NBN shows its worth

A high-speed broadband lesson at Willunga High School.

Reliable high-speed service delivered by the national broadband network is showing positive results at the schools it has reached.

By Antonia Maiolo

The NBN rollout is gaining momentum and already improving learning opportunities for school students, according to a study by a Victorian educational consultancy.

The report, 21st Century Teaching Strategies for a Highly Connected World, the result of a three-month study, revealed students in schools connected to the NBN were already experiencing educational benefits.

The study was conducted by the consultancy ideasLAB on behalf of NBN Co. It drew on the experiences of 60 teachers and educators at Presbyterian Ladies’ College (PLC) and the TAFE teacher training institute in Armidale, NSW, and Willunga High School in South Australia.

“Services delivered over the NBN have the potential to significantly extend the reach, availability, and quality of education services for all Australian students,” said Kate Cormick, general manager of education at NBN Co.

Cormick said the report found that 82 per cent of teachers who participated in the research said student learning experiences will be increased.

Among other findings, 96 per cent of the teachers involved in the study said that the NBN will allow students to achieve more and that the NBN will increase teachers’ professional development and learning.

Over eight weekly online sessions teachers were exposed to virtual pedagogies and online technologies to stimulate thinking and expand their view of possibilities.

Access to the NBN was announced by the federal government last year when it awarded $27 million to 12 projects under the NBN-Enabled Education and Skills Services Program to give better access to education opportunities for students.

The goal is that by mid-2015, some 3.5 million Australian homes, schools and businesses will be connected to the NBN and this will enable access to high-speed broadband.

Cormick said in today’s highly digital world, a critical component of a world-class education system in Australia is the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which is underpinned by access to reliable, high-speed broadband.

Families, students, schools and businesses in the Willunga and Armidale areas were among the first in Australia to access the internet via the NBN.

Janelle Reiman is the principal of Willunga High, about 30km south of Adelaide, and said there had been a high take-up of the NBN in the area with 90 per cent of homes and business expressing interest. She said the rollout has allowed school and home environments to be connected to high-speed and consistent broadband.

“Prior to the NBN, our internet access was slow and with frequent outages making it hard for teachers,” Reiman said. “Frequently students would be logged out as it did not allow consistent access for everyone.”

She said teaching and learning in the classroom was affected, with speed and reliability of wireless coverage being the greatest inhibitors.

This meant that teachers did not feel confident with the use of technology to assist learning, and students were restricted in what they could achieve.

Reiman said the NBN has facilitated a revolutionary change in the delivery of content and of learning input. “Students who used to hand in C-grade work are producing A-grade work.”

She said it has also provided a platform for teachers to provide cutting-edge learning experiences for students, and that the NBN has helped to facilitate better learning for special needs students.