

Schools to fingerprint students for security

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Biometrics is a method of identifying people based on their biological characteristics. Fingerprints are the oldest of these, but newer technologies include face recognition, hand geometry and voice recognition.

Photo: *Michele Mossop*

VICTORIAN students will eventually be fingerprinted or issued with identifying swipe cards as schools step up security to combat truancy, vandalism and playground violence.

Some Melbourne secondary schools already use swipe cards instead of roll calls and to monitor students moving between classrooms and other areas, such as toilets.

Victorian Principals Association president Fred Ackerman said he did not believe the community was ready for schools to adopt biometric technology — which identifies people using unique markers such as fingerprint, iris print, face image or voice — but conceded it was only a matter of time.

"It's coming, there can be no denying of that," he said. "It's really just a matter of when, and my guess would be, not that far away."

Australian Education Union state secretary Mary Bluett said the swipe card technology was too expensive for most state schools, but advances in fingerprint technology meant it would eventually be introduced throughout secondary schools. The push for biometric security measures comes from a school photography company, Academy Attendance Systems, which is offering technology that scans a student's thumbprint at a console and matches it to an existing template and then to students records.

The company's national marketing manager, Vladimir Ostashkevich, said the thumbprint technology was foolproof, whereas swipe cards could be used by others.

He acknowledged the "big brother" aspect of the systems, but said "it is about a school's duty of care to their students and knowing where they are when they are in the school".

Jacinta Cashen, of the Victorian Council of School Organisations, said the move raised serious privacy concerns.

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/schools-to-fingerprint-students-for-security/2007/09/01/1188067438565.html>

