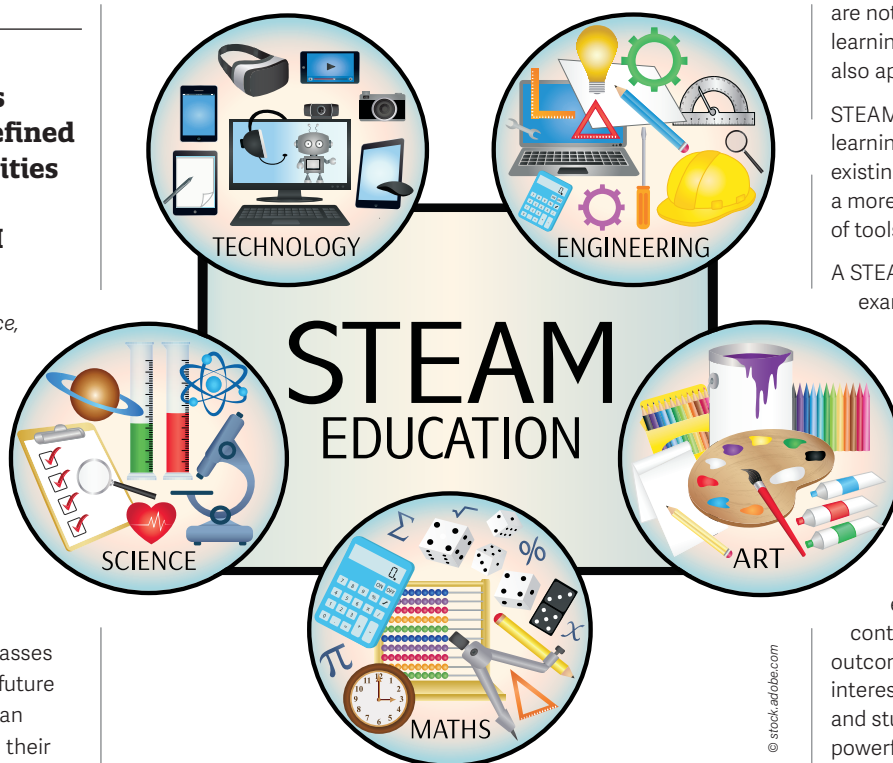
By Rosie Clarke, Editor

**The tech boom and a global skills shortage has redefined educational priorities over the past decade as STEAM industries grow.**

Rather than teach *Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts* and *Mathematics* as separate subjects, STEAM schools integrate these learning areas with real-world applications and project-based pedagogy.

Each area alone encompasses a vast range of potential future pathways for students than schools can draw from in their project design – for instance, engineering encompasses civil and chemical, as well as electrical and mechanical.

Teachers should refresh their understanding of all these different fields when they consider STEAM curriculum design.



### Why build STEAM programmes into your curriculum?

As well as helping to produce tomorrow's designers and engineers, STEAM programmes help develop innovative mindsets, critical thinking, and

problem-solving abilities that ensure our students become creators, not just consumers, regardless of their chosen field. STEAM learners become flexible thinkers, and the emphasis STEAM programmes place on creative problem-solving develops thinking strategies that

are not just useful in any future learning or career pathway, but also appeal to most industries.

STEAM-based teaching and learning exists to enrich existing subject areas with a more dynamic application of tools and technologies.

A STEAM teaching mindset, for example, encourages the use of coding, laser cutting, and robotics into your History, English, or Arts classroom.

And vice versa, when thinking about science education: "Integrating arts activities can decidedly enliven the curriculum

content, make lesson outcomes more successful and interesting to both teachers and students, and introduce powerful and inspired creative thinking into the teaching-learning process," note Sousa and Pilecki in *From STEM to STEAM: Using Brain-Compatible Strategies to Integrate the Arts*.

### How to build a STEAM classroom

Constructing a STEAM classroom requires flexible,



## Build artful, practical teaching spaces by embracing STEAM pedagogy



adaptable furniture design that can cater to digital learning as well as hands-on activities required for arts and engineering projects.

Modular tables and desks are useful for this reason and can even come with whiteboard surfaces that students may use to flex their creativity and brainstorm in groups. Schools can even take a STEAM approach to the design process by engaging 3D design apps that allow you to virtually configure and reconfigure your teaching

spaces for different learning activities. These solutions mean teachers are encouraged to link the learning environment to their pedagogy, building a STEAM classroom that is both artful and practical.

Learning space design that facilitates a STEAM programme is how schools can maximise their students' ability to thrive in their new STEAM curriculum. STEAM classrooms are designed to give students the tools they need to trial their ideas, experiment with solutions, and, most importantly,

provide enough flexibility and variety for them to switch activities or try something else!

To cater to all the possibilities your STEAM programme holds, classrooms should be created with multi-use in mind. Easy access to power points, digital storage and charging capabilities, as well as easy-to-clean art stations, and computer or tablet devices for app integration, allow for more seamless sessions of learning.

International expert in the field of STEAM, Professor Georgette Yakman told Associate Professor Zhao Hui Chen and Master Lu Xiaoting from Henan University, in a 2016 interview on the development of information technology research, that schools should take steps to increase the quality and depth of their STEAM outcomes: "To help STEAM achieve better results, I recommend: Each school should have a STEAM certified coordinator.

"As a course specialist, application writer and community liaison, these coordinators should be familiar with the interrelationships of

education, science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics, and other disciplines, such as career planning, problem-based learning and curriculum integration.

"Purchasing equipment and design courses should have the vision of sustainable development, both based on the actual situation of STEAM education, but also to meet the future needs of STEAM education. In order to meet the needs of STEAM education, to achieve the deep integration of information technology and STEAM education, teaching methods such as the use of flip-class activities should be used."

For those unfamiliar with flip-class, the 'Flipped Classroom' is a blended learning model in which traditional ideas about classroom activities and homework are reversed, or 'flipped'. In this model, instructors have students interact with new material for homework first. It can provide a blank canvas for students to stimulate creativity and encourage unique innovation, perfectly STEAM-appropriate. ■

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# Key drivers behind STEM space designs

By Rosie Clarke, *Editor*

**Wonder, investigate, problem solve! A school explores how core principles of STEM-based learning extend beyond programme pedagogy and into physical learning environments...**

School curricula now widely incorporate STEM-based learning, affecting our youngest learners all the way through to our young adults. While this shift has generated countless positive experiences for teachers and students alike, it involves an ever-evolving education landscape that presents big challenges for schools. Learning environments must adapt to changing student demographics, teaching techniques, and technology requirements, but things can change year-to-year. So, how do schools navigate STEM trends?

