

Parents receive a text, kids get the message as truancy plunges



SAFE: System notifies parents of any truancy.

SEAN FEWSTER
EDUCATION REPORTER

TRUANCY rates in state high schools have been slashed by up to 90 per cent by an award-winning Adelaide innovation.

Adelaide company MGM Wireless piloted its messageyou service - that sends text messages to the parents of absent students - three years ago.

Since then, more than 200 schools across Australia have recorded unprecedented drops in truancy.

Yesterday, the company won the prestigious Deloitte's Fast 50 Rising Star Award for its success.

Willunga High School deputy principal Cathy Trenouth said the system improved more than just attendance. "It makes it much easier to isolate the students at real risk of dropping out and provide extra support," she said.

"Student safety is also a strong factor. The sooner we can alert our parents to an absence, the better."

Under the messageyou system, manual class roll calls are fed into a computer that flags unexplained absences and notifies the child's parents.

Willunga High School, which had an unexplained-absence rate of one in seven students, has seen a 90 per cent improvement in Year 8 absences.

Rates have halved at Kildare College, in the northern suburbs, and dropped by 80 per cent at Adelaide High School in just two months.

"When an absence is unexplained, you don't know if a student is sick or truanting with or without parental

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

- Schools using the system: 200
- SA schools using it: 41
- South Australian students monitored: 29,187
- **REDUCTION IN ABSENCES**
- Willunga High School:
 - Year 8: 90 per cent
 - Year 9: 60 per cent
 - Year 10: 70 per cent
 - Year 11: 55 per cent
 - Year 12: 60 per cent
- Adelaide High School:
 - First week: 25 per cent
 - First two months: 80 per cent
- Kildare College:
 - General absences: 20 per cent
 - Unexplained absences: 50 per cent

permission," Adelaide High School deputy principal Michael Black said.

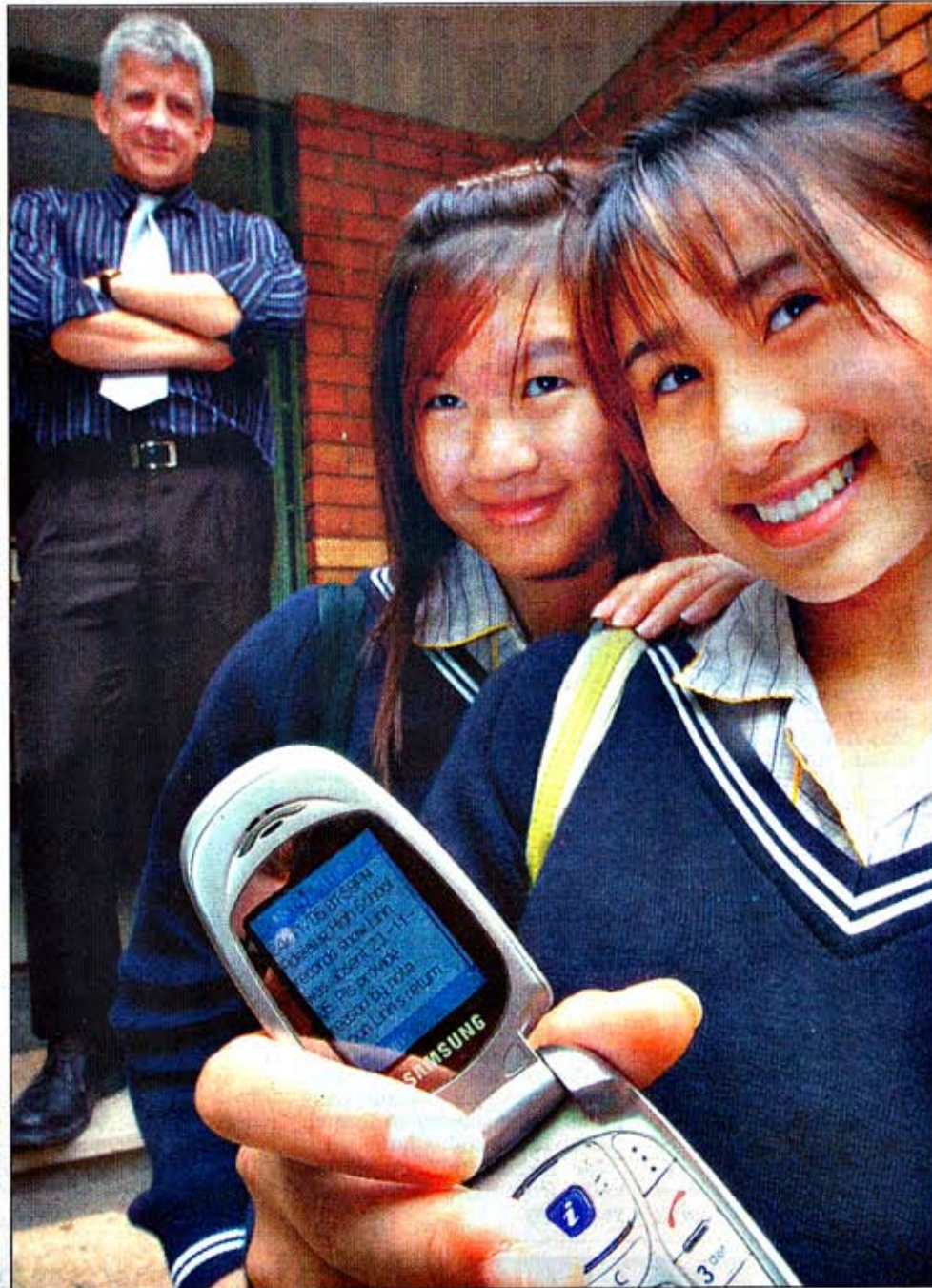
"This way, parents know where their children are and the school can take appropriate steps."

MGM Wireless chief executive Mark Fortunatow said the award recognised the benefits of the system.

"We want to deliver solutions that schools need to achieve their educational and social goals," he said.

"School attendance is emerging as a serious problem worldwide.

"It's satisfying to think a solution has been developed here."



SUCCESS: Adelaide High students Ly and Linh with Deputy Principal Michael Black. Picture: TRICIA JOHNSON