

Catholic Education Office of Wilcannia-Forbes



The area covered by the Catholic Education Office of Wilcannia-Forbes spreads over half the state of New South Wales, Australia. Such great distances—from Bourke to Broken Hill is over six hours' drive—makes effective communication vital, but challenging to achieve. Before the introduction of G Suite and Chromebooks, many schools in the diocese were limited by their resources. The technology proved to be the turning point—and a great equalizer. Wilcannia-Forbes is now 1:1, and its 18 schools continue to create meaningful connections between students, teachers, and the wider district.

District facts

Private school district

Total district enrollment

2,050 **345**
Students Teachers

Years served

K > 12

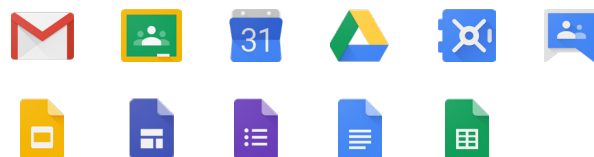
Number of schools

18 

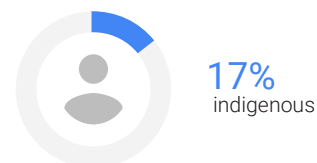
Google tools

2,500 Chromebooks
4 Years using Chromebooks
5 Years using G Suite for Education
100% Using G Suite for Education

G Suite for Education tools used



Ethnicity



Why Chromebooks

- For a geographically vast district, the technology offered by Chromebooks and G Suite made it significantly easier for teachers, students, and other diocese staff to connect and work together
- Teachers from different schools have combined classrooms through Google Hangouts, fostering a sense of community across far-flung areas
- For students who can't get to school, it's easier to keep up with their work—and maintain contact with their friends and teachers—using G Suite and Chromebooks

Results

When Wilcannia-Forbes introduced G Suite in 2013, just 1,400 files were uploaded to Google Drive. Today, that figure is over 320,000—assignments, assessments, lessons, professional learning, and more.

It's not just within schools and classrooms that the culture of collaboration has become the norm: 55% of teachers now work with their counterparts in different schools, and 56% of students collaborate with peers outside of the classroom.



Number of files
uploaded to
Google Drive

1.4K

2013

320K+

Today

95% of teacher
felt students
were more engaged

98% of teaching
staff strongly
agreed that Chromebooks
and G Suite have an
important function
in the classroom

Results of
Wilcannia-Forbes schools

+90% of teachers and students combined
observed higher-quality student work

56% of students
say they
collaborate more with
their peers

96% of students
said that
technology helps them
learn at school

90% of students
are excited
about learning when
using technology

Teaching and learning: teachers and students

In 2013, Wilcannia-Forbes invited teachers who were excited about the technology to be the first to try out G Suite. Representatives from all 18 schools attended a course (held at three venues across the district) on using G Suite and integrating it into their classrooms. Returning to their own schools from the course, the newly trained teachers began to share what they had learned. Today almost every teacher in the diocese uses G Suite to create and share work.

For school principals, a "Train the Trainer" program was set up. As Matthew Smith, IT Administrator for the diocese, sees it, it's the principal who 'sets the tone' for each school and drives the uptake of new technology, so getting them involved is crucial.

Wilcannia-Forbes is using the technology to overcome the challenges of small, remote schooling. Two small schools nearly 300km apart have created a joint Classroom to combine their resources and give their students a more well-rounded education. Students from the two schools work together on projects and meet regularly in Google Hangouts.

The district has also created multiple classes where students from different schools work together on a common skill or subject. This may be especially helpful when a teacher has particular expertise that other schools might not have access to. The teacher can deliver a lesson in their own classroom while students from other schools are participating via Hangouts. Classwork is then shared and completed in a dedicated Classroom.