## **Challenges schools expect when implementing a STEM makerspace and programme:**

- Need to develop clearer understanding of how STEM differs from current practice. Translate your school's values, pedagogy, and ideals into practical solutions.
- Need to know where and how to start. Ask, 'what is a STEM space?' and what might it offer your school.



Images courtesy of Furnware

- Need a space. Locate somewhere at your school suitable for STEM activities – consider that many schools don't have the luxury of a dedicated STEM studio.
- Need to budget. What are your school's funding options? While some schools may have 3D printers, laser cutters, drones, robots, and television studios, budgets are always finite, and few schools have access to the ultimate STEM kit list.
- Need to avoid pitfalls. How can you learn from the false starts of early adopters?

A successful STEM programme goes beyond installing the latest 3D printer or purchasing the latest robotics. Learning spaces developed for STEM-related activities should not only be informed by sound research but also in partnership with

learning space consultants so they can meet the diverse and variable needs of learners.

The following school used Furnware's expertise to transform their existing learning spaces into STEM centres. Its principal shares how they feel their STEM design success transformed student engagement and learning.

Devonport Christian School in Tasmania transformed an empty classroom used for after-school STEM activities into the dedicated, creative hub of its new STEM centre. Devonport's innovative programme is filled with imagination and possibility for students of all ages.

The centre boasts open collaborative spaces plus dedicated green screen areas for filmmaking, LEGO building and presentation rooms. Principal, Chad Smit, prioritised the need for purpose-built spaces to facilitate his school's STEM programme. He recalls: "We started to get more specific with the design because one of the ways schools can go wrong [is by having] too many flexi spaces and not specifically-built spaces".

Another priority for Devonport was integrating tech equipment it had purchased in previous years, while using furniture and space to design something awe-inspiring for students.

"It has to *have* fun, has to *be* fun, has to *live* fun, it has to *speak* fun,

and so we threw in bright colours".

As much as their STEM centre's design has ticked all the right boxes, it's the transformation of learning which is the real success story at Devonport Christian School.

## **Advice from the Devonport team to kickstart your own STEM space:**

- Don't be afraid to learn with your students, start with the basics like Minecraft and 'hour of code'.
- Visit schools that have successfully implemented STEM and go to conferences – You'll meet tech experts who might offer you free equipment to trial.
- Tech can be overwhelming and expensive. Don't purchase an entire class set of one item, get different smaller sets of items to keep the costs down and rotate them.
- If you don't have a dedicated space, create a creative corner or if you have access to a disused bus, you can always create your own mobile makerspace.
- Take advantage of PD courses where you can, upskill and learn.
- Run sandpit sessions in the staffroom with your school experts to bring all staff along on the journey and remove 'the fear' of not knowing.
- A lot of STEM is project-based learning and real-world problem solving, so it doesn't all need to be about tech. Think about other materials (that are free) you can use.
- Don't wait until you are ready, otherwise, you will miss so many opportunities. ▲





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# Developing character for learning using technology

## A classroom approach

Image courtesy of Integrate AV

### Welcome back to another testing year for us in the teaching profession.

Most of us are now back in our classrooms developing routines with students while accommodating those self-isolating at home. Throughout the pandemic, we adapted to technology in new, creative ways and remained strong during the tidal wave of professional development and policy updates to provide quality education for our students.

If we had not relied upon our own 'character for learning' and willingness to adapt, we would



**Lindsey Davis,**  
*Training and Development Consultant,  
Integrate AV and Technology Integration  
Specialist, Sydney High School*

have failed our students in much more than delivering program content. We all know, as teachers, we act as role models to students; how we respond to situations

is noticed by them acutely. In celebration of teachers' achievements and demonstration of key characteristics for learning, I feel we should not only continue to demonstrate these, but help our students further develop their own 'character for learning' skills in the classroom.

I refer here to key character traits that are valued across our society. While there is much debate over possible hierarchies and classifications of these traits, as teachers we understand the importance of positive 'character for learning' traits in improving educational outcomes. Our schools may actively promote, recognise, and reward positive

'character for learning' traits, especially highlighting students' ability to develop these traits further during two significantly disrupted academic years.

### For the purposes of this article, I will refer to these key 'character for learning' traits:

- Organisation
- Self-motivation/diligence
- Social emotional intelligence (ability to work in a group)
- Resilience
- Creativity

There are numerous ways of supporting students to further develop these key traits and we may have already found strategies that work well. I wish to share with you some of the ways you can utilise classroom technologies to promote and develop character for learning traits with your students.

### Organisation skills

During lockdown, students were thrown in the deep end, having to organise their time and manage their workload for their entire education from home and for many, on their own. As teachers, we came up with as many support strategies as we could to best support our students' ability to find,



Image courtesy of Integrate AV



complete, and submit their work, as well as check their feedback in the simplest way possible.

This form of digital organisation has become crucial in the workplace too, but prior to COVID it was taken for granted that our students would figure it out for themselves by the time they graduated high school.

Of course, no longer having students in front of us highlighted the need for support with their digital organisation skills. Many of our students rose to the challenge, especially younger students, and those with additional learning needs. This incredible achievement for our young people should not only be celebrated, but we should aim to continue to develop these skills, even when our students are back in our classrooms.

For example, if your students have access to devices in your classroom, you can continue to provide classwork in a similar way to how they accessed it from home. Especially if some of your students are self-isolating. This could be uploading work to your school's learning management system or Google applications and asking students to access it from there.

Encouraging students to use digital organisation applications to help them self-manage their work can also be easily implemented in the classroom. Again, using their devices, you could ask them to add calendar events to your school's chosen calendar application such as Google Calendar or Microsoft Outlook to record when their homework is due. Show them how to add alerts to notify themselves before the due date of what they need to complete and how to add any worksheets to the calendar invite so they know exactly which homework the due date is for. Learning management systems often do this automatically for students based on teacher input but demonstrating how students can organise themselves digitally should not be overlooked as a learning opportunity.

### **Self-motivation/diligence**

For many of us, the last two years have tested our drive and determination to do our best, especially our students. Term 4 2021 was a struggle to not only

deliver our course programs, but also to re-establish our school's routines and core values. We needed to reinvigorate our students' commitment to their learning with little of the academic year left. Some of our students found it especially difficult to adjust back to classroom expectations; they became disengaged, distracted, and struggled to motivate themselves. This was swiftly followed by the school holidays, lessened restrictions, and many of our school community becoming ill with COVID.

It is no surprise upon our return to classroom teaching this academic year that many of our students need support to build self-motivation skills and encouragement to do their best when in the classroom. Your school may have developed strategies to promote this 'character for learning' trait, or you may have existing approaches to use.

