McKinnon moves away from 'chalk and talk' with Google Apps for Education

McKinnon
Secondary College

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
- Replace previous webmail system with new alternative
- Create new ways for students and teachers to work together
- Find a platform for sharing internal resources quickly and simply

What they did
- Provided Gmail accounts to all students and faculty members
- Introduced Sites as a platform for the internal Intranet
- Encouraged students to work together and create learning communities in Google Drive and Google Groups
- Laid the foundations for further collaborative learning when the school introduces Chromebooks

What they accomplished
- Made school accounts and services available 24/7, regardless of location
- Increased communication between teachers and students
- Boosted success of project work and increased parent engagement

Customer

McKinnon Secondary College is a co-educational school with 1,900 students from year 7 to year 12 and around 200 staff. The college was founded in 1954 in the south-eastern Melbourne suburb of McKinnon. It has developed a proud reputation for academic excellence and music performance. The college is consistently one of the best-performing non-selective government schools in Victoria.

Challenge

McKinnon prides itself on its technological excellence and visionary approach. All teachers are encouraged to reinforce learning through technology in lessons. The McKinnon Exploration and Research Centre (MERC) offers a flexible, technology-rich centre within the school, where lessons can be taught using video, laptops and the internet.

As the school's reliance on digital communication and storage grew, the email service from SquirrelMail was becoming unsuitable in supporting staff and students in their work. With over 100 teachers, nearly half as many administrative staff and 1,900 students, the school relied heavily on email for official communications but individuals' mailboxes were limited to 12mbs. Teachers and administrative staff were constantly having to delete and archive content, which was both inconvenient and time-consuming.

Beyond IT administration issues, McKinnon also wanted to explore how digital, collaborative learning tools could help it move away from a 'Chalk and Talk' approach to teaching. Instead of having teachers stand up at the blackboard and talk at students, they wanted to explore how they could create a more interactive learning environment and harness and build upon the digital skills so many kids have from using technology at home.

"It was clear to us that students were more inspired to learn when they had access to multimedia resources, and could complement lessons with their own online research. This approach would also prepare them for the expectations of the professional world," explains Ashley Evans, the Assistant Principal at McKinnon.

> *"We're delighted we've been able to improve the learning experience for our students through Google's technology and meet our goal of encouraging a more engaging, digitally advanced approach to learning. In the coming months, we're looking forward to seeing how Chromebooks push the students to be even more creative."*
> — *Ashley Evans, Assistant Principal, McKinnon Secondary College*

Solution

McKinnon wanted a technology platform that would allow students and teachers to access email and learning resources from home and from school. Having researched the options available, Blake Seufert, Systems Manager

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—Cherie Marks, head of E-Learning and Cyber Safety, faculty teacher, McKinnon Secondary College

at McKinnon, decided that Google Apps for Education, which includes tools such as Gmail, Google Drive, Google Sites and Google Groups, was the most suitable solution.

"Web-based email with vast storage was a big priority when choosing our new communications platform, but it wasn't the only factor in our decision to move to Google Apps. We immediately saw the potential of tools like Google Sites and Drive in creating shared online resources, which we knew our students and teachers would love to explore," explains Blake.

Benefits

The first major change was introducing Gmail accounts across the school. With Gmail, students and faculty no longer had to spend time deleting incoming messages in order to make space in their inbox.

Teachers, administrative staff and students then started experimenting with the other collaborative features of Google Apps such as Google Groups and Google Sites, introducing them into lessons to help support shared learning.

With the use of Google Drive, students now frequently work together simultaneously on shared online documents. When creating a revisions guide, for instance, each student is given responsibility for creating notes on a specific aspect of a subject. At the end of the lesson they have a comprehensive revision guide.

Google Groups, which provides discussion groups for people sharing common interests, is also used for student collaboration. The legal class in year 12, has a Group with 103 topics and 54 active members, where students ask questions on homework and topics covered in previous classes. Students have become so engaged with the Group, that they often answer questions from one another before the teacher. Meanwhile, teachers can monitor the students' progress through their questions to the Group and ensure answers are accurate.

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About Google Apps for Education

Over 30 million students, faculty, and staff use Google Apps for Education worldwide. Google Apps is a free suite of hosted email and collaboration applications exclusively for schools and universities. You can learn more and sign up to try it out by visiting our website:

www.google.com.au/intl/en_au/chrome/education/devices/

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are fast, portable computers that give students access to the web's rich educational tools & resources. Educators can manage Chromebooks easily from their web-based Admin Console. And starting at just $299 per device including Google Apps for Education for free, these computers make technology affordable for schools. You can learn more here:

www.google.com.au/intl/en/chrome/education/devices/

Whereas previously teachers experimented with building their own websites when they wanted to create a learning resource, they now use Google Sites to house all subject materials. This means students can access homework tasks, review content if they miss a lesson due to illness, or access timetables and project deadlines. 85% of departments now manage their own Sites in this way.

As well as boosting access to learning resources, Sites are used for sharing projects with parents. For instance, the school's annual Science Fair previously involved each student exhibiting their science project at a physical stand. Some parents inevitably couldn't attend and it was difficult for teachers to view and judge everyone's exhibit in the two hour slot.

The Science Fair is now conducted online using Google Sites. Groups of students create and upload their presentations, embed a two minute video summary of their experiment and share the work with the rest of the class, teacher and parents.

"Moving our Science Fair to Google Sites has proved extremely successful, removing time constraints and enhancing parental engagement. Students love the fact that their parents offer encouragement and provide their comments in a venue that everyone can see," explains Cherie Marks.

McKinnon has also built an intranet through Google Sites to house all official institution information, including lesson timetables, upcoming events and previous exam papers. Access controls are easily set by teachers to display materials securely to those who need it. Having remote access to resources through tools like Google Sites has streamlined administration and made it far easier to share all this information.

With the foundations laid for successful use of online tools in the classroom and at home, the school now plans to roll out 720 Google Chromebooks to students in Year seven and Year ten. The devices were selected for their low price point and ease of set-up, as well as the fact that they don't require software updates, because they're automatically updated.

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