

July 2019

Dear Parents

The Banning Technology Debate

'For every complex problem, there is a simple solution that is elegant, simple to understand, and wrong!'
HC Mencken

There has been considerable debate in the media and wider community about the Victorian Government's recent announcement that mobile phones will be banned in government schools from the beginning of 2020. Indeed, at the recent parent forum about our Secondary School Review there was some discussion about technology, and the merits and pitfalls of any prohibition.

A number of parents have expressed their views to me, and I want to share the thinking of the College Executive, and our plan moving into the future.

The misuse of technology, and the challenges of those addicted to various technologies is a problem. It is not a problem limited to schools, classrooms or teenagers; equally, neither are these exempt. While banning phones in classrooms might address part of this wider problem in some cases, it is unlikely to address key behavioural issues which influence the quality of life for all.

Kingswood College is committed to a holistic education – that of the whole child. The use of technology is not limited to their classroom experience. We share a big vision – of education for the whole of a child's life, in partnership with parents.

History is littered with examples of spectacularly unsuccessful prohibitions: we do not wish to add to this! In my experience those affected by changes respond more positively to being part of decisions which affect them, rather than having outcomes unilaterally imposed.

Another challenge is managing different types of technology. Banning telephones will not necessarily prevent students from accessing everything that a telephone can do, via another device. Without a broader approach, blanket banning a phone at certain times of the day may lead to increased use at other times – such as at home.

Kingswood College has been an active agent in helping young people to understand the power and pitfalls of technology – from the outset, our introduction of devices (both iPads and BYOD) has gone hand in hand with a commitment to responsible digital citizenship. In this endeavour we have partnered with a number of organisations who are leaders in the field, including cybersafekids, Project Rockit, the Alannah and Madeleine Foundation and more.

However, teaching young people to be wise, thoughtful and timely in their use of technology remains a significant challenge for parents, teachers and students!

To this end, the College proposes to engage with staff, students and families about the best way forward for our community. Discussion is underpinned by the belief that education is a powerful tool, and that wellbeing sits at the centre of our endeavours. Finding the right balance in our lives – between times when technology is useful and appropriate, and times when a digital detox is best – is going to vary between individuals. And in reality, sometimes young people will get it wrong – we should understand this and enable them to learn from their mistakes. This requires a whole of life approach.

We have begun discussions with staff and students, and will work with the PFA to seek opportunities to engage with parents, and continue to support parents to work with their children outside the classroom. The next PFA meeting is scheduled on Tuesday 20 August at 7.00pm in Cato, where this will be a topic for discussion.

A united approach, underpinned by a clear rationale for why we do what we do, is vital if we are to address this complex problem. Simple solutions are compelling, but the complex issues surrounding people's use of technology require a thoughtful, considered and united approach. I look forward to

working with you towards a clear strategy, based on the overall wellbeing and learning of young people.

From time to time there may be articles of interest in this debate which I will link via my blog on Kingsnet. I invite you to join the discussion and share your thoughts with me.

Yours sincerely

Elisabeth Lenders
Principal