Classroom technologies can also help you encourage self-motivation among students. One option would be to use software applications or hardware solutions that allow students to connect their personal devices to your interactive flat panel (IFP). Different teaching software and online applications allow you to visualise on your IFP when all students have connected to an activity, including those students connecting remotely.

### **Social emotional intelligence**

Using screensharing technology such as AirServer, always provides learning opportunities to develop and recognise social and emotional intelligence. As teachers, we often shy away from using this application for fear of students not being respectful towards each other or to us and ultimately disrupting our ability to teach that lesson. Rather than avoid this situation, I believe it is an important part of our students' education, to be able to demonstrate responsibility and respect when communicating digitally. This could be turned into a specific tool for learning, where we provide students with a rubric, detailing how they can demonstrate their social and emotional intelligence during these activities.

For example, students could



*Image courtesy of Integrate AV*

be asked to share an essay paragraph with your IFP. You can bring up some of the paragraphs on the screen for your class to read and peer-assess. By modelling how to provide constructive criticism in such a way that the student feels empowered to improve, your students not only improve their ability to write a paragraph, but also the skills of empathy, compassion, and respect. Once this teaching and learning tool of connecting with student devices is used multiple times in meaningful ways, our students will become confident in this form of digital communication, which will also support them when they leave to join the workforce or Further Education.

### **Resilience**

You may have students in your class who struggle with making mistakes. They may tear pages out or use liquid tape to try and hide any mistakes they make. I personally ban the use of liquid tape in my classroom as I encourage my students to put a line through any mistakes and make adjacent corrections. This way, they have a record of their own improvement. With technology, students can negate the need for permanence altogether.

Sharing your screen with student devices for them to interact with gives them the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in a way that can be digitally erased and easily corrected with guidance. Most teaching software platforms allow for live corrections to be made by students from where they are sitting, enabling them to make their own corrections more collaboratively. This approach enables you to spot common misconceptions in your class, while encouraging students to keep trying and feel more confident in their own abilities.

### **Creativity**

As a 'character for learning' trait, creativity refers to the process of learning as well as the demonstration of understanding. If our students can learn in a creative way, it enables them to develop their own creative approaches to concepts and in doing so demonstrate deeper understanding.

With the use of interactive flat panels and student devices, we can encourage creativity in our students. For example, an activity requiring students to deliver a presentation could also facilitate an interactive quiz or a game. Here, students will need to understand the topic well enough to come up with their own quiz, but also be able to use the presentation software and interactive flat panel well enough to manage delivery and engagement in their quiz. Enabling your students to facilitate their own activities can be very empowering and inspirational, paving the way for more creative and engaging approaches to their own demonstrations of understanding.

Outlined in this article, we can use technology in various ways to develop 'character for learning' traits as we support students' transition back into the classroom and to maintain the wonderful skills they gained by necessity during remote learning. ●

*Lindsey Davis has been in the Education industry for 20 years, including working in the education technology industry delivering and managing teacher professional development. Working with Integrate AV as a Training and Professional Development Specialist, she is keen to support her fellow teachers with their use of technology in the classroom for developing a wide range of skills in our students of all ages.*



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# INDOOR AIR QUALITY PLAGUING OUR SCHOOLS?



By Heather Barker Vermeer  
Industry Reporter

## Effective ventilation has never been more of a necessity in schools.

It is widely known that crowded, poorly aired classrooms are a breeding ground for germs that can cause many common illnesses, but the so-easily transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 has added a new layer of seriousness to the ventilate debate. While air filtration alone cannot prevent COVID transmission, health and government officials around the world recommend increasing ventilation, with outdoor air and air filtration, as a vital part of any larger strategy. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, for instance, lists improved ventilation as a potential additional control measure to reduce the risk of COVID transmission.

Australian teachers have voiced concern around poor ventilation in schools as they reopen amid the ongoing pandemic of an airborne virus. Last term, for instance, concerned Brisbane teacher Tim Arnot told ABC that he decided to monitor CO<sup>2</sup> in his classroom and recorded levels four-times higher than recommended. Levels of CO<sup>2</sup> rise as people breathe, where spaces are poorly ventilated, and research has linked CO<sup>2</sup> levels to educational outcomes. Prolonged exposure to poor air quality, wherein the CO<sup>2</sup> levels exceed these levels can result in headaches, poor concentration, restlessness, nausea, and sleepiness.

Moreover, "school aged children have greater susceptibility to some environmental pollutants than adults because they breathe higher volumes of air relative to their body weight, and their body tissue and organs are actively growing," according to a recent Australasian research paper titled, 'Indoor Air Quality and Thermal Comfort', which notes: "Children also spend more time in school than in any other environment except home. Indoor air quality is dependent on the concentrations of CO<sup>2</sup> and other respiration derived pollutants, volatile organic compounds (VOC), particulate matter and other pollutants such as formaldehyde." ►



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◀ While schools scramble to navigate confusing COVID guidelines from their government bodies, one way they can safeguard the health of students and staff is to monitor indoor air quality.

With proper use and maintenance of HVAC systems, air cleaners and purifiers with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters can help reduce airborne contaminants including viruses indoors. It won't necessarily stave off Omicron, but adequate ventilation can improve general health and wellbeing. The ventilation most suitable for your school spaces will vary depending on size, occupancy, acoustics, and more. Solely mechanical ventilation is well-suited to internal rooms or where acoustic requirements don't allow for natural ventilation.

To find out more, School News spoke to industry professionals

about what air care technologies are on the market...

### Specialist insights for schools

*Suzanne Hammouche, CEO of GAMA Healthcare Australia, recommended air care technologies containing medical-grade HEPA H14 filters to improve indoor air quality, but also stressed that schools should first consult and follow local guidelines.*

"A peer-reviewed Australian study published in *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology* journal identified clean surfaces, ventilation and air filtration as playing key roles in preventing the aerosol spread of viruses like COVID-19 indoors. The study observed that two air cleaners (i.e., portable HEPA filters) in a room reduced aerosols by 67 percent compared to those without.

"Most schools are reluctant to undertake a costly and disruptive full-scale refurbishment but are looking for a fast, effective air purification solution. To accomplish this, I recommend checking for air purifiers with the following features: an auto-mode that senses air quality and adjusts speed; a dual HEPA 14 filter as these are 10 times more effective than models using HEPA 13 technology; a high clean air delivery rate (CADR); low noise levels while operating, particularly while in automatic mode; pre-filters and carbon filters to help prolong the HEPA filter lifespan; a filter change sensor to encourage timely removal and replacement; and built-in air particulate sensors to help identify the current air quality in the room."

