

Catholic Education Office of Wilcannia-Forbes

Impact portraits: Success stories with Google for Education

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 Google Workspace 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 (Public school district)



Total district enrollment

2,050 Students
345 Teachers



Grades served

K>12



Number of schools

18 Total

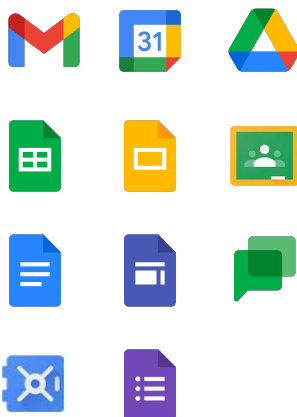


Google tools

2,500 Chromebooks
4 years using Chromebooks
5 years using Google
Workspace for Education
100% Students using Google
Workspace for Education



Google Workspace for
Education tools used



Ethnicity

17% Indigenous

Why Chromebooks

For a geographically vast district, the technology offered by Chromebooks and Google Workspace 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

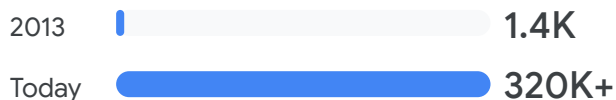
For students who can't get to school, it's easier to keep up with their work—and maintain contact with their friends and teachers—using Google Workspace and Chromebooks

Results

When Wilcannia-Forbes introduced Google Workspace 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



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 Google Workspace. Representatives from all 18 schools attended a course (held at three venues across the district) on using Google Workspace 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 Google Workspace 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.

Results of Wilcannia-Forbes schools

Teachers

95% of teachers felt students were more engaged

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

+90%

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

Students

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

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.

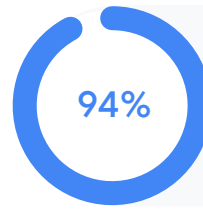
Today, Wilcannia-Forbes increasingly relies on video-conferencing, underpinned by Google Workspace's tools, to create and deliver professional learning.

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."



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Matthew Smith,
IT Administrator—Diocese of
Wilcannia-Forbes



of students surveyed in May 2016 are saying that they've seen an improvement in their skills and knowledge since the introduction of the technology

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 Google Workspace 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.

Keeping in touch

Chromebooks and Google Workspace for Education 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

