3 December, 2012

Dear Parents / Caregivers,

I write with reference to Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) at Bishop Druitt College. In line with many other schools around the country, and indeed, the world, we will embrace BYOT in our Learning and Teaching at the College in 2013. During 2012, we have had a professional development program for staff, introduced Google Docs to our teaching environment, and trialled iPads with a Year 7 class.

Hitherto, schools have shunned personal devices that many students already bring to school. Increasingly, allowing these devices (and others) to be used in classes to augment access to the internet is becoming common in schools. The methods of engagement and collaborative learning have changed dramatically. In the past two years, BYOT is the model that many schools have adopted for their classrooms.

The Digital Education Revolution (DER) funding we received from the Federal government allowed us to buy enough laptops to service student needs from Years 9 to 12. Like many schools, we opted to keep and maintain these laptops at school. Our MacBooks get used heavily every day. BYOT will complement these resources.

The BYOT policy is intended to allow and encourage the use of internet-capable devices that can connect through the school’s wireless network and that are suitable for: researching and accessing information; collaborating and communicating with others; and creating a wide and sophisticated range of products that demonstrate their learning.

Teaching staff will oversee the use of personal devices as an extra resource in the classroom and not a means to an end. Outside of the classroom, they should be securely stored in student lockers. All students will be expected to keep their devices locked safely in their lockers when they are not in use. We will install lockers for the Year 11 and 12 students over the summer vacation, so all students will be able to lock their devices away when not in use in class.

The movement to BYOT will generate challenges for us as a school. Some obvious issues include: the influence of ICT on student behaviour; the cost of BYOT to parents; the potential for inequity amongst students; the impact on current and potential teaching and learning practices; the need for clear and consistent policies and guidelines; the necessity of supporting and equipping teachers to help the students use ICT responsibly and effectively; and the physical safety and security of the devices.

However, these concerns are not a reason to retreat in the face of the growing use of BYOT in schools. It is incumbent upon us, in partnership with students and parents, to identify and meet any challenge posed by BYOT. BYOT is an evolving practice in schools.
These challenges will need to be met and overcome, and mean we must not rush the implementation of BYOT at the College. To that end, we will move towards starting the program in Term 2, next year. This will allow more staff professional development on the use of BYOT in classes. Importantly, it will also allow us to work with parents to engage them with the use of BYOT at school.

In Term 1 next year, we will host Parent Information/Workshop evenings, where we will be able to answer questions. We will also be able to demonstrate how we will integrate BYOT in the classroom, which will be the practical workshop aspect of those sessions.

From the start of Term 2, the students in the Secondary school will be encouraged to bring their own personal device for use at school. I have attached a list of the pros and cons of possible devices for your reference.

We understand the financial impact of this on families, which is why it is not compulsory, and also why we have embraced a range of potential devices – many of which are either already in our students’ possession, or which can be purchased relatively inexpensively. Waiting until Term 2, removes any undue haste in the acquisition of BYOT devices.

Included with this letter is a list of Frequently Asked Questions that I hope will give you a better understanding of BYOT at the College.

I have trawled numerous school websites in recent months, reading about how those schools are going about BYOT. I must acknowledge three schools – Clayfield College, Brisbane, St Columba Anglican School, Port Macquarie, and Inaburra School, Sydney for their permission for me to refer to their dialogue with parents and information on BYOT as I compiled these documents for the BDC community.

There is a wealth of information about BYOT in the internet. A good starting point would be a blog “BYOT. Bring it on.” http://byot.me/ It covers a range of topics and will help give you a sense of the worldwide movement towards BYOT.

I hope you find this information useful.

Alan Ball
Principal