

# Around the Schools by Lorraine Harris - Kingswood Primary School



Students from Kingswood programming their Lego robots. From left to right: Caleb, Jasmine, Teacher Linsey, and Tehan

**“Self-driving cars just down the highway”** was a headline in The Age newspaper on August 12. Added to this at the moment there seem to be any number of television documentaries intent on scaring us with their statistics on the March of Robots and the leaps and bounds being made in the area of artificial Intelligence (A.I.) Traditional jobs as we know them are threatened and with them the fabric of our society.

It is fortunate then that our school leaders have been very aware of this trend for some time. I recently had the opportunity to visit Kingswood Primary school (enrolment 587) situated in Dingley. Here I met the entrepreneurial Principal Ms. Rosemary Cosentino. Understanding the need to introduce her students to the skills they will need to thrive in this brave new world she applied for, and was accepted into, the Education Department’s High Performing Principals program. With funds provided, she enrolled in a future’s focused course

at the world-renowned Harvard Graduate School of Education in Massachusetts. Working with consultants and associate professors, her studies challenged her to a heightened appreciation of the need to incorporate the **skills of thinking** into the curriculum.

Back at school, she quickly realised that her staff would also need to gain access to the programs being taught at Harvard, if the school was to move forward together. Unfortunately training at this level is expensive. Using initiative, the school established an annual conference based around the acronym **-STEAM** - (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) - to generate the necessary funds.

Studying the school’s website, I noted that the most recent of these conferences was held on 11 August 2017. Attracting representatives from 208 schools - both Primary and secondary - the delegates, under the banner of **Ignite, Innovate** and **Integrate**, were confronted that by 2025 over 4 million

current Australian jobs will no longer exist. World class keynote speakers of an international calibre made sure that the delegates got value for their money as they challenged, motivated and inspired the teachers to plan strategies to cope with our future.

With cash flow from enterprises such as this, the school has been able to enrich their staff with international training. This has enabled them to implement programs that place the skills of thinking at the centre of the curriculum. Using **The Habits of Mind** program, (for which they have international accreditation), they have designed activities that focus on such intriguing ideas as - *Managing Impulsivity, Gathering Data Through All Senses, Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations, and Questioning and Posing Problems* - to name just a few of the 16 Habits of Mind. I can think of some world leaders who could benefit from these skills!

All of this sounds a bit airy fairy in respect to providing a

solid foundation with which to tackle the future, I thought. Until I was taken to a Grade 2 classroom. Here I found that the future was right on our very own doorstep. Seven-year-old children, aided by an App on their iPads, were building and operating automated remote-controlled

vehicles using Lego. When I asked what subject covered this activity I was impressed to learn it was **Robotics and Coding**. (7-year-olds!). Two of the Habits of Mind they were displaying were *Striving for Accuracy* (without it the robots grind to a standstill) and *Thinking Independently*. According to the teacher the students also enjoy subjects with names like - *Safe Use of Drones; Development and Application of Solar Power; and Animation and Photography*.

While the old staples of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic are still essential and taught in such areas as *Writer’s Workshop*, students and staff at Kingswood are on an exciting learning journey through such subjects as *Makey Makey*, where they are supported to create and

make something useful that will be of benefit to society. - *Bicycle helmets with inbuilt indicators?*

The walls of the classrooms fairly vibrate with slogans that encourage and enthuse. Such sayings as *See Think Wonder* carry out one of Principal Cosentino’s main wishes for her students. Having bought up children of her own, she believes that an important part of her role at Kingswood is to make sure that every student is equipped for the future, while being given multiple opportunities to *Discover Their Passion*.

Tehan, Caleb and Jasmine, who took charge of me during my visit to their Grade 2 classroom, were certainly evidence of the success of this philosophy. Energy oozed from their very pores as they competed to see who could impress me the most with their vehicular building skills. They manipulated the technology with ease and confidence.

I left in no doubt that the youngsters of today are being equipped to steer Australia into tomorrow and beyond.