Central Middle School student Reece Anderson, 14, with the Alice Springs school's principal Andrew Leslie, has tracking softwa

Non-attendance at one school fell from 60 children to five

SARAH MARTIN

AN Alice Springs school is one of the first in the country to track students using GPS technology to improve school attendance rates.

The tracking devices are also being used to help case-managed Aboriginal families locate their children to avoid losing welfare payments if their children skip class.

Centralian Middle School has about 60 families signed up to the new program, which links stu-

dents' phones with electronic class attendance roles.

If a child fails to attend class, parents automatically receive a text message notifying them of the absence, along with a link to the GPS location of their child.

The technology builds on an existing notification program called "messageyou" that is used in about 1100 schools across the country to alert parents if their child is absent.

The new program uses GPS, WiFi and mobile phone tower triangulation to accurately locate the student.

Centralian Middle School principal Andrew Leslie said the technology had helped to address the problem of truancy at the

school, which has a high indigenous population.

The technology also can be used by students to notify parents of their location in the event of an emergency.

"I think it is wonderful technology," Mr Leslie said.

He said the school had offered the mobile phone application to parents involved in the federal government's School Enrolment and Attendance Measure to prevent them losing welfare payments for non-attendance.

SEAM is targeted at children in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory with attendance levels below 80 per cent.

"Parents can no longer say they can't be expected to comply be-

cause they don't know where their child is," Mr Leslie said.

The number of families being reported for non-attendance at Centralian has fallen from 60 children a week to just five since the technology was first implemented a year ago.

Mr Leslie said overall attendance rate at the middle school had improved from 68 per cent to about 90 per cent.

Mark Fortunatow, chief executive of Adelaide-based company MGM Wireless, which developed the program, said the take-up rate for the Pinpoint application was growing at about 10 per cent a week since it was first launched in February, with about 250 schools now participating in the program.

Gleeson subjected to formal interview

CHRIS MERRITT
LEGAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

THE Howard government's first attorney-general, Daryl Williams, has revealed that he conducted a formal interview with Murray Gleeson before the judge was appointed chief justice of the High Court.

Mr Williams and a staff member took notes and former prime minister John Howard later offered the judge the nation's most senior judicial position.

This procedure, outlined in a new book about Mr Gleeson, is set to reignite debate about whether interviewing candidates can compromise the independence of the judiciary.

Author Michael Pelly, a columnist for The Australian, writes that the interview took place in early 1998 and was based on a misapprehension. At the time, Mr Gleeson was NSW chief justice and had agreed to meet Mr Williams in the belief that the attorney-general was obliged to consult him about candidates for the pending

vacancy at the High Court. Mr Gleeson, who retired from the High Court in 2008, declined to say what he told Mr Williams. But in 2005 he said he was opposed to any interview process. "Beyond simply asking if someone is available, it is never appropriate," Mr Gleeson said at the time.

Mr Williams outlined to Pelly the procedure he used when questioning candidates for judicial office. He would first ask for suggestions on who should be appointed to the bench.

"I would also ask them 'Do you want to be considered?'," Mr Williams told Pelly. "If they say yes I would say 'OK, let's do this consultation in two parts. One, we will leave you out of it and you can tell me about other people, and then I want you to tell me about yourself."

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for a video about the book on the app or theaustralian.com.au

Warning after eBay passwords 'stolen'

FRAN FOO

MILLIONS of eBay Australia users should brace themselves for identity theft after hackers stole passwords and personal information from the online marketplace, which could face fines of up to $1.7 million for the security breach.

EBay yesterday admitted to the massive data breach that affected 145 million registered users worldwide after its database was compromised.

The database, which was illegally accessed between late February and early March, did not contain financial information, but eBay has urged users to immediately change their passwords, even though they were encrypted.

The hackers walked away with people's names, home addresses, telephone numbers and dates of birth after it managed to "compromise employee log-in credentials" — something detected two weeks ago — allowing unauthorised access to

eBay's corporate network, the company said.

Australia's Privacy Commissioner Timothy Pilgrim said the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner had received a voluntary data breach notification from eBay early yesterday. "We are currently conducting enquiries into the data breach to inform whether the OAIC will need to open an investigation," Mr Pilgrim said.

Herbert Smith Freehills partner Kaman Tsoi said that even if hackers could not decrypt the passwords, they might have had access to personal information that could be used for cyber attacks.

"While the Australian Privacy Principles replaced the previous National Privacy Principles in March this year, the requirement remains similar: take 'reasonable steps' to protect the security of personal information," Mr Tsoi said. "As (a previous case) indicates, it is possible to take reasonable steps but still fall victim to a hacker."

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