Beyond the classroom

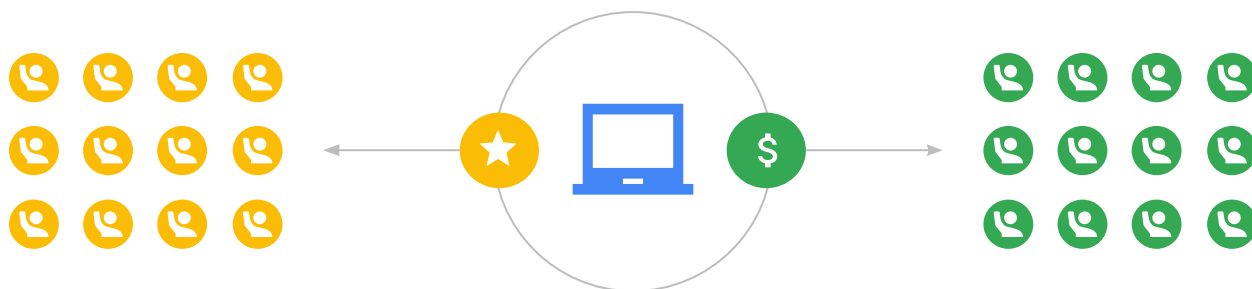
It's not just within (and between) classrooms that the technology has had a positive impact. Ongoing professional training is fundamental to all schools, but delivering consistent training to staff across such a large geographical area has presented a challenge in the past.

Today, Wilcannia-Forbes increasingly relies on video-conferencing, underpinned by G Suite's tools, to create and deliver professional learning.

Collaborations and breakout sessions have proven to be "transformative", according to Matthew Smith. Even meetings are more efficient, he says: "We have our agenda set up to have those short, sharp meetings where you can see people face to face... everything's linked into the agendas, everything is accessible through folders that we've created and shared. It's a big shift in how we deliver meetings. It's really opened us up to provide the best services to our schools."

"It's really opened us up to provide the best services to our schools."

Matthew Smith, IT Administrator—Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes



Equality of access

The underlying philosophy of the Catholic education system is that no one is denied a Catholic education because they can't afford school fees. Correspondingly, Wilcannia-Forbes was determined that all students have equal access to the new technology and its benefits.

To that end, they offered subsidized Chromebooks to students who could not have afforded them otherwise. According to IT Administrator Matthew Smith, that "impacted hugely on the motivation and engagement of these students, who felt that they were now able to come to school and complete their work in the same way as every other person in their class."

Simone Harding, Education Services Officer—Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes agrees: "Inclusion also made sure that our more remote communities can access the technology as well—it wasn't exclusive to our metro communities."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, offering every student equal access to Chromebooks and G Suite has seen an increase in student engagement and participation, with 94% of students surveyed in May 2016 saying that they've seen an improvement in their skills and knowledge since the introduction of the technology.

The sharing of teaching skills that's possible with the technology has also made it easier for Wilcannia-Forbes to provide the same quality of education across its schools, regardless of school size or geographical remoteness.

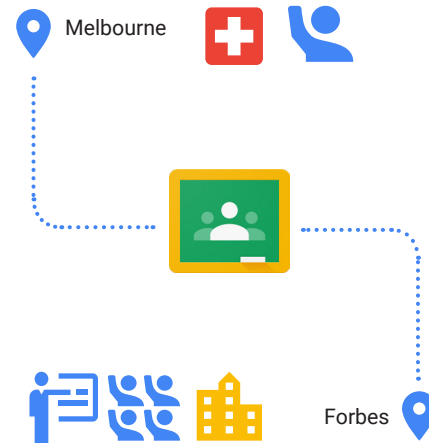


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Keeping in touch

Many students within the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese live in remote communities, and technology's role in bridging those distances is hugely important.

But it's had an important role in a less predictable situation also. An unexpected boon for one student was the connection she was able to maintain while undergoing medical treatment in Melbourne. At such a difficult and disorienting time, being able to stay in touch with her classmates and teachers—even contributing remotely to lessons—was a welcome bit of normalcy for the student. And when she did return to school, she wasn't disadvantaged by having missed out on all that had happened in her absence.



“Inclusion also made sure that our more remote communities can access the technology as well—it wasn’t exclusive to our regional communities.”

***Simone Harding**, Education Services Officer—Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes*