

Australia's first Year 9 'university students' are set to begin a year-long program designed to engage and inspire them during this crucial stage of their education.

The Ivanhoe Grammar School students will spend a whole year at the new campus, which will offer students a 12-month taste of university learning that will engage, challenge and prepare them for senior school and adult life.

The school's current Year 8 cohort relocated to its innovative new campus on the outskirts of La Trobe University in Macleod yesterday, where they will use the final weeks of Term 4 to settle into the unique new environment.

Ivanhoe Grammar School principal, Gerard Foley, said the idea for the campus was born out of the need to accommodate the shifting needs of Year 9 students.

"Research shows that when students reach middle adolescence – typically around Year 9 – their needs change," Foley told *The Educator*.

"While Ivanhoe Grammar School offered a unique Year 9 experience for more than a decade, this was not a year-long program and did not provide Year 9 students with their own physical space."

Following discussion between Foley and Professor John Dewar – the Vice-Chancellor and President of La Trobe University – a working party was established to develop a unique learning program to meet the learning needs of Year 9 students

"When these learning needs are not met, the risk of disengagement from their schooling becomes significantly more likely, and research shows that re-engagement can take some years," Foley said.

"This trend can be reversed by schools prepared to offer Year 9 programs which caters specifically for students' needs and interests at this level. Hence the interest from both La Trobe University and Ivanhoe Grammar School in developing this Australian first program."

Foley pointed to research showing that Year 9 students respond positively to a curriculum that links to, and is meaningful in their lives outside, as well as in the classroom.

“Year 9 students value opportunities to explore new ideas in depth. They enjoy cooperative small group learning which is secure and supports them moving beyond their comfort zone. They learn what they think is useful and enjoy using their skills to solve real-world problems,” Foley said.

“At our University Campus we provide a unique and tailored year-round program, catering specifically to the learning needs of 14-15-year-old adolescents, which is engaging, rigorous, and authentic.”

Foley said the “unique learning” at University Campus will strengthen the school’s existing learning philosophy by further enriching its students’ personal and academic lives.

“Mathematics, Science, English and the like continue to be important core studies for students; however, by exposing students to the types of big ideas you would expect to find in a university environment, their learning will be at an even deeper level in preparation for studies in the VCE and IB in Senior Years,” he said.

Foley said this will be achieved by providing “engaging and authentic learning experiences”, including a ‘passion project’, the development of a Global Action Plan, and four inquiry-based units focusing on enterprise, science, conflict and global citizenship.

“These engaging studies will further develop skills in innovation, enterprise, problem solving, digital and financial literacy and intercultural understanding,” Foley said, adding that these capabilities are “critically important” for secondary school graduates who leave school into a genuine global and rapidly changing community.

“Furthermore, we envisage our students experiencing a university environment at this stage will ensure they are fully informed about making decisions post school and it will assist in demystifying the university experience, which can be a daunting prospect for students straight out of school.”