Schools make a move to BYOD

Richard Jones and Jo Inglis at The Southport School, Gold Coast. Source: Supplied

MOBILITY is changing the face of education with more schools investing in bring-your-own-device schemes where students are not only allowed but encouraged to replace textbooks with their personal electronic learning tools.

In some private schools, computer labs have made way to wireless broadband networks to aid the content flow from computer server to screen.

The success of Kevin Rudd's digital education revolution - where every secondary school child has access to a computing device - has whetted the appetites of students, teachers and parents alike.

As a result, tablet computers and laptops are fast becoming de rigueur in modern-day classrooms - with funds permitting. IBRS analyst Joe Sweeney said it remained unclear what the perfect student to computing device ratio was, but "it's clear that mobile computing in schools is here to stay".

Mr Sweeney said the BYOD wave in education was "inevitable", and schools must be prepared for a "tsunami of devices" as students expected to be able to access information on any device.

Educational departments and schools needed to establish the infrastructure for BYOD, he said, though the $64,000 question was where funding would come from in a post-DER world.
Not surprisingly, private institutions are leading the way and The Southport School on the Gold Coast is one example of a recent BYOD convert.

Founded in 1901, the Anglican day and boarding school caters to boys from Prep to Year 12.

About two years ago, Richard Jones was hired to introduce educational technology to the school.

As director of e-learning, Mr Jones was tasked with sourcing a learning management system that students could access 24/7.

"We have introduced BYOD this year in our school and we think it is a great success, better than the single-device approach," Mr Jones said.

After a small pilot of 30 iPads in 2011, it purchased 200 of the tablets. The IT department wasn't too pleased with the decision and pushed for netbooks, which resulted in the purchase of 200 Windows-based units.

In 2010 the school had a total of six general-purpose computer labs. Today, that has been whittled down to two.

That move has seen the school return 120 Dell desktop computers that were on lease in favour of mobile devices such as MacBooks, MacBook Airs and iPads. Savings from the closure of the labs were ploughed back into critical network infrastructure.

"Once we scaled back our labs and sent back our leased machines, our IT manager told me over the Christmas period we spent $250,000 on network infrastructure upgrades. It wasn't as if the BYOD program was saving us money; it's that we reallocated the funds that we were spending.

"It's the way a lot of schools will have to go if they want any kind of 1-1 (computing) program," Mr Jones said.

He said Apple's MacBooks and MacBook Airs were most popular among the students, followed by iPads.

If students did not want to bring along their own devices, they could take one from school against a refundable deposit, Mr Jones said.

According to TSS head of learning and teaching Jo Inglis, a school-prescribed device can cause frustration in the tech-savvy generation that wants to their own device when studying.

Ms Inglis has her eye on preparing the workforce of the future as her students become adults in the 2020s.

"What will technology look like in their work environments?" she asked.

She said that at TSS, learning and teaching were the driver of its IT provisions, not vice versa.

"Teachers have control in their learning spaces over when a device can enrich learning and when the device is to be put away," Ms Inglis said.

"Whilst no model is likely to be perfect for all educational contexts, the BYOD model at TSS has been well received by boys and their parents."

She said the TSS teaching framework "drives learning and teaching pedagogy".

Ms Inglis said the impact of technology in education in both school and tertiary institutions had been dramatic.

"Schools continue to be challenged by the tendency of IT models driving curriculum delivery, learning and teaching," she said. "Homes, too, have changed.

"Not that many years ago, homes may have had one computer on a desk.

"Today's student may have three or more devices at their disposal, one often on their person - or under their pillow - 24/7."