Suzanne further explained, "the higher the CADR, the higher the volume of air purified hourly,

so a portable unit that delivers a high CADR of up to 600m3 per hour, would be able to ventilate rooms up to 120m3 with five air changes an hour".

"These features make for a cost-effective air purification solution to quickly decontaminate and improve air quality, without the need to install integrated HVAC systems."

*BenQ Australia Managing Director, Martin Moelle told us that 'air purification' has definitely become a buzz word heading back to school for 2022.*

"Some public schools have been lucky enough to be part of the government air filter rollout, and many private schools are taking matters into their own hands. We've also seen some interesting and innovative DIY projects as a result of this trend, with schools making their own devices—utilising inexpensive fans and MERV filters. There's even a whole community coming together to share designs and ideas. Something else we have seen rapidly develop in this space is air ionisation technology.

"Essentially, negatively charged ions are deployed to 'take down' VOCs in the air. This could be the next big thing in air quality assurance."

He added: "The research around virus transmission has really highlighted the need for better ventilation in shared spaces. Stopping recirculation or minimising unfiltered air seems to be the best way to mitigate risk. Then



Image courtesy of BenQ Australia



implementing technology like air purifiers along with the added safeguard of effective monitoring of key parameters like CO<sup>2</sup> becomes very important.

In terms of air quality specifically, he said: "We're seeing evidence of public schools even striding ahead of their private counterparts with new public school buildings in Queensland, for example, already being fitted with CO<sup>2</sup> sensors along with existing schools implementing similar air quality measuring devices. Opening windows to let fresh air into a class is best, especially in many parts of Australia where it's relatively comfortable to do so. But having filters retrofitted into existing air conditioning infrastructure is also being explored by schools."

*Daikin spokesperson, Dan Tosh, has noticed and increased demand for air conditioners with integrated air purification technology.*

He said: "This product segment is growing with more models coming onto the market for various applications. Schools are also considering adding mechanical ventilation to help



Image courtesy of Daikin

bring fresh air into classrooms and indoor spaces.

"Schools should consider the air change rate per hour (ACH), which is how often indoor air is being replaced with outdoor air. Increasing the air change rate will help dilute the air within the space with some suggestions of upwards of four to six air changes per hour. This may be difficult to achieve in some classrooms, but any improvement on the current air change rate will be better.

"There are different ways to

achieve higher air quality year-round by either natural ventilation which is simply opening doors and windows or by mechanical ventilation which uses fans and ductwork to bring in the outside air. Natural ventilation depends heavily on outdoor wind conditions so you might not achieve your requirements for ACH—if it's too hot or cold staff will be reluctant open the windows and doors as well. Whereas, with mechanical ventilation you can control and direct the outside air as needed,

irrespective of the weather."

Finally, Dan explained: "The national construction code (NCC) sets the minimum requirements for ventilation that is needed for schools. One verification method is to measure the average CO<sup>2</sup> amount is under 850 PPM over eight hours, the other method is to allow 12 l/s per person of outside air. So, if you wanted to target a maximum CO<sup>2</sup> amount 850 ppm can be used, this can be measured by either a CO<sup>2</sup> or IAQ sensor." ■



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# Program doubles skills and confidence of students



All images courtesy of St John Ambulance Australia

**First aid is a vital life skill for all to learn and maintain, in fact 96% of Australians agreed that it is important to get more people into first aid and CPR training.**

Operating now for 10 years in Australia, the free St John Ambulance First Aid in Schools program is much-loved by teachers, parents and students alike. Through this program we know that children as young as 5 are highly capable of assisting in emergency situations, doing anything from calling 000 for an ambulance, to performing the steps of the DRSABCD action plan.

Even COVID has not been able to stop the program – it has proved popular for virtual delivery to children whether they are at home or at school in the past 2 years. However many teachers are thankful that in 2022 it is back to face-to-face training within schools, allowing for practical skills including CPR and bandaging to be practiced by children, cementing their learning.

Data clearly demonstrates the impact of the program, with knowledge, confidence and skills all significantly improving for students after just one 45-minute First Aid in Schools Session, with outcomes more than doubling:

- Knowledge in first aid improved by 100% by the end of the session
- Skills in first aid improved by 124% by the end of the session
- Confidence in first aid improved by 111% by the end of the session

## What teachers say about the program:

*"I liked how interactive the session was. My students were engaged the whole time and enjoyed the question and answer time and CPR practical example."*

**– Lauren, teacher at St Kevin's Primary School, Hampton Park**

*"Many of my students said they could use what they learnt to help others. I like that my students feel empowered that they could help others."*

**– Nichole Bell, teacher in Berwick, Victoria**

*"The presenters did a great job communicating with the students and keeping them engaged. The students enjoyed the story, the quizzes and the song at the end."*

**– Helen, teacher in Skye, Victoria**

*"Very interactive, well presented, kids enjoyed it. Lots of valuable information especially tailored to prep level so it's easy to understand. Presenter did a fantastic job."*

**– Christina, teacher at Westall Primary School, Victoria**

We know that without this program, children would remain unable to help in an emergency and this could even mean lives would be lost. This is particularly critical in rural and remote locations, where medical help may be hours away.

With ambulance response times increasing across the country due to COVID impacts, the First Aid in Schools Program is more vital than ever. It takes the little responders located in so many homes, parks and public places and gives them the tools to draw upon in an emergency.

What many aren't aware of is the program is completely free and fully funded by St John as part of its charitable works, and largely without any government contribution. From 1 July 2020 - 30 June 2021, St John Ambulance trained 218,519 primary school children across Australia in first aid at no cost to parents, schools, or students. Over the life of the program, over 2 million Australian primary school students have learnt first aid from St John.

This ongoing commitment to the resilience and preparedness of local communities by St John is only possible because of those who purchase accredited first aid training, defibrillators, PPE and first aid kits from St John. As a social enterprise, St John contributes its proceeds back into the community as part of its mission for the service of humanity.

St John Ambulance asks that parents, teachers, principals and schools make a reciprocal commitment of support to St John so that they can continue to operate the program for the next generation of students. The lives these children save may be your own. ▲







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# AEDs at the heart of your school



*Image courtesy of St John Ambulance Australia (Vic)*

**By Heather Barker Vermeer**  
*Industry Reporter*

**When someone experiences cardiac arrest, their heart suddenly stops beating and unless a heartbeat is restored, they will die.**

The chance of survival reduces 10 percent for every minute someone goes without cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and a defibrillating shock. AEDs, also known as defibrillators, deliver a safe electric shock to restart the heart. CPR can temporarily maintain

blood and oxygen circulation until a defibrillating shock is administered. They are designed so that anyone can use them, even without much training. The device itself will talk you through the life-saving process.

