

Plumpton Education Community pilots student polling technology

Education Today reporter

Eric Jamieson, Principal of Plumpton High School in Sydney's outer western suburb of Plumpton, 38 km from the CBD, says that applying for the principal's position six years ago was "the best thing I have done in my professional life... it just keeps on getting better."

Reflecting the area's ethnic mix and low-income families, the school's ICSEA value at 923 out of a possible 1100 emphasises the challenges faced by students and teachers alike. The 1050-strong student body includes more than 70 different ethnic groups; a significant number come from NESB homes and many more are ESL students.

Plumpton High is part of the Plumpton Educational Community, a group formed in 2006 to bring together three local primary schools, the high school, Plumpton House, and Mt Druitt Tutorial Centre. The latter is a three-class facility for students with significant behavioural problems.

"When we formed the educational community, the idea was to provide better continuity for students," Jamieson says. "It has since evolved to provide lots of opportunities for professional development."

The community's annual teachers' conference, which brings together 150 teachers, is an example. The two-day event has "taken on a life of its own" and features presentations by top-level educators from Australia and overseas.

Cross-school teaching is ongoing, with the high school's dance, music and arts teachers taking classes in the primary schools. Moving in the other direction, primary teachers are involved in remedial literacy and numeracy teaching in the high school, where their skills are valued.

"Our teachers love it," Jamieson says.

Students are involved too. Last year, Year 11 students who had achieved lifestyle and sports accreditation, designed and implemented a once-a-week sports session for less athletic primary children. This concluded with a gala primary sports day, also organised and managed by the Year 11s.

Despite the local community's disadvantages, Jamieson points, with justifiable pride, to the high school's commendable year on year improvements in both HSC and SC results. In 2009, 72 HSC students achieved Band 5 or 6, compared to 30 in the previous year. And the SC results were also the best ever: 94 in Band 5 and 6 compared to 47 in 2008.



Primary students are keen users of Keypads

Less academically minded Year 10 boys can elect to do a course that combines three days each week of classroom studies with two days working in local businesses. In class, the focus is on English and maths at a level required for trade training. Of 18 boys in the class last year, 12 had

found apprenticeships and the other six were in full time employment by the end of the year.

Technology pilot

Jamieson says that he's keenly interested in anything new that may improve academic outcomes and is



Fig. 1 What is your reaction so far as teachers to the system? Fantastic 13%; Very good 66%; Good 13%; OK 7%. (Rounded. Sample 15 teachers)

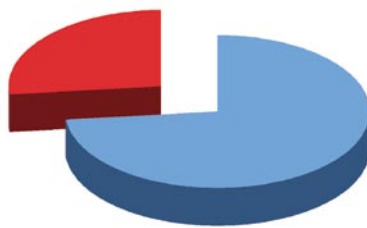


Fig. 2 What is your students' reaction to using TurningPoint so far? Love it 71%; Like it 29% (Rounded. Sample 15 teachers)



Fig. 3 How many keypad questions would you ask in a day? 9-10 40%; 7-8 7%; 5-6 33%; 3-4 20% (Rounded. Sample 15 teachers)

“very open to participating in pilots and trials. I’m all ‘open eyes’ to opportunities.”

The Plumpton Education Community is currently conducting a pilot study trialling the Keypad Achievement Program (KAP), this combines the TurningPoint Student Response System with the Performance Matters Student Data Analysis System.

As a pre-cursor to KAP, student data is being collected using TurningPoint Keypads during class. The students’ results will be uploaded into Performance Matters and merged with other student assignments, quizzes and tests to provide a comprehensive and detailed report of their performance.

The Keypads are being used in English, maths and science classes at the high school, and literacy and numeracy in the primary schools to record students’ responses to questions posed by their teachers.

And early results are “very interesting,” Jamieson says. “Instead of a few hands going up when a question is asked, every student answers every question, so they are more involved in the lesson.”

“In classes where the pads are not used, students are asking ‘where are the Keypads?’ They seem to be having an enormous effect on attitudes and engagement.”



Eric Jamieson Principal Plumpton High School

Students and teaching staff have responded enthusiastically to an early survey of their opinions of Keypad lessons. When 15 teachers were asked for their reaction to the system “so far”, 66 per cent voted ‘very good’; 13 per cent

‘fantastic’; and 13 per cent ‘good’; 7 per cent ‘OK’. Asked about their students’ reaction to using Keypads, 71 per cent said ‘they love it’; and 29 per cent ‘they like it’. Asked how many questions they were posing daily, 40 per cent of teachers said nine or 10 questions were being asked; 7 per cent were asking seven or eight; 30 per cent were asking five or six.

Jamieson said that teachers, students and even parents were finding new ways to apply the system, pointing to a recent survey in the community where students used the Keypads to record respondents’ replies to survey questions about community attitudes to Plumpton High School.

His only reservation so far, Jamieson said, is the time needed to construct questions, but that’s not a major headache. Assuming that the pilot concludes successfully, the Plumpton Education Community expects to implement the Keypad Achievement Program across all years and subjects.

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