It has been a few weeks since the introduction of the 1:1 Tablet PC program for Years 5 and 9. At this exciting time here are some insights into how the girls and staff are exploring their many educational uses.

**SOCIAL SCIENCE**

“Inquiry-based learning, problem solving and informed decision making are the tools of the Social Scientist” explains Christine Douglas, Head of Social Sciences. Here she outlines the ways in which the Tablet PCs support and extend these skills.

The Tablet PC equips students to develop their skills in these areas as well as the means by which they can access a wealth of challenging, inspiring and relevant online resources. Use of these resources is now efficient, spontaneous and immediate. Exposure to different perspectives and media debates on current issues is now readily available in “real time”. Increased student choice in the presentation and review of class and research work is now more accessible, allowing for tailor-made student learning. Self-paced and independent learning is able to be used extensively to accommodate preferred learning styles, including visual and auditory learning. Students are enjoying the ability to work on the same online based tasks at the same time. In the classroom, the digital inking tool function of the Tablet PC has deepened student understanding, for example, in the study of complex graphs in Business Studies and Economics.

> Can you outline an example of a specific lesson or unit of work in Year 9 that is now possible with the Tablet PCs that hasn’t really been easy until now?

Year 9 Geographers have developed a greater appreciation of the Australian landscape via virtual tours of places and environments. By utilising powerful Google Earth applications on their own Tablet PC, students participate in a virtual “fly over” along a transect, from Darwin to Kununurra. Students individually select stop off points and conduct on-line site investigations into climate, landform and land use features of the area. Viewing the landscape from the air with photorealistic, interactive 3D views and exploring towns and settlements in high resolution as they zoom, pan, tilt and rotate around the area and its landmarks, has added a new dimension to classwork. Such software on the student’s individual Tablet PC is exciting in that it brings map work and spatial learning alive for students in a visually interactive manner.

> Is there any particular subject-specific software that you will be using with the students? If so, how will this enhance teaching and learning?

We offer a broad range of subjects in the Social Sciences Department – Geography, Commerce, Business Studies and Economics – and the task of finding suitable subject specific software is enormous. However, the software being used has been selected because it offers students challenge, collaborative learning opportunities, engagement, enjoyment and ownership of the learning process. Programs in Geography include the use of geospatial technologies, such as GIS and Geocaching, Scribble Maps and Topo Raster Maps, to complement fieldwork activities. Across all subjects, multimedia programs such as Photostory, Movie Maker, Comic Life, Voki, as well as podcasts and wikis are being used to enhance teaching and learning.

> Technology is just one part of the curriculum. What other essential non-IT activities does it have to integrate with?

There are a number of mandated activities in the Geography syllabus, including fieldwork. The Social Sciences Department has been successfully trialling the use of technology in recent fieldtrips to Shark Island, Centennial Park and Kosciuszko National Park. This has greatly enhanced the opportunity to collect data and store information as well as share photographs and obtain current weather information. In addition, activities that develop critical thinking, research and written and verbal communication skills are also an integral part of our curriculum. Technology will be used when and where appropriate to foster the acquisition of these skills.

> What is exciting you and your Department about the future possibilities with this technology?

One exciting possibility of the Tablet PC for the Social Science Department is the opportunity to provide each student with their own daily access to a digital version of the Sydney Morning Herald. Access to the most current information available, from a variety of sources, is essential for all of our subjects and aims to foster an insatiable interest in current affairs in the students. The girls are well accustomed to completing a current affairs quiz each week in class. We know that individual access to this media source will further enhance the value of these quizzes as well as providing new opportunities for research and further development of their critical thinking and communication skills.

The Tablet PC is allowing us to guide and share a journey with our students, in a medium that they know so well. We are excited about embracing this change and continuing to utilise learning and skills required for the 21st century, in an environment where information can be sourced and shared digitally, contributing to a reduced carbon footprint.
TABLET PCs in YEAR 9

Year 9 students have been the first year group in the secondary school to be allocated a Tablet PC as part of our 1:1 computing program. They have eagerly welcomed their new resource and the possibilities it provides, and feel that it is assisting them in making their learning more flexible and organised. Here are some thoughts from a discussion between Holly Gyton and a group of Year 9 students after their first two weeks with the Tablet PCs.

Students are embracing the initial practical benefits of the Tablet PCs. The ability to access their work “anywhere, anytime” during their day is widely acknowledged as an advantage. Rather than having to move to a computer lab or borrow laptops from the library, the girls particularly like the immediate availability of their personalised Tablet PC in the classroom. The girls recognise that the facility to download textbooks and classwork is continually decreasing the need to carry as many textbooks and exercise books. Managing files is now also much easier because “everything is in one place” rather than having to juggle documents between multiple USBs, computers at school and computers at home.

In the first fortnight, students have been exploring various ways of using the Tablet PCs in their classrooms. For example, they are enjoying the ease of access to French websites to assist in correct pronunciation, using Photoshop in Visual Arts, contributing to shared notebooks using OneNote in Mathematics and participating in an online share market game in Commerce. The girls feel that “it is so much easier to continue on with your own work” as they are now able to work at their own pace on their own computer. Some students are also exploring different electronic ways to organise their homework, assignments and manage their time.

The girls also discussed some of the new challenges of learning in this digital environment. Breaking those old habits of putting every book in their bag each day, remembering to charge the battery overnight and deciding which notes should be printed are three areas that the girls mentioned as being new challenges to tackle. However, the best part is how friendly and supportive the ICT support staff have been — “they are always smiling and do everything to help us out!” And the girls speak with appreciation of the careful thought and time their teachers have spent in integrating this technology.

Year 9 students are clearly excited about the possibilities that the Tablet PC represents. Impressively, not only are they exchanging ideas and advice with each other about the most effective ways to take advantage of their Tablet PCs, but they are aware of their diverse learning styles and that different uses of technology suit individuals differently. What they appear to cherish most about their Tablet PCs is the choice that it represents while also knowing that it is just as important to “use pen and paper and to talk to each other”.

TABLET PCs in YEAR 5

“One of the best things about having access to Tablets PCs in the classroom is the spontaneous learning that it allows for,” explains Helen Dempsey, Primary ICT Co-Ordinator. Here she outlines the advantages of the 1:1 program for Year 5.

If the girls have a question or want to continue a line of thinking independently, it is much easier to do this having individual devices. Learning can also become more personalised, with girls accessing resources and working more at their own pace. A range of web based resources are easily accessible too. This was evidenced in a recent Year 5 small group session when looking at newspapers and how to construct a balanced report. The girls were able to read news articles from a range of sources from that day, watch video news reports and begin to craft their own article.

In Science and Technology this term the girls are looking at Weather. This unit of work is very practical in nature and focuses on developing many important scientific skills. Previously it has been difficult to keep a record of all of the content and processes looked at in this unit, with many items spread across a range of locations. This term we will use OneNote to document the entire investigative process in one spot. This will include using the Tablet PC’s camera to video and take photographs of the investigations, integrate diagrams that have been drawn using the stylus and tablet, insert links to or screen captures from websites like the Bureau of Meteorology and attach files such as Excel workbooks showing data collected when using a data logger to measure temperature.

The use of OneNote in this context will allow the students a complete overview of a unit of work on completion of the program. This means that if they have not understood a concept, missed an experiment or simply want to review their learning, they have the opportunity to look back over their learning journey by going to one place. The range of resources used appeals to girls with various learning styles. In addition, the teacher will be able to review student understanding from her own computer with the ability to share OneNote files.