Beaulieu College
A division of Kyalami Schools (INFO)
ALIS VOLA PROPRIIS

The Kyalami Schools Group goes Google to be globally competitive.

The setting

Founded in northern Johannesburg in 1996, Beaulieu Preparatory School is the cornerstone of the Kyalami Schools Group (KSG). With a global educational landscape in its sights, KSG seeks to "re-imagine education". Independent and co-educational, the group also includes Kyalami Preparatory and Beaulieu College (high school). That's about 1,550 students, from ages three to eighteen years, across three campuses. What better platform than Google Workspace for Education to re-imagine, unify, and spark learning in students and staff alike?

CloudEDU

Tech in good time

For many schools in South Africa, Covid-19 was the disruptor that forced educators to confront the role of technology in their environment. This was not the case for the KSG where Group Head of Academics and Innovation, Mark Naidoo, along with dedicated staff like Patrick Thorp, started integrating cloud-based tools into the curriculum, its Educational Technology Vision and Strategy workshop long before 'lockdown' became synonymous with 'online'. In late 2018, Google's leading Education Partner in Africa, CloudEDU, facilitated its Educational Technology Vision and Strategy workshop with the group's senior management to uniquely define the schools' vision for educational technology.

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In early 2019, every student and staff member in the Kyalami Schools Group was equipped with a Google Workspace for Education account, which included the online benefits of Google Classroom. Part of the mandatory onboarding was ensuring that all educators were trained and certified on Google Educator Level 1. A one-to-one Chromebook programme was launched in Grades 6 to 9. Additionally, Beaulieu Prep invested in a mobile bank of Chromebooks (enough for a whole grade) that could travel between classes, phases and subjects.

"We were very well set up for the 2020 emergency that was Covid," says Patrick Thorp, now the group's Ed Tech Specialist. "Our intention to bring tech into the classroom and make it a uniform, streamlined application across the board – implementable early on in 2019 – was retrospectively a very good move. Because of the systems we already had in place, we navigated the challenges of online schooling extremely well. The Google Workspace platform was phenomenal, and CloudEDU's efficient onboarding had unknowingly prepared us for the obstacles that inevitably came with the pandemic."

Google for Education   CloudEDU

Tech for teamwork

Google Classroom became a great gathering point for everyone: a central place from which educators could disseminate, in a structured manner, content and guidelines, and assignments. Thorp, who also teaches Information Technology at Beaulieu College, explains, "I develop online workbooks in Slides – digitised versions of textbooks for every student with access via Classroom. I send my students to places a traditional textbook can't – through hyperlinks to websites, tutorials, exercises, and online teaching programs for coding, as example."

"What I love about the Google fraternity is that everybody shares a bunch of ideas," Thorp adds. The collaborative nature of the workbooks allows online group work, brainstorming as a class – starting conversations in a format where everyone has a voice: "It allows me as their teacher to guide, not lead, the discussion. Children who ordinarily wouldn't feel comfortable speaking up in class, have equal say in online work." Also, there's a record to refer back to – tangible evidence of engagement, in a more inclusive space.

At Beaulieu Prep, Tessa Hughes, the Deputy Principal, embraced similar benefits of Google Workspace for Education and Chromebooks within her primary school. "I've never known a better tech device for kids. It's lightweight, it's robust, it's instant on … it ticks a lot of boxes." Hughes, who developed her own subject called 21st Century Critical Skills (or CCS for short), says her "off-the-wall-classroom" invites students to research, design, make, build, test, collate, and present findings in a collaborative way. This subject seamlessly integrates higher-order thinking skills with manual skills with technological skills to explore questions like 'What is electricity?' (a Grade 5 group project). And the Grade 4s played around with the Chromebook's format flexibility – from tablet to laptop to tent mode.

The collaborative nature of Google Workspace for Education is really powerful in the classroom, as well as "from a workflow point of view within a large organisation like ours," notes Thorp. Staff being able to hop on to a Google Doc across different campuses makes planning quicker, more efficient and trackable. Idea generation, managing admin and record-keeping have improved. "It's been huge in terms of curriculum development because teachers are communicating more, in real-time, around what's working and what's not working. It's been a great democratising factor amongst our educators. Everyone has a say."
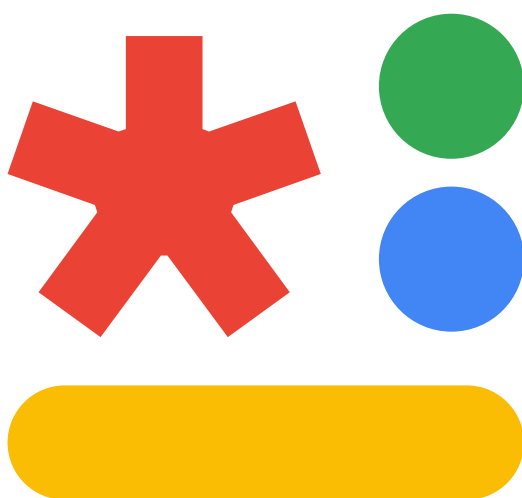
Google for Education   CloudEDU

Tech support and safety

A number of accessibility tools built into Google Workspace for Education ensure equity for students who have physical or neurological barriers to learning. Other easy-to-use Chromebook-ready tools like Read&Write and Speech-to-Text are very enabling for learners who are disadvantaged by uniform assessment requirements. "They become more free to express what they've learnt. It empowers learners faced with a pen and paper, who might otherwise shrink away," affirms Hughes. "We also supply a device to each of our bursary students (often from underprivileged communities), " adds Thorp.

Without the necessary infrastructure and technical support, it would have been impossible to achieve this large-scale integration of technology into teaching, learning, and daily operations. Thorp explains, "The more devices your institution has the greater your bandwidth needs to be. Teachers aren't going to use tech in the classroom if it's frustrating." So the group improved the reliability of Wi-Fi speed and kitted out every classroom with a Google Chromecast (eliminating cables and empowering learners to cast their contributions straight to the whiteboard).

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"But the biggest reason we went with Google Workspace for Education and Chromebooks was the inherent security. Google is uncompromising in that respect, and the safety of our students whilst connected to our network was non-negotiable," says Thorp. Hughes adds, "Being able to manage the device remotely, restricting access and reigning them in, has given our parents huge peace of mind." Safety settings are put in place by the school's IT technicians who have been trained by CloudEDU on operating the Google Workspace admin console and applying the Chrome Education Upgrade license effectively. "CloudEDU always step in if there is an issue we can't resolve. They are great communicators and very supportive."

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People first

Even with the platform in place, KSG knew that teachers, not tech, were at the centre of best pedagogical practice. "Just because you have technology in the classroom certainly doesn't mean you have learning going on," asserts Thorp. Currently completing his ICT Masters at the University of Johannesburg, Thorp explains the various stages of tech integration – from simply replacing a whiteboard through to synthesis and application of tech as self-directed learning tool. "It's about asking 'How can I create opportunities to bring the child into their learning?'" Tech has to work hand-in-hand with teaching philosophy – shifting the teacher as disseminator of knowledge to the facilitator of learning.

"Technology is an answer to the 21st-century skills we seek in our workforce moving forward. Teachers who are ensuring the curriculum is future-proofing our children, know that tech in education isn't a marketing gimmick, but a real opportunity," Thorp concludes. As long as the Kyalami Schools Group continues to re-imagine holistic education that is globally competitive, students like Divit Bansal (Grade 7) can claim, "I love using my Chromebook because it lets my imagination go free."

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Success by numbers

schools **5** **3** campuses

1550+ students

5 – 9 Grades with Chromebooks

82% of educators are Google Certified Educator Level 1

2019 2-3 hours **per week** on Chromebooks

2023 2-3 hours **per day** on Chromebooks

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