NEWCASTLE HERALD

How a Newcastle 10-year-old is hoping to fix his classmates' attention spans



By Jessica Belzycki

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Christian Bailey with his Virtual Academy project. Picture by Jonathan Carroll

Newcastle 10-year-old Christian Bailey often noticed his peers, and even his teachers, getting distracted in class. He decided to do something about it.

The St Joseph's Primary School, Merewether year 4 student has designed a platform to try to help his classmates focus.

"People are always getting distracted in class and I wanted to figure out why," he said.

"Everyone should have the opportunity to learn and be the best version of themselves."

He spent five weeks researching the problem and coming up with the solutions as part of Catholic Schools Maitland-Newcastle's Virtual Academy.

Part of the High Potential and Gifted Education program, the Virtual Academy gives students from all over the region the opportunity to investigate their own issues and ideas and develop creative projects and solutions.

On Tuesday November 10, Christian and his peers presented their findings to teachers, families and fellow students.

Christian researched how technology was contributing to slowing children's attention spans and stopping them from learning.

"I created a device that can help people focus and students can have it on their desk," he said.

Using Canva's code generator, Christian designed a platform where students can set goals for how long they want to focus.

"You can set a timer and the third section is rewards, so if you do, for example, five hours of focusing you go up a level from bronze to silver to gold," he said.

"The idea is that people can put in the amount of time they want to focus and then they can sort of feel like rewarded if they focus."

Christian said he loved being part of the Virtual Academy because he felt challenged to think about real-world problems and how he could actually make a difference.

St Joseph's Primary School Merriwa year 6 student Annabelle Marshall tackled a very different problem.

A keen League Tag player, a non-contact form of rugby league, Annabelle noticed that her school was struggling to attract girls to the sport.



Annabelle Marshall created a project to encourage girls to play League Tag. Picture by Jonathan Carroll

"We barely managed to get a team together for our league and I was wondering why girls don't want to come," she said.

She decided to create a League Tag open day where girls could bring a friend and see what the game was like.

Her mother, Danielle Cronin, said that growing up in Merriwa, there were not a lot of team sports for girls.

"Coming from a small school community, it's allowed her to create a bigger network of friends, especially when transitioning to high school," Ms Cronin said.