



Schools' web tangle

Better school websites can help students, teachers and parents alike, writes **Kamahll Cogdon**

SCHOOL websites are shifting from marketing tool to vital link between the classroom and home. But not all schools are on top of the internet revolution, the Victorian Council of School Organisations warns.

Council president Nicholas Abbey says many school websites meet the demands of tech-savvy students and parents, but most lag behind.

"I've probably seen at least 100 school websites and of those there'd be a good 30 per cent or so that are pushing the envelope, really creating an example of what a website should be doing," he says.

"The others are still serving a function, but are perhaps more promotional than really adding value to education and communication."

Abbey's comments follow new research that shows busy parents want better internet-based communication with schools.

But school websites were found to often have outdated or incorrect information, be difficult to navigate, be poorly designed and lack regular communication pathways.

The survey, by school website provider Sponsor-ed, found 77 per cent of 123 parents polled would prefer to

get school information online.

Almost 80 per cent wanted to get newsletters via email or websites.

Abbey says the best sites are an interactive resource for parents, offering password access to information on their child's progress.

"The better websites are increasingly providing very rich data and information about what a school is doing, what it's achieving, what services are available to parents, and links and networks to local community services."

Abbey says leading sites add another dimension to teaching and learning by including curriculum materials and allowing students to create wikis through which they access information on what they've studied in class, and discuss their lessons and homework.

Eltham College of Education principal Dr David Warner says his school's website is pivotal in the three-way partnership between teachers, students and parents.

Warner says his school was the first to introduce online curriculum material and reporting via a secure intranet portal 10 years ago.

Parents and students are alerted via email when a teacher posts a new progress report.

"Increasingly today both parents are

working, they're busy and to be able to keep in touch with your son or daughter and their schooling on a regular basis is a bonus," he says.

Warner says the school works with an IT company to run the website, which is funded on a per-student basis.

Abbey says tight budgets and time constraints hinder schools improving websites and believes greater government resources are needed.



Student art online: striking art on the Eltham College of Education website.