

# Texts nail truants

By **DAVID JOHNS**

A LOCAL high school is using a text-messaging service to increase communication between the school and parents regarding student absences.

Southern River College principal Karen Read said the idea came from a northern suburbs school which had tested a system which sent automatic text messages to parents when their child failed to turn up to school.

Parents can then respond to the message, explaining the reason for their child's absence or informing the school they do not know why their child was absent.

"One of the things about it is we are getting immediate parent feedback as to where their kids are," Ms Read said.

"They (the parents) have responded well to the idea."

She said that while it was too early to tell if the scheme had reduced the truancy rate, office efficiency had increased.

"We manage it on a daily basis," she said.

"Certainly we're seeing increased communication between the school and parents."

The SMS interface was one of nearly 40 installed in schools around WA by Adelaide-based company MGM Wireless.

Marketing manager Sam McCarthy said the system was a preventive measure to stop confusion as to the whereabouts of school children.

He said that unlike a State



**Phone messages help Southern River College track students.**

Government idea to fine parents whose children did not turn up to school, the service attempted to involve parents in the process as early as possible to prevent the situation from getting to that point.

"There's a mix of public and private schools using the system," Mr McCarthy said.

"With the public schools we're seeing a huge reduction in unexplained absences.

"It's really about improving communication between the school and the parents - plus there's a huge improvement in office efficiency."

The system can also be used to send out general reminders.