

From little things big things growour iPad Journey at Wonga Park PS

Our curriculum – how do iPads support our teaching and learning

Wonga Park PS is very proud of the rich curriculum and the vibrant learning community that is a feature of our school. We have invested in building strong relationships and developing a curriculum that prepares students to flourish in the 21st Century. Not only has the focus been on developing the necessary ways of thinking such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and creativity, but also the ways of working including the skills of communication and collaboration. The Habits of Mind have also been a focus to aid students to know how to behave intelligently when faced with problems and dilemmas where the solution is not immediately apparent. Knowing how to persist, question, pose problems, strive for accuracy, think flexibly, find humour, imagine, innovate, respond with wonderment and awe, think about their thinking, will set our children up for success throughout their lives.

Through the Tribes process we have focused on building a community of learners where children feel safe and that they belong. With a strong level of trust evident, our students feel comfortable working collaboratively and taking risks with their learning.

Our inquiry learning journey over several years led us to Challenge Based Learning where our children were well placed to ask questions, problem solve and take responsibility for their learning. Teachers were also well placed to 'let go' and allow children to ask the questions and direct their own learning. Teachers were also willing to let children make choices about how they learnt and choose what tools they would use. Challenge Based Learning enabled children to explore Big Ideas and ask rich questions, but there was a growing frustration amongst students and teachers that the lack of ready access to information and also tools that would help students show their thinking and learning, was hindering learning. The need to improve this situation was the impetus behind exploring iPads as a mobile learning device.

So began our iPad journey. What has our iPad journey looked like? The journey to implement a 1:1 iPad program has been strategic. It was based on research including visits to other schools and discussions with experts, building teacher capacity through in- school and external professional development, undertaking a school trial and seeking teacher and student feedback. It has also taken a leap of faith by leadership, teachers, School Council, parents and students.

The journey has been directed by a very active ICT committee with representation from every level and specialist teachers, the Principal, the Assistant Principal and our ICT technician. Thorough preparation for the 1:1 program was required including preparation of protocols, user agreements, student iPad licences, cybersafety programs and security measures. This work contributed greatly to its ultimate success of the 1:1 implementation.

Although some schools we researched or visited had made the decision to focus on a particular level or levels of the school, we decided to follow our philosophy of whole school implementation of new initiatives. All staff participate in ongoing professional development including regular sharing at level and whole staff meetings. The ICT teacher representative at each level provide valuable support and planning advice to other teachers in that level.

The purchase of ipads has been gradual over three year. In 2011 we purchased 15 iPads that were used as a class set by all grades from P-6 with teachers being encouraged to borrow the iPads overnight and at weekends. Staff feedback regarding the use of iPads as a learning tool was very

positive with teachers indicating high levels of student engagement. Teachers were keen to move forward but needed increased access to the iPads. Therefore, our next step was to give teachers the opportunity to gain confidence and a greater understanding of the potential of the iPad for learning by disbanding the class set and providing all classroom teachers with their personal device. Teachers were encouraged to personalize their device and use it to gain confidence in ways to use it as a teaching and learning tool. This was pivotal to the later success of the iPad implementation. To enable all staff to build their capacity a further 11 iPads were purchased and distributed to integration aides, specialist teachers and our ICT technician. During this two year period there was a continuous communication with parents via newsletters, the school website, information evenings. Examples of student work on their iPads were featured at Open Night, expo days and our weekly school assembly. This was an important step towards educating parents about the value of the iPad as a tool for learning. In 2013 the 1:1 iPad program began for Grades 1 – 6. Parents were invited to purchase/provide an iPad (minimum iPad2). The current uptake across all grades is around 70% + and growing. To provide iPad access to students without a personal device the school purchased 4 devices per classroom (56 devices).

With our thorough planning in place, the major parent concerns around safety and security and inclusiveness (would children without their own iPad have access?), have not been an issue. Parent feedback has been extremely positive with many positive comments about how iPads have engendered richer conversations and sharing about their child's learning.

Teachers are also very positive about how readily and seamlessly the iPads have become integrated into the teaching and learning process. What has surprised us is the level of peer tutoring and collaboration that is evident with the iPad as a learning tool.

Our students overwhelmingly enjoy using their iPads as a tool for learning. The iPads have given students more choices in the way they can construct their understanding and show their learning. Their portability supports collaborative tasks, learning from each other and learning 'any time anywhere', including at home. Students demonstrate how they readily learn how to combine the potential of a variety of applications to create rich content.

Where to from here Continuing our communication with parents is also vital so that we leverage the potential benefits of strong partnerships between home and school.

More than ever, our teachers are facilitators of learning. It is important that we continue to focus on building teacher capacity especially around the ways we design and integrate learning experiences that utilise technology to lead to high levels of student achievement. In reference to the technology integration SAMR Model, our teachers are working at providing opportunities for students to work at the modification and redefinition level rather than just the substitution and augmentation level where the use of the device is defined and limited. With a focus on transforming the ways children think and work, teachers are challenging students ask the questions and find solutions in ways that would not be possible without technology.