Schools can undertake a risk assessment and, following this, if they decide that in the event of a life-threatening injury, timely access to emergency services cannot be assured, they may decide that an AED is required at the school. *School News* was advised that schools should consider securing the defibrillator to a wall-mounted bracket or cabinet and keeping

the AED within a hard case for protection, within a visible and known area such as reception.

It was also recommended to us that schools ensure accurate records are kept, and that the defibrillator, battery and pads are checked monthly for expiry dates and also that the child key/pads are both present and working correctly.

There are often significantly fewer AEDs available in rural areas and coupled with the fact that rural residents have a disproportionately higher incidence of cardiac arrest, AEDs outside of urban areas are

crucial if lives are to be saved. Schools are often the heartbeat of rural communities and are therefore an ideal location for an AED to be situated. Providing services to the community such as hall hire, sports events, and meetings, increases the potential need for life-saving emergency equipment further.

A clear and simple plan should be in place for all staff to be able to administer a defibrillating shock, from an AED situated in a central, accessible location. It is essential to ensure all first aid officers having up-to-date adequate training in all first aid matters, including CPR.



Local ambulance crews are often able to provide school-wide talks or staff sessions. Including AED-use and CPR training to students too, can provide a lesson of immeasurable value.

### AED expertise from a specialist supplier:

"The number one consideration for a school considering an AED is the paediatric capacity of the defibrillator," warns St John Ambulance Australia (Vic) representative, Emma Klinakis.

"All AEDs are made to work on an adult-sized patient which requires a large shock, but these shocks can usually be adjusted down to suit an infant or a child. Schools should look and compare how this is done via the various defibrillator models—is it easy to transition between adult and paediatric use so that the defib can be used on both staff/visitors and children? Some require separately purchased child pads that sit alongside the adult pads, while other models will have a 'key' to convert the current within the adult pads to suit a child.

"If a school decides via a risk assessment that in the event of a life-threatening injury, timely access to emergency services cannot be assured, they may decide that an AED is required at the school. Schools should consider securing the defibrillator to a wall mounted bracket or cabinet and keeping the AED within a hard case for protection, within a visible and known area such as reception. It is recommended that records are kept, the defibrillator, battery and pads are checked monthly for expiry dates and

that the child key/pads are present and working correctly."

Servicing a defibrillator is simple but must not be overlooked, according to Emma. "Many defibrillators will do their own self-tests; how often and how thoroughly this happens will depend on the quality of the unit purchased. Many defibrillators have warning lights that change from green to red when it needs attention, and this is easy to look out for every time you walk past.

"Many models will also start beeping – the lesson is don't ignore that beeping noise, it could mean your AED is due for a new battery! In general, there are regular replacement intervals for items like batteries (usually every four years) and pads (usually every two years). You can either add these checks to your inspection list when checking your first aid kits or get an external organisation to service your defibrillators for you."

As training requirements may vary from state to state, Emma noted that in Victoria schools must ensure there is always a first aid officer who has completed HLTAID011 Provide First Aid in the last three years as well as HLTAID009 in the last 12 months: "The number of first aid officers can vary per school but for a school between 600 to 799 students and staff on site, at least eight first aid officers are needed.

"The principal is responsible for ensuring training is compliant and first aiders are ready and on hand. All first aiders should be familiar with the location of an AED if the school has one, and the method for converting the AED to child use." ■



Image courtesy of St John Ambulance Australia (Vic)

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**Equip your canteen 101:**

# Kitchen must-haves

**By Heather Barker Vermeer**  
*Industry Reporter*

## **A quality school kitchen requires a quality fit-out, and that means commercial grade equipment.**

Whether you're upgrading a small tuckshop, or building a massive canteen from scratch, operating without commercial grade, high quality equipment is inefficient and unsafe.

### **What items do you need first?**

No school can manage adequately without the following basic pieces: an oven and hobs, a large microwave, fridge, freezer, warm cupboard/drawer, water heater, slicer, mixer, and a large toaster. A fire extinguisher is also compulsory. Once you've got those big pieces sorted, you're going to want to look at ordering the smaller must haves for your kitchen. These will allow you to maintain a high standard of food preparation and hygiene, whatever your catering needs. These include cooking utensils, kitchen knives, chopping boards, cookware, protective clothing and safety signage, as well as a first aid kit.

### **Kitchen storage solutions**

The aforementioned items will allow you to cook tasty meals and snacks hygienically. But you also need to store it. Beyond a spacious fridge, you're going to need a walk-in cold cupboard or pantry to keep the food fresh. This must be well organised with storage containers

and systemically labelled for safety as well as convenience.

### **Fridges and refrigeration cabinets**

Ensuring your food is kept at the correct temperature is vital for health and safety, so having a fridge with sufficient capacity and layout is crucial. Traditional single-doored fridges, larger double door units, hi-tech touch screen operated outfits and dispenser fridges are all options to consider, depending on space, needs and budget.

Refrigeration or cooling cabinets allow you to ensure food remains chilled prior to serving or for self-serve selection. They can also provide an overflow to fridges for ingredients if fridge space is at a premium, but these units will mainly be used to store prepared cold food prior to consumption.

As with all equipment, cleaning and maintenance should not be neglected and fridges and refrigeration cabinets should be kept to a high standard of cleanliness. They should be serviced regularly to ensure seals continue to remain effective and all parts are in good working order to avoid bacteria build up, temperature loss or electrical safety risk.

### **Food warming and holding equipment**

Many ovens contain a 'warm drawer', but this will offer insufficient space for your school catering set up. Hot food display cabinets allow you to present food and maintain temperature, either for kitchen or self-service.

Holding and proofing cabinets can be separate entities or combination systems. They are used to proof dough and keep food at the perfect serving temperature and start from around \$1200 for a basic model.

Steam tables are the ideal food holding solution for high-volume operations. Food sits in metal trays, heating from below by steam, which work well for presentation and service. They are available as liquid propane steam tables or electric versions and can be mobile or static. Open well steam tables and sealed well options are available depending on your requirements and start from around \$600 for a two pan open well steam table with undershelf.

Stainless steel drop-in hot food wells start from a one tray electrical unit, which can be purchased new from around \$500. It is likely you'll need several trays however, and the multi-tray units generally cost in the region of \$2000 for three tray options, and \$3000 for four. These can be placed on top of your existing counter space and used for serving.

### **Commercial slicers and mixers**

Manual gravity feed meat slicers will cost your school from around \$400 for a 12-inch stainless steel slicing plate model. An adjustable rotary fruit / vegetable slicer is a handy purchase to have and allows your cooks to quickly produce a variety of sliced fruit and vegetables safely and effectively. These are for sale new from around \$120.

