



# Tannum Sands BITS Centre tackles skills shortage

A JOINT project between Boyne Smelters Ltd (BSL), the Comalco Community Fund and Tannum Sands State High School is giving young people in the Gladstone area access to business and information technology (IT) skills in a real-world environment.

A decline in the number of students studying business and a shortage of local IT specialists resulted in the establishment of the Business and Information Technology Skills (BITS) Centre for Excellence, which opened in April at Boyne Island.

The centre provides Year 11 and 12 students with a learning environment that duplicates the expectations, ethics and discipline of the workplace.

Tannum Sands State High School principal Ray Johnston said the school had always had a strong interest in enterprise education and wanted to take it to the next level by offering learning offsite in an authentic work environment.

"When Boyne Smelters offered us some disused office space we leapt at the chance because it really matched in with what we had been hoping to achieve," he said.

"Students are taking one of three business subjects — Business Communication and Technology, Business Office Management or Accounting — or they're working towards a Certificate II or III in Information Technology (Networking) at the centre.

"Students attend the centre one day each week on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday starting at 7.30am in the morning and finishing at 3.30 in the afternoon.

"They spend about half the day studying and the other half running a business enterprise where they put what they've learnt into practice.

"Graduates of the program looking to enter the workforce will be job-



Tannum Sands State High School principal Ray Johnston and General Manager of Boyne Smelters Ltd Alan Breen watch as one of the first BITS Centre students, Chantel Carrigan, enters the Smelter site.

ready, experienced and employable, while others may have direct entry to Central Queensland University courses.

"Eighteen Year 11 and 27 Year 12 students from the school are currently in the program and it is anticipated that the centre will be opened up to students from other schools in the district in the near future.

"The centre, through its business enterprise and authentic learning, will provide a valuable pathway to employment and further education and we expect that it will attract a large number of students," he said.

The school has also introduced early morning classes, including Maths and English, to accommodate students who are attending the BITS Centre.

Maxine Brushe, Transition Coordinator for the Central Coast District, said the IT and business skills shortage was identified during the development of the local District Youth Achievement Plan (DYAP).

"The BITS Centre project is a perfect example of local organisations working together to develop pro-

grams that meet the needs of young people and the local community.

"A community steering committee, with representatives from district schools, the Central Queensland University, TAFE, and local business and industry including Boyne Smelters and Comalco, was established to help set up the BITS Centre," Ms Brushe said.

"The Comalco Community Fund allocated almost \$250,000 to help establish the centre and Education Queensland has provided a further \$80,000 for equipment.

"In addition, Boyne Smelters has provided personnel over the two years to liaise with the school and also contributed computers and IT equipment for the centre.

"All up, the project is worth about \$1 million when you add up the financial and in-kind support from the various players such as Education Queensland, Comalco and Boyne Smelters," she said.

Boyne Smelters is Australia's largest aluminium smelter producing more than half a million tonnes of aluminium each year.



A new two-storey, four-classroom Prep building at Eatons Hill State School will have the school set for Prep in 2007.

# Getting set for Prep at Eatons Hill State School

NEW Prep classrooms at Eatons Hill State School are nearing completion as the school prepares for the statewide intake of Prep students next year.

A new two-storey, four-classroom Prep building and two refurbished Preschool classrooms will ensure the school is ready to meet the growing demands of the Pine Rivers community, located on Brisbane's northern outskirts.

Principal Clyde Campbell said the new Prep facilities would provide an excellent learning environment for children in the early phase of learning and the school would have a capacity for 150 Prep places.

"The classrooms are flexible, colourful and extremely well equipped and will significantly improve storage capacity for learning resources and play equipment," Mr Campbell said.

"They incorporate excellent play areas and have been integrated with an existing outdoor stage and seating area for students.

"The layout of classrooms supports the delivery of the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines and the provisions for learning technology will significantly enhance programs for all children.

"The new Prep facilities and the Prep program will support the ongoing multi-age and rich-task philosophy within the school," he said.

2007 heralds the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Eatons Hill State School, which currently has an enrolment of 962 children.

Mr Campbell said the school had received a large number of inquiries from residents in the school's catchment area.

"Our community is looking forward with great anticipation to the start of Prep and it will take the pressure off parents who have previously had to contend with waiting lists for Preschool at the school," he said.

"The introduction of a full-time, five-day Prep program will significantly boost the early years program at the school and get children off to a great start with their education."

# Teachers learning about teaching and learning for the Middle Phase

A HANDS-ON approach to learning about the Middle Phase of Learning has helped a group of Townsville teachers improve their understanding and practice, both in the classroom and in school leadership roles.

The five Townsville teachers were among 40 participants in Education Queensland's Middle Phase of Learning pilot online course, *Taking Action in the Middle Phase of Learning*.

The professional development program for teachers and educators uses an action learning process where participants undertake a middle phase project of their choice. Participants can use the course to gain credit towards post-graduate university qualifications.

Participating teachers from four Townsville schools formed a learning set to support each other and share ideas and questions throughout the course's extensive reading, online tutorials and practical application.

Kirwan State High School deputy principal and participant Toni Robinson said the online learning mode gave participants access to a com-

prehensive range of relevant information, all packaged and organised for easy use.

"I feel like I now have the definitive package of the latest research about the Middle Phase of Learning," Ms Robinson said.

"I know more about the big issues in the middle phase, what strategies are effective for adolescents and how I would like to continue to refine my own practices," she said.

Ms Robinson applied her learning from the course to her leadership role, developing questioning and reflecting strategies to support change in middle phase teaching and learning. For her project, she focused on working with her school's Head of Department to improve engagement in a Year 9 SOSE class.

"When we analysed our practice and reflected on it, we realised that the students were disengaging when we moved to more abstract concepts," she said.

"Once we realised that, we slowed down the process, provided more opportunities for students to talk about their own experiences and made

more explicit connections between personal and abstract content.

"We found the students became more actively involved in the inquiry process when it was more relevant to their own life experience.

"They participated at a higher level and showed deeper understanding.

"Having an awareness of the nature of adolescents and how they learn allows you to develop your own middle phase filter to evaluate all your practices," Ms Robinson said.

As well as their individual action learning projects, course participants have applied their learning more informally in their classrooms and departments.

For example, Melinda Pearson is working on more challenging, engaging assessment tasks as Physical Education coordinator at Townsville State High School.

"I've used what I've learned through the course to review and refine the assessment of the theory components of our PE courses," she said.

Other members of the Townsville-based learning set were equally



The Townsville learning set, from left, Toni Robinson (Kirwan SHS), Kaylene Mladenovic (Townsville SHS), Donna Statham (Bohlevale SS) and Carolyn Dawson (Heatley SHS). The fifth member, Melinda Pearson (Townsville SHS), is absent.

positive about the course. Heatley State High School Acting Head of Department Carolyn Dawson said the course design was "fabulous", while Bohlevale State School deputy principal Donna Statham said the course has equipped her better to provide information and advice to parents and students.

"The course readings were very

interesting, the tasks were practical and the collegial spirit we developed in our learning set was an added bonus," Ms Statham said.

Teachers wanting to inquire about participating in the course in Term 3 should email Mary Lincoln, A/Principal Education Officer, Middle Phase of Learning at [Mary.Lincoln@qed.qld.gov.au](mailto:Mary.Lincoln@qed.qld.gov.au)