

'I've got kids in year 9 taking pictures of galaxies 60 million light-years away' All eyes on the sky

Peter Bodkin

THE beauty and wonder of the heavens has been opened up to young stargazers with a local school establishing a world-class telescope and astronomy facility on its grounds.

Tara Anglican School for Girls has entered a joint venture with Oxford University's Schools of Astrophysics, receiving a powerful