Counter-top bread slicing

machines will set you back around \$1200 and can be adjusted to different slice size settings – perfect if you bake your own bread on site.

Commercial mixers are a Godsend in the school kitchen and should be a staple item. Prices vary, but for around \$1000 you can get a sizeable, sturdy model that can deal with most of your mixing needs. Similarly with food processors, \$1000 will generally be money well spent.

### **Ovens**

As much a matter of preference for each individual head chef, ovens are a science unto themselves. There is little way of procuring a brand new one for under \$1500 and they can stretch upwards of \$7000 for all the bells and whistles. Gas, ceramic or electric hobs, counter-top, freestanding, built-in, double-deck, convention, griddle... deciding will be a project in itself! Most chefs will know what they prefer and what will best suits the needs of their kitchen, if not always the school's budget.

### **Dishwasher**

Commercial under-counter dishwashers start from around \$3000. Tall, free-standing dishwashers are an easy to load option, avoiding the need to bend over regularly to add in the dirty dishes. These are generally pricier, running more into the \$5000-\$10,000s. There are also specific high or low temperature models, counter top versions and ones that cater especially for heavy duty pots and pans. ■



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A photograph of a modern school canteen. In the foreground, a tall, red and white Gnibl vending machine is filled with various snacks and drinks. The machine has the Gnibl logo and the text "genuinely healthy snacks" on its side. In the background, there is a white table with four white chairs. A sign on the wall reads "Relax Refresh Revive".

# Clear up those vending machine misconceptions

*Images courtesy of Gnibl Healthy Vending,*

**By Rosie Clarke, Editor**

## **Schools around the world are venturing into the versatile and lucrative potential of on-campus vending machines.**

Don't jump to junk food conclusions, however, as these machines run the gamut. While one primary school in New York stocked theirs with graphic novels and children's books to entice reluctant readers, others around the US have installed COVID-test vending machines to fend off Omicron.

Fresh and healthy food options are immensely popular in vending machines, and these are slowly becoming more visible on school sites around Australia. Victoria's Healthy Eating Advisory Service, for instance, recommends healthy vending as a "great way to encourage healthy food and drink choices" in conjunction with wider school initiatives such as education around nutrition.

Schools can enter collaborative business partnerships with vending machine companies, earning a commission on products sold. Vending companies vary widely in terms of product choice,

and business model. Some can provide custom stock lists for each school and even factor in the location of a particular machine, i.e., stocking high protein foods and more hydrating drink options for machines near a school gym. Schools prioritising student health should ask whether their chosen supplier consults with an accredited dietician; meanwhile, schools that centre sustainability as a core value should ask whether they offer sustainably sourced/ packaged products. Foregrounding your school values will help forge a business partnership that benefits your community.

And don't forget to consult your kids! Senior students, in particular, will relish the chance to have more agency over their food and drinks, and they are often just as health-conscious as the adults.

### **Industry insights:**

This issue, Nick Volpe, Director at Gnibl Healthy Vending, gave us the low down on what vending options are out there for schools and whether he has noticed any purchasing trends.

"Unfortunately," says Nick, "healthy vending machines are still few and far between in schools."

"Much focus is placed on the quality of the canteen offering, but in many cases, schools have been slow to update their vending offerings. I think, often people still consider vending in terms of chocolates and chips while there is a huge range of exciting, genuinely healthy snacks that can really elevate the food offering on campus. This is especially concerning as we know that children are enthusiastic snackers and it is most often in the snacks they enjoy between meals that they make the worst choices.

"Another difficulty is the hefty commission payments that traditional junk food vendors offer to schools. This financial incentive can be difficult to ignore, and impossible for healthy vending operators to match because of the higher cost of wholefood-based







Schools can enter collaborative partnerships with vending machine companies, earning a commission on products sold



© stock.adobe.com

snacks. The margins on sugary soft drinks, chips and chocolates are enormous because of how cheaply these junk foods are produced. It certainly is a barrier to healthy vending in schools.

"Public schools, at least in NSW, are bound by excellent (and constantly improving) guidelines in the form of the NSW *Healthy School Canteen Strategy*. This outlines which foods are appropriate for students. It differs for high school kids and primary school kids and has a focus on whole-food content. Foods score points for the inclusion of fruit, veggies, nuts, legumes, fibre, and protein content; and are penalised for added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat. There's also a strong focus on serving size which can often be the difference between a snack being suitable or not. There's a lot of detail in getting food choices right for kids, but it couldn't be more important.

"The challenge comes in for private schools where the *Healthy School Canteen Strategy* is not mandated and therefore there is

no standard. Most schools have their own nutritional guidelines, but some are better than others at limiting the junk food."

Nick says, "Getting a healthy vending machine range right is a careful and detailed exercise. You need to understand who will be using the machine and in what context--carefully consider snacks and drinks based on their serving size and ingredients, as well as allergens."

He emphasises that vending options should be seen as a complement to existing canteens or cafes on site: "They operate very differently and fill an important role when the canteen is closed.

"After-school activities and sports events are when vending machines shine. Modern vending machines can be automatically disabled during certain hours of the day (for example, during recess) so they don't compete with the tuck shop or canteen.

"Today's machines are high-tech too, they communicate in real time with cloud-based software to

track sales, stock, and refills. The data is used to optimise the range by popularity. Another important note is that every machine has a slightly different range! So, for example, a machine in a library would have a different range to

one in an Aquatic Centre. The offering needs to support the student needs in each setting--they are also fully refrigerated these days so you can vend products like cheese and crackers, and preservative-free juices." ●

Most schools have their own nutritional guidelines, but some are better than others at limiting the junk food





# School Camps:

## A raft of learning opportunities

By Heather Barker Vermeer  
Industry Reporter

**Away from desks, devices, and the confines of school gates, children often display very different characteristics to those they show in the classroom.**

School camp brings with it many opportunities to build relationships. The child who is boisterous in class may display vulnerability while homesick, for example, or the student who is shy during group discussion may shine as a group leader during orienteering. School camps shift students and staff to new contexts; this can gift learners the opportunity to showcase different strengths and present new sides of their personality, which can in turn gift teachers the opportunity to see students in a new light and build better relationships outside the classroom to bring back into the classroom. And children get to see their teachers differently too: Who knew Ms Murrell was so good at backyard cricket? Or that the 'strict' teacher was so thoughtful and caring?

Yes, camp can open an unexpected treasure trove. However, if it is not planned and run correctly, camps can also be a Pandora's Box.

The sense of apprehension around camp can be overwhelming for children, so managing expectations and providing tools for emotional self-regulation is important.

