Children take stand on healthy learning

Pulling up a chair is now old-school

A MELBOURNE school is taking a stand against obesity and idleness.
Mont Albert Primary School is offering the world’s first standing classroom, which may also improve learning.

A grade 6 classroom has been fitted with height-adjustable desks to allow pupils to sit or stand.

It is part of an experiment by Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute researchers.

Since the desks were introduced two months ago, most students have taken the opportunity to stand.

For the first eight months next year, the standing pupils will be monitored by scientists keen to know if being upright can improve health, fitness, learning, and memory.

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Pupils will also be fitted with devices to measure how long they spend sitting.
Lesson plans will be overhauled to cut down the time students spend idle.

The institute’s head of physical activity research, Professor David Dunstan, said long hours sitting at school were a hazard for children.

“When they stand up, they are engaging more muscles that are likely to be of great benefit for keeping the blood flowing throughout their body and reducing the level of fatigue,” Prof Dunstan said.

“If we can ingrain good health behaviours in early age we know they track into adulthood,” he said.

Previous studies have shown students spend two-thirds of a school day sitting.

Prolonged sitting can contribute to the onset of obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Principal Sharon Saidik said the school’s pupils, parents and teachers had embraced the project.

“Those boys that can tend to fidget and get distracted easily have been more engaged,” Ms Saidik said.

If comparisons show benefits for the cardiovascular health, learning and memory of the standing students, Baker IDI researchers hope to begin a much larger trial, to see if the idea can have an impact on lessons across Australia.
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