

## St. Columba Anglican School Uses Google Apps for Education and Google Classroom to Help Students Teach Each Other



### At a Glance

#### St. Columba Anglican School

- Independent private school serving 1,100 students
- Google Apps for Education user since 2012
- Google Classroom user since 2014

#### Goals

- Foster a “bring your own technology” policy for students and teachers
- Improve access to learning resources across Australia and around the world
- Transform how students and teachers work together on assignments
- Create easy access to documents from any device or platform

#### Approach

- Google Classroom brings unique projects to students – such as a group critique of a teacher’s novel
- Classroom helps teachers provide feedback while students are working on assignments and not just afterward
- Students teach each other and share knowledge

### Institution

St Columba Anglican School is an independent private school in Port Macquarie, New South Wales, Australia. The school serves 1,100 students from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 and has 153 teachers.

### Challenge

St. Columba Anglican School is located in a rural town in New South Wales, Australia – about 240 miles north of Sydney, and 350 miles south of Brisbane. “We’re always working to overcome the tyranny of distance,” explains Matt Richards, the school’s director of e-learning and educational technology. When students grow up in a beautiful but remote coastal town far from a major metropolitan area, “collaborative technology helps keep us connected to the rest of the world,” he adds.

Teachers seek out ways to bring experiences with other students and educators into St. Columba classrooms. “We’re out to prove that being geographically remote doesn’t prevent you from being a leader,” Richards says. Embracing all technology, no matter the platform or device, was a step in technology leadership.

“We were one of the first schools in the area to adopt a BYOT, or ‘bring your own technology’ policy,” says Richards, who also teaches hardware and software development, digital literacy, coding, and robotics to St. Columba students. “That means everything – Mac or Windows, Chromebooks or laptops, and any kind of phone or tablet.”

The challenge for this liberal BYOT policy was compatibility and access. “To make BYOT work we needed a web-based communication and document system,” Richards says. “We needed access to our programs and documents



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*“Google Classroom encourages the community learning model, and challenges the idea that teachers are the only ones who hold knowledge. It’s making it easier for students to learn from each other.”*

*—Matt Richards, Director of E-learning and Educational Technology, St. Columba Anglican School*

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from any device. The only way to make BYOT work was to place all of our learning and teaching applications in the cloud.”

### **Solution**

In 2012, St. Columba migrated to Google Apps for Education. “We rolled it out as a tandem system, so people could choose between using Google Apps or the old local drives system,” Richards says. “Just about everyone began using Google Apps – Gmail, Google Calendar, and Google Drive. Google apps was easy, accessible and enabled collaboration. It made teaching and learning easier. Teachers kept using it.”

With Google Apps for Education in place, Richards saw an opportunity for the school to begin using Google Apps as a free learning management system. “If our teachers, administrators and students could tie all of the Google tools together, we believed we could really change how teaching and learning happened,” he says.

Google Classroom was that unified teaching and learning tool he’d hoped for: It was designed with Google Apps for Education to help teachers save time, keep classes organized, and improve communication with students. Google Classroom also helps automate many of the manual processes associated with creating and managing assignments – and allows teachers to comment on students’ work on an ongoing basis.

### **Benefits**

Even teachers who’ve struggled to adapt to new technology are finding Classroom intuitive to use, Richards says: “They tell me that they were literally up and running with class projects in five minutes. We’re seeing more teaching and less ‘teching.’”

St. Columba teachers are big fans of progressive assessment, in which teachers coach students through assignments while students are working on them – not just when they’re completed. Paper-based assignments don’t allow teachers to step in midway through an assignment and guide a student – but Google Classroom does, letting teachers monitor student progress on documents in Drive, and then add comments.

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## About Google Apps for Education

A free suite of communication and collaboration tools – including Gmail, Classroom, Docs and Drive – for learning anywhere, anytime, on any device.

**Classroom:** A tool within the Google Apps for Education suite that allows educators to easily create, review, and organize assignments, as well as communicate directly with students.

**Chromebooks:** A range of fast, affordable devices that update automatically, and are easy for schools to set up and manage.

**Android:** A variety of affordable tablets that are easy for schools to set up and manage, and designed for students to share.

**Google Play for Education:** A content store built just for schools, so teachers can get the right apps, books, and videos to the right students, right away.

For more information visit  
[www.google.com/edu/apps](http://www.google.com/edu/apps)

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“Instead of telling students how they’ve done weeks after an assignment begins, teachers can start working with students right away,” Richards says. Teachers are also using Kaizena, an add-on tool for Google Docs, to add voice comments to student assignments. Students simply click on links in comments to listen to teacher feedback. “It’s a great time-saving feature for teachers who have several classes,” Richards says.

Classroom is making projects possible that could never have been attempted at St. Columba with paper assignments, or even basic online tools. Stephen Mansfield, who teaches English at St. Columba, placed his unpublished novel on Classroom and is asking his high school students to rewrite sections and provide critiques – which Mansfield plans to use for a new version of the book that he’ll send to publishers for review.

In Richards’ own technology classes, he’s using Classroom to manage a student project involving Minecraft, the hugely popular building game, to design models of an “ultimate” future school building. With Google Hangouts, students share their creations with fellow students at Wooranna Park Primary School in Melbourne, 900 miles away.

“Students think Classroom is amazing and fun,” Richards says. “As teachers, we’re also discovering that Google Classroom encourages the community learning model, and challenges the idea that teachers are the only ones who hold knowledge. It’s making it easier for students to learn from each other.”