Clear communication is key, not just with parents and caregivers, but with students too. They want to know exactly what their experience at camp will look like. Provide as detailed a schedule as possible to help alleviate worry in the lead-up to the trip. Rather than passing around a paper copy or emailing

it across, go through the schedule as a group and allow time for questions. Consider presenting the schedule visually; for example, watch a YouTube video of an activity they will be doing together, particularly if it is something they will not have done before. A structured role-play activity can also ease anxiety and help put students in a growth mindset as they prepare for camp. Breaking down the abstract idea of 'school camp' into a series of actions, tasks, and manageable routines is helpful. For instance, a student may avoid attending camp altogether if they fear one activity on the schedule; whereas walking through the activities collectively can help reduce emphasis they have placed on

a single activity. This reduces pressure and helps the child to manage their expectations by focusing on aspects they are more familiar or comfortable with and can look forward to.

### Choosing your school camp venue

School camp accommodation can range from a wild bush setting where students and staff set up their own tents, to a catered cabin lodge, depending on budget, group size and desired student experience. Here are some core considerations for picking your prized camp locale...

How self-sufficient do you expect your students to be? This question will drive your venue hunt. Some providers allow





students to cook their own food and sleep in small groups or pairs, while others provide fully catered mealtimes and house students in dormitory-style bunks. Self-directed learning in a camp setting benefits middle and high school attendees, so choosing a venue that allows them to self-cater and enjoy activities individually as well as in groups will enable students to test their boundaries and take initiative. Create a kitchen roster and assign tasks! For many secondary students, independent living will be new and exciting. Also, find out whether the venue has self-directed skill-based games such as quoits or boules on hand for students to play during free time either alone or in groups. This can help create a camp's upbeat spirit and provide a welcome distraction from any screen-deprivation that may occasionally start to creep in.

Large-scale camp sites can accommodate 300+ if your school is game for going big with a whole-school camp! Many cater to the 50-80 range, allowing



for 2-3 classes to combine for the trip. Mixing classes is a good way to spark new friendships while also allowing children familiar with each other to feel confident and comfortable.

### Activate participation

Group hikes are a camp staple that get kids moving but also improve communication as students and teachers talk while they walk, learning to motivate and empathise. They are also a popular choice on leadership camps and

for schools that emphasise spirituality depending—a guided meditation or historical route can be a great hiking alternative! For older students, trekking by torchlight after dark can feel more adventurous.

Meanwhile, scavenger hunts engage primary children by giving them 'a mission' that can sustain their interest in a long walk. Abseiling, kayaking, high ropes, and rock climbing are popular activities that can provide memories to last a

lifetime—but safety must come first and qualified instructors are non-negotiable. Raft-building is probably the poster child of a school camp and provides team-building opportunities galore—plus a lot of laughs when the time comes for crafted creations to set sail on a nearby lake. The right venue can help co-ordinate these types of activities. Communicating clearly, developing practical motor skills, using logic, and overcoming adversity are often all needed in these classic challenges. ■

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Cranbourne West PS. Project by Grassports Australia



St Martin's College. Project by TEB Contractors

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Project by West Coast Sporting Surfaces

reduction due to the inclusion of a shock pad layer, resulting in better protection for student joints and fewer injuries.

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St Martin's College in South Australia recognised the benefits of the Laykold Masters Float system which has recently been installed at the school by Laykold experts TEB Contractors.

Students were welcomed back in 2022 with bright, new multi-sport Laykold courts replacing

worn synthetic turf ones.

Another popular system for schools is Laykold Advantage which is a high performance 3 – 4 coat acrylic system with a hard wearing and long-lasting, non-slip surface.

The specially designed surface is also cooler and better to play on than bare asphalt. It does not include a cushioning layer.

Grassports Australia recently completed an amazing transformation of existing asphalt courts at Cranbourne West Primary School in Victoria. Using Laykold Advantage in midnight blue and dark green, Grassports created

two vibrant multi-sport courts that have reinvigorated a tired and neglected space.

Laykold is also a great canvas for creating amazing ground art. West Coast Sporting Surfaces in Western Australia recently completed a multi-sport and recreational play area for a High School, again using the Laykold Advantage system.

However, they incorporated some fun, educational games into the design which were meticulously painted onto the surface.

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# Implement a five-year maintenance plan

**By Rosie Clarke, *Editor***

**Property maintenance directly impacts a school's reputation, appearance, and general morale.**

So why does it tend to be low on a school board's list of priorities? When budgets are tight, working preventative measures into your financial plan can grease the wheels with management.

Painting maintenance sets school buildings apart—even if a school is struggling on the inside, well-kept walls work wonders to keep up appearances. On the other hand, shoddy paintwork puts off prospective parents and does little to instill pride in a student body. To get on top of finances and keep your school in tip-top condition, you can implement a preventative maintenance plan that schedules lower cost regular cleaning and preventative fixes. The goal here is to avoid the need for an expensive, full-scale renovation down the road once complaints and hazards start to roll in.

## Planning 101: What needs to be maintained?

First, check the damage. Weather is a critical offender when it comes to paint longevity. Strong UV rays cause fading and colour morphing, while winds and rain dirty paintwork and eventually cause cracks



and splits. Ignored for too long, the only remedy is to strip the walls and repaint, but scheduled maintenance can stave this off by brushing, sanding, and treating where needed. Water damage is a nastier offshoot and can be hard to spot unless you specialise in building maintenance—another benefit of scheduling regular professional attention—but bubbling paint, mould, peeling, and staining are all tell-tale signs that need to be assessed for health and safety.

## Another maintenance woe for

schools involves vandalism and graffiti. Along with general wear and tear from rogue soccer balls and illicit skateboarding, these kinds of marks are likely to attract copycat behaviour, so regular deep cleaning works as a deterrent.

Finally, you can schedule an audit first and foremost. A painting contractor should be able to survey your site, identify any areas of concern, carry out an initial repaint if needed, and work with you to implement a five-year routine maintenance schedule.

## The simple strategy schools neglect

Establishing a clear routine maintenance plan is a simple strategy that flies under the radar for most schools.

But you can rectify this in Term 1 by drafting a schedule of cost-saving maintenance to put your finance team at ease and ideally reduce your own admin for future. For specific strategising tips, we reached out to industry specialists.





## Industry pointers for your painting maintenance plan

"When it comes to school budgets," remarks Higgins' General Manager of Operations, Nick Higgins, "maintenance is often one of the easiest things to cut".

