DEBBIE BUTLER outlines the use of technology at Mentone Girls’ Grammar School.

TODAY’S students have literally grown up with a mouse in their hand. Toddlers know how to ‘swipe’ an iPhone and teenagers interact in a dense digital world, communicating via social media in ways the previous generation would never have dreamt about.

Principal of Mentone Girls’ Grammar School, Mrs Fran Reddan, says that: ‘The school strives to provide contemporary and creative approaches to learning and communicating, especially for girls. The use of technology is critical to this and is designed to respond to student developmental stages. Importantly, a successful technology framework is one that speaks to girls in their language – they are empowered by the use of small, lightweight and personalised devices; they can leverage their inclinations to work collaboratively; they can learn to be even more creative and productive in their learning and build increased confidence in presenting their knowledge to others.’

‘As a school, we have developed an Interactive Learning Strategy for students that offers an age and stage appropriate approach to connectivity. In terms of devices, we have classroom computers and iPads in the junior school, followed by a one-to-one iPad program for students in years 7 and 8. We know that more than 60% of our students in years 9 – 12 want to connect with their own devices to our network. As a result, our Own or Loan Program is supported by advanced systems that enable students to connect safely and securely through our wireless network, whether by PC, Mac or iPad. While many students like to use their own devices, we do not expect students to purchase their own computers and have a large loan pool of laptops available. Students also have access to high-end iMacs for video editing and computer labs for specialised software.’

Mrs Kay McCullough, Vice Principal, and Chair of the School’s Curriculum and Innovation Committee, says that advancing technologies like the iPad have brought an exciting dimension to the curriculum. ‘Opportunities provided by tools like iMovie, which allows students to create multimedia with ease, and Notability which enables them to take class notes that seamlessly include pictures, diagrams and even voice recordings, have had a positive impact on their learning. Electronic books not only make it feasible to carry a library in one’s schoolbag, they have real advantages over traditional books because of inbuilt dictionary functions and annotation properties. Students are also able to improve their personal organisation by running electronic planners and setting reminders for their homework, co-curricular activities and other deadlines’, says Mrs McCullough.

As Principal, Mrs Reddan always has her eye on the bigger picture when it comes to technology. ‘We have a very strong community focus and understand the impact of personal technology devices on student wellbeing, and on students’ families. Introducing new technologies can be a challenge for the home and we work in partnership with families to encourage responsible and healthy choices. For example, our year 7 five-week iPad Passport program encourages parent-student communication and the development of clear home-use expectations. We also support families through evening workshops that empower parents with techniques for managing the iPad at home.’

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