Back to nature to bring out our best

CLEANING UP: Michael, 11, Noah, 12, and Elliott,11, at Upper Sturt Primary's Heritage Bushland site at which they and fellow students learn about the environment. Picture: STEPHEN LAFFER

MARTINA SIMOS
EDUCATION WRITER

UPPER Sturt Primary School is going without wi-fi in favour of valuing local bushland, but the decision does not compromise the value of the internet in children's learning, an educator says.

Principal Barb Jones said the decision for the school to not have wi-fi as part of its environmental and safety stance, was made in consultation with the local community.

When she arrived at the school of 27 students, parents approached her about their concerns over the long-term exposure to wi-fi, because research had been published about the possibility of health problems. After reading the research, Ms Jones began a discussion with staff and it was decided not to install wi-fi but to data cabling instead. "The parents had done lots of research from Canada and they sent us information," she said.

"I looked at that research and I thought there was something there – especially for girls in the area of reproduction.

"This does not mean we do not value the internet or that children are unable to access the internet."

Earlier this year, all desktop computers were removed and the students now use tablets, connected to data points, when they access the internet.

Ms Jones said removing the computers gave them more space, and staff had created learning opportunities that extend beyond relying on the internet.

"Children are devising imaginative games and are genuinely friendly to each other," she said.

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"We are broadening children's understanding of technology to incorporate robotics and media so children move from just accepting the internet as the only technological medium."

Ms Jones said another of the school's priorities to develop its Heritage Bushland site – the only such site on government school land – as a learning environment, was a long-term project.

She hopes other schools and the local community will also be able to access it.

The school is working with the Natural Resources Management board and local Landcare groups.

One of the ways the bushland is used is for role-playing as either Aborigines or settlers when learning about Australian history.

"They (children) are loving that learning is not sitting at the desk," she said.

Students Noah, 12, Elliott, 11 and Michael, 11, enjoy learning about bushland and will sometimes go there during recess and lunch breaks.

The students do activities such as weeding, helping the younger students, creative play, bio-learning, working on the peace garden, taking photographs and participating in environmental forum work.