Implementing a maintenance plan to frame maintenance as value-adding is vital for this reason, he tells us: "It's much easier to reduce the amount of money spent on maintenance than dock money earmarked for improving enrolments. Even though most shrewd business managers understand that preventative maintenance is a financially savvy approach and more cost effective than fixing things on an ad hoc basis, it can be difficult to justify this regular spend, which a school board may view as unnecessary.

Quite the contrary, Nick suggests: "Poor maintenance can give parents the impression that the school is 'going downhill'; while satisfied parents who can see that the facility is well looked after and school fees are being

properly managed, are more likely to keep their children enrolled for longer—improving retention.

"So, it's important to frame maintenance planning, such as a maintenance painting solution, in terms of its forecasted return on investment (ROI), and how it can ease school budget strains in the long term. For instance, by undertaking preventative maintenance on a regular basis, you can minimise natural deterioration and eliminate the costly repair or replacement of building components. While it may seem like the job is done once the paint is dry, the job has

only really begun. Maintenance of the interior and exterior of school buildings post-paint job is crucial to keeping your education property looking fresh for longer. In fact, keeping a newly painted building suitably maintained will extend the life of the painted surface and add extra years in between repainting.

"A regular maintenance painting plan protects the surfaces of buildings from the elements, reducing the effects of prolonged exposure to water, salt, sunlight, mould, and mildew. Keeping on top of painting requirements also ensures

that warranties are honoured, as reputable contractors conduct an annual site visit, ensuring any issues are caught early and dealt with before they become problematic."

Planning ahead also allows you to schedule routine maintenance to maximise benefit. Nick adds: "By scheduling maintenance shortly before important dates in the calendar, such as the school's open day, you can reap maximum benefit from the maintenance work by ensuring the school puts its best foot forward when it most counts." ■



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# Schools branch out, plunge into nature play

Image courtesy of Timber Creations

By Rosie Clarke, Editor

## Sustainable play space environments benefit from a combination of architectural landscape design, and pedagogy-informed equipment options.

A review conducted by University of South Australia researchers, Kylie Dankiw and Katherine Baldock was the first to provide empirical evidence that supports the development of innovative nature play spaces in childcare centres and schools.

The study notes that nature play boosted fitness, motor skills, learning, as well as social and emotional development in children. They also suggested possible improvements in cognitive and learning outcomes, including “children’s levels of attention and concentration, punctuality, settling in class (even after play), constructive play, social play, as well as imaginative and functional play”.

Dankiw commented: “It’s about making mud pies, creating stick forts, having an outdoor



Banksia Rd Public School - Image courtesy of Timber Creations

adventure, and getting dirty. “These are all things that children love to do, but unfortunately, as society has become more sedentary, risk averse and time-poor, fewer children are having these opportunities. By playing in nature, children can build their physical capabilities – their balance, fitness, and strength. And, as they play with others, they learn valuable negotiation skills, concepts of sharing and friendships, which may contribute to healthy emotional and social resilience.”

While some schools are moving classes completely outdoors to

fully immerse students in nature, many mainstream schools are instead integrating aspects of nature-based learning into their school environments. Play spaces are a versatile way to accomplish this while giving new life to underused areas of your campus. Embarking on a school-wide project to transform your existing environment into thriving learning areas and imaginative play spaces can be fun as well as productive. And, as mentioned, nature play spaces are frequently versatile enough to double as teaching environments, with natural seating for group work,

hideaways for quiet reading, and even musical instruments, log animals, and sensory gardens for creative inspiration.

Keen to explore recent installations relevant to Australian schools, we approached nature play facilitators to find out more.

## School sector expertise from the industry

Timber Creations’ Madelyn Smith talked us through a recent project undertaken at Banksia Rd Public School to transform an awkward mound of dirt which had been used as a rubbish dump into a usable playground space.

She revealed: “The mound was cleaned up, compacted, and a range of interesting ways to clamber and climb it were added as well as a slide. The final outcome included branch scrambles, balance beams, ramps, stepping logs, as well as discovery play elements tying into the rest of the school, such as rope climbs, a sorting bench, a self-build cubby, balance beam, and more. ►





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Images courtesy of Imagination Play

◀ The mound was finished off with a mulch covering, and Doryanthes plants, that will grow roots to further protect the mound—plus, the children will get to enjoy weaving play with the enormous Gynea Lily flowers.”

Nature play, at its core is anything you can find naturally occurring in the environment to explore, Madelyn explained, “but adding small touches of nature can transform ordinary play equipment too”.

“Unaltered found pieces, like logs and rocks are fantastic, but consider swapping standard climbing equipment with those made from different natural materials. Cubby poles with natural timber defects are great for sensory discovery; percussion instruments made from hollow logs lead to experimentation and deeper learning about natural sounds and noise-making. Almost anything in the playground can be made from natural materials, for a more environmentally sustainable and exciting discovery playground.

“It’s also about working with what you have! Use those slopes and trees and let the space inform your playground—show children how different environments can



be used for play. Plants, trees and natural elements change with the seasons, and non-prescriptive play pieces keep challenging students in different ways. In these environments, students learn by doing—they invent, risk-assess, challenge themselves, fail, and re-assess. This type of play supports growing independent learners.”

Imagination Play representative Madeline Jones told us about a recent brief her team received from Blue Landscape Architects, for Kingston Reserve in Victoria to create a memorable experience for children by incorporating traditional playground elements into the natural environment. The space won a *Gold Award* from the Australian Institute of Landscape

Design and Managers in 2020.

She explained: “The first step is to consider available space and surrounding natural elements to help define the goal so schools can realise their vision. Traditional playground elements can be enhanced with natural timber to give kids the sensory input they crave. Textured sand, wooden steppingstones, timber hideaway, natural rocks, and digging tools encourage kids to explore natural textures, invent games and develop unstructured play scenarios.

For schools taking nature play environments a step further, Madeline said: “Encouraging kids to interact with their local ecosystem through the use of bird feeders, composting, or growing plants is cost effective

and utilises readily available materials. These elements can be easily incorporated into the curriculum and often use recycled or existing materials on the school site.”

Ultimately though, school playgrounds “need to be safe, sturdy, and easy to supervise”, Madeline stressed. “Nature play is a broad concept. Plants, sand, water, dirt and rocks are all a part of nature play, but great nature play design takes those elements and creates a safe framework that inspires imagination.

“Combining traditional playground elements with natural textures is a great way to integrate play spaces into a school’s surrounding environment. It can be as complex as installing structural timber climbing frames with slides and monkey bars, or as simple as fitting a timber teepee and stepping logs.

“The core idea is to provide children with natural sensory input, while guiding them towards unstructured play. The natural and irregular shapes found on logs, steppingstones, balance beams, and rocks help children assess and negotiate risks, while building confidence and problem-solving skills.” ■



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