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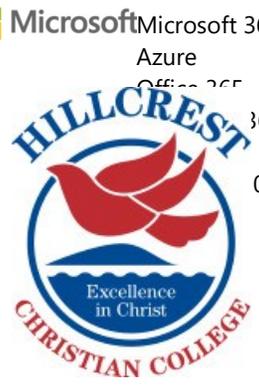
Office 365

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Customer
Hillcrest Christian College

Partner
Built to Roam Pty Ltd

Products and Services
Microsoft Teams
OneDrive for Business Online
OneNote 2016
SharePoint Online
Surface Book 2
Surface Pen
Surface Pro

Industry
K-12

Organization Size
Medium (50 - 999 employees)

Country
Australia

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Hillcrest students learn to read 12 months faster with digital education tools

January 17, 2019



Located in Queensland, Australia, Hillcrest Christian College is an independent, coeducational day school that serves more than 1,400 students, ages 3–18, in levels Prep to Year 12. The College also runs a full-day daycare program for children ages 3–5. The College believes in preparing all students for a digital world and, by using tailored applications that include Microsoft Surface and Surface Pen, has seen early learners develop reading and writing skills up to 12 months ahead of expectations.

There is a reason Hillcrest Christian College was recognized by Cambridge University in



2018 as one of the 100 most innovative schools worldwide. The school incorporates award-winning education design and delivery into its curriculum for students at all levels. "We prepare our students for a highly automated and digital world from the beginning of their learning, not just at the end," says Jeff Davis, Executive Head of College for Hillcrest Christian College. This view is expressed among the school's teachers and faculty who make extensive use of Microsoft Surface devices, in addition to Microsoft Office 365 and other learning and collaboration applications, in the classroom.

The challenge of delivering this digital education is two-fold: accelerating literacy for children, while also providing them with the best learning tools to help them succeed. "We want to provide our students with learning opportunities that are accessible on a digital platform from a very early age, so the technology can maximize their learning," says Michelle Cecil, Education Consultant, who helped implement the *I Love Reading* program at the College and now helps Hillcrest teachers and external clients make the best use of it.



Technology that accelerates reading and writing skill development

Hillcrest developed the *I Love Reading* (ILR) program to help shape successful learners for the future. Using an English phonetic code developed by the Mamone family, ILR helps early learners decode texts at an accelerated rate. The program exemplifies Hillcrest's use of technology for teaching and learning. By combining applications, Surface Pro devices, and classroom instruction, ILR helps students develop critical reading and writing skills. ILR promotes all aspects of literacy development, along with creativity, critical thinking, and soft skills for the future.



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Students view color-coded, phonetic text on the Surface device, using a software interface developed by the ILR team. This approach produces significantly accelerated outcomes for students. "Very conservatively, I'd estimate we're seeing children reading 12 months ahead of where they would have historically been reading," says Cecil.

The next step was to address the writing aspect of literacy. Hillcrest approached Microsoft with the concept for an app that would help students develop writing skills and allow teachers to track progress and send images of student work to parents. "It's really good to have your children reading at a faster rate. But if they're still unable to write, we've got a problem," says Davis.

With funding from Microsoft, Hillcrest worked with Built to Roam to develop the ILR writing app. Students use the app and Surface Pen with Surface Pro to develop their writing skills. "With the pen, children can access the writing app and practice writing the word sounds, so they're building great fine motor skills as they're learning their academic skills," says Cecil. For students who are learning English, ILR helps them engage in reading and writing much more easily than with other methods.

For all early learners, the Microsoft technology encourages advanced exploration. "We have students who have been at school for 18 months and are now doing an investigative research project that traditionally they wouldn't have been able to access until Year 3 or 4," says Davis. "You can't do that without technology. It boosts the student's confidence and their interest to engage in learning."

The learning value of a standard device and a digital pen

Hillcrest provides Surface Pro devices for use in the classrooms serving Prep through Year 4, while Surface Book 2 is the device of choice for students in Years 7–12. Teachers and administrators also use Surface Book and Surface Pro devices and collaborate with Microsoft Teams, the hub for teamwork in Office 365.

"It doesn't matter whether it's a Preppy or Year 12 student. Our students can do far more with Surface Pen than what they thought was possible on a computer," agrees Cecil. For example, the youngest students can use the digital pen to draw pictures in Microsoft OneNote, while older students can write scientific and mathematical equations.

Additionally, classroom learning is smoother when all students use the same device. "Before we standardized on Surface, there were lots of issues in class and student frustrations because the ability for everyone to access the same thing at the same time was quite difficult," says Joy Geyer, Head of *I Love Reading*.





An online platform for applications, content, and community

The College can also use Office 365 to offer ILR to other schools through a separate commercial company. "The Office 365 ecosystem really helps us deliver the curriculum in a way that's highly collaborative for the schools and teachers," notes Darren Rackemann, Deputy Head of Community, Academic Performance and Innovation at Hillcrest Christian College. For example, the ILR team uses the Office 365 platform to upload resources, post training videos, and answer questions for participating schools. For a large corporation that uses the ILR program in their educational institutions, Hillcrest collaborates with their teams through SharePoint and Yammer.

Reduced materials expense and simpler IT support

The choice of Surface as the standard for school devices has eliminated some costs for Hillcrest. For example, the school saves AUD6,000 (USD4,300) per academic year by not printing the calendars previously used by students to track dates and assignments. Additionally, teachers no longer need to print out a stack of worksheets for their class; they can simply post the documents to OneNote for student access. And students no longer need to print because teachers can see each student's work inside OneNote and can collaborate with students using Teams.

Hillcrest also experiences benefits for IT support. "Overall, the quality of the Surface Books we deployed is fantastic, with less than 10 percent of damage or issues related to the devices," says Peta Jorgensen, P-12 Digital Learning Coordinator at Hillcrest Christian College. "When a student experiences a problem, they can simply swap out the device and pick up where they were because they saved their work to Microsoft

 Microsoft
OneDrive in the cloud.
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Ready for a continually changing future

Hillcrest plans to build on the benefits of Microsoft technology through new deployments of devices and capabilities. For example, the school now provides Surface Book devices to students in Years 7–12, eliminating the challenges of supporting a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) program for these levels. The school will also explore Teams capabilities as the platform for sharing with parents, giving them the ability to view their child’s work, monitor progress, and better work with teachers to address learning challenges.

These plans are part of Hillcrest’s ongoing commitment to deliver an education that reflects an increasingly digital world. “Microsoft, as the platform for our learning delivery, fits perfectly with our overall vision of the school, where it’s about skills for the future rather than the content of the now,” says Davis.

Find out more about [Hillcrest Christian College](https://www.hillcrest.qld.edu.au/) (<https://www.hillcrest.qld.edu.au/>) on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/_HillcrestCC) (https://twitter.com/_HillcrestCC), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/HillcrestChristianCollege/) (<https://www.facebook.com/HillcrestChristianCollege/>), and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hillcrest-christian-college/) (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/hillcrest-christian-college/>).

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