

FAIR GO FOR THE WEST

School never so cool

STUDENTS TAKE TO PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AS PART OF GLOBAL NETWORK



Parramatta Marist students Ryan Douglas, 12, Elie Sleiman, 12, and Mina Gendy, 11, test drive new learning conditions.

Deborah FitzGerald

PARRAMATTA Marist High School has flipped traditional schooling on its head as the first school outside the US to join a new tech network aimed at student-centred learning.

The school, which had its HSC ranking jump 32 places last year, is part of a global network of schools adopting project-based learning, which eschews traditional teaching methods and classrooms.

It has opened its new \$7 million learning and administration buildings alongside Mother Teresa Primary co-located at the Westmead Education Precinct with Catherine McAuley Westmead.

Now the school is in the running for the \$10,000 grant

in NewsLocal's classroom of the future category of the West competition.

Clusters of students sit on the floor with their laptops and are engaged in animated discussion, some are standing in front of sliding glass walls where diagrams are drawn, wiped and redrawn.

Except for the relative youth of the participants, it has the look, feel and buzz of an adult working environment in a corporation at the big end of town.

It is hard, on first inspection of the open plan room, to spot the teachers moving between the groups of boys, encouraging discussion and problem solving.

Welcome to a 21st century classroom.

Principal Brother Patrick Howlett first came across



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win

the teaching method in a small school in Napa, California, granted \$10 million by the Gates Foundation to introduce the new system.

"Project-based learning is where they work in groups of five or six, they all have roles within the group, they all communicate," he said.

"They pull their weight, they have to solve something together, each raising issues before they come to a consensus. Then they have

to prepare and present their findings. It's deeper learning, not just learning the material, it's using the material to take a position and argue a case.

"The emphasis was on content in the past, the 20th century was about the content and passing exams, it was about rote learning and memorising the material.

"We are preparing students for the information era."

Mr Howlett said technology allowed the students to connect with peers overseas.


"We are saying the world is not Parramatta," he said.

"There's a whole global approach, particularly with video conferencing, although time differences are an issue.

"We are living in a global community and our students are not stopping at the boundaries.

"One school had a project with a school in Turkey and they skyped one another discussing 1915 Gallipoli."

Mr Howlett said under the new model, students were more engaged and motivated to learn.

 Do you agree with this style of learning?
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