

Class is out there

PUPILS DICTATE WHAT THEY WANT TO LEARN



Diago, 16, from Templestowe College, Jacinta, 13, from Mount Alexander College, Temma, 14, from Templestowe College, and Amren, 13, from Mount Alexander College. Picture: JAKE NOWAKOWSKI

STUDENTS are telling teachers what they want to learn, and are even getting alpacas, snakes and drones because they ask for them, under a radical school shake-up.

Under the “Independent Learning Plan”, there are no school bells, no PA system, and even no set year levels. At one school, students get in trouble if they don’t have their phone with them: it’s how teachers and principals get in contact.

Students of year 7 age can take VCE subjects, uniforms may be optional, and pupils can choose what to study, and at what level.

Students run their own coffee carts in the halls, build

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motorised skateboards in class, and create their own clothing labels they wear to school.

And there’s no detention.

The ILP program is at four Victorian schools — Templestowe College, Bundoora Secondary College, Mount Alexander College and Beechworth Secondary College.

There are plans to expand the program to 10 schools next year, and to 20 by 2019.

“If we’re going to claim to be the education state, we need more than numberplates just saying it’s so. We actually need radical reform,” Templestowe co-principal Peter Hutton said.

“How do you justify a system where half of the students end up with terrible outcomes — not just academic, but the incredible cost in terms of mental health and loss of feelings of worth as a learner?”

Mr Hutton has resigned from the Department of Education and will take up a full-time job recruiting other schools to the model. He called on parents to rally against the “sad” traditional education system that was “failing kids”.

“We need an extreme program because (the system) is extremely broken,” he said.

“Our global education system is based on a lack of trust of students, teachers and

principals to make decisions in the best interests of young people.”

Templestowe student Dylan Reid, 16, said mates at other schools were “jealous” he got to build skateboards or guitars and create a clothing label.

“It’s so much better, because you’re going to enjoy working, and when you enjoy it you get so much more out of it,” he said. “And you can try a bunch of different things.”

The three Melbourne schools have seen a dramatic enrolment increase in just a few years. Mount Alexander has seen enrolments jump from 280 to more than 400 in two years, and principal

Wayne Haworth said: “Families are seeking us out. Students are more engaged and their voices are getting louder — they’re less passive as learners.”

Education Minister James Merlino said the state government was “very proud of our education system, which consistently outperforms other states and territories”.

“The department and parents have previously raised concerns about the teaching methods (at Templestowe), and in response, an investigation was conducted which resulted in an improved focus on literacy and numeracy,” he said.

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