

Given enthusiastic teaching teams, schools should be able to engage every child in some way

Capturing the imagination of primary school children

By Sue Goss

Capturing the imagination of young children and helping them take off in their own enthusiastic direction is one of the joys of teaching. It can happen anywhere but it usually occurs at school. Given a great team of enthusiastic primary teachers, a school should be able to engage every child in some way.

"The first three years of schooling are the years that set children up for life," says Ann Hooper, head of junior school at Lauriston Girls' School. "If we can capture that innate desire to learn, and build on it, they retain it for life. They will want to come to school each day."

How important are the physical surroundings to a child's ability to learn? Lauriston has just refurbished 'Blairholme', the historic house where the girls from prep to year two have their classrooms.

"We have kept the essence and beautiful surroundings but transformed the learning landscape into a fresh, modern, flexible and dynamic learning environment for young girls," says Ms Hooper. "Girls at that age need to be excited about learning. They expect to learn and would be disappointed if it didn't happen. They have an innate curiosity and enthusiasm."

Ann Hooper had read the plentiful literature available on tones and colours in classrooms, since the school had the opportunity to refurbish completely.

"We consulted a child education psychologist who advised on furnishings and palette," she says. "I was rather surprised by

her advice but for this particular building it works beautifully. Colours do matter and the furniture coverings and materials complement the look of the rooms."

Apart from the outward refurbishment, the teaching and learning programs are continually being revised to cater for girls of this particular age.

"There is a tendency to underestimate the capacity and capability of girls of this age to explore in a surprising depth issues and concepts that are challenging," says Ms Hooper. "To ensure this doesn't happen here we are including the sorts of projects which girls really enjoy which involve collaborating and sharing their learning. For example, we are working with 'Scientists in Schools' and have installed a digital weather station at Blairholme. Their experts talk about climate change and weather; the girls can download data from the computers and compare it with Howqua and the Bureau of Meteorology."

Another spin off from having the junior school divided in this way is that year twos can have significant leadership roles, taking assembly and looking after the new girls.

Blairholme is separated from the main school with its own adventure playground, a little garden, sandpit and soccer lawn. For girls who like to sit and read there are ottomans and odd corners around the classrooms.

Lauriston's little school within a school has been specially designed as a really happy place for girls to begin their education.

The hardest part could be moving up to year three.