School helps staff learn by degrees

Rockhampton Grammar School headmaster Phillip Moulds is sending his teachers back to study too, sponsoring a masters degree course through Griffith University.

Rockhampton Grammar is paying for staff masters degrees

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At the Rockhampton Grammar School, it's not just the students who must front up to class every day. This year, the teachers are being sent back to class, with the school offering to pay the costs for its 120 teachers to undertake a masters degree.

The independent co-educational boarding school in central Queensland has worked with Griffith University to tailor a masters degree in education catering for the specific needs of its teachers.

About 40 teachers have taken up the offer, including some who already hold post-graduate or masters degrees, and headmaster Phillip Moulds hopes most of his staff will sign on.

"Our school tag line is 'every opportunity, every student, every day' and that applies to the teachers as well as all the students," Dr Moulds said.

"We're working really hard with Griffith to make sure the course is embedded in their day-to-day work rather than being divorced from it."

"One of the great strengths of the course is it allows us to overcome the gap between theory and action and provides a pathway to integrate the theory into the classroom as much as possible."

It's a significant investment for the school, which charges modest fees of about $5500 a year in high school and $15,000 for boarding students, with the degree costing $12,000-$18,000 per teacher.

But Dr Moulds said the board of trustees was immediately supportive of the initiative, to be funded from the existing budget without extra charges to parents.

The school is placing no condition on teachers who obtain their masters to remain for a set period.

Dr Moulds, whose PhD was about ongoing learning and who teaches an online course for Harvard's education school, will write two courses a year to be delivered as part of the Griffith masters degree.

The first course is on research and applying research findings to teaching, while future courses will cover using and analysing test and assessment data to better target teaching, teaching strategies and curriculum.

"It's good for the teachers to model learning for the kids. It provides a culture whereby everybody is working together in a very thoughtful and dedicated way."

"Teachers make a fundamentally significant difference to the learning outcomes of students. We want the best teachers in front of the students to get the best possible learning happening."

The school is also offering a scholarship to its graduating students, providing financial as well as mentoring and other professional support to encourage its high-achieving students to consider a career in teaching.

Grattan Institute school education program director Ben Jensen has identified mentoring programs as a key factor in student and teacher success, particularly in Asia. One of the first teachers to sign up for the masters degree was Nanette Murphy, the director of teaching. She will be coordinating the degree for the school and managing the timetable to ensure teachers have time to study.

It will be Ms Murphy's second masters degree but she thought it important to lead by example.

"I love learning. It's our game. We're committed to making this part of what we do and enhancing what we do, so I thought the best way to lead by example was to be part of it," she said.

Head of education at Griffith University Donna Pendergast said the degree's strong focus on the needs of the school's teachers provided a model for improving professional development for all teachers.

"It's totally integrated, it's contextual and it's relevant ... on a day-to-day basis so they're able to directly work with the reality of their situation and see the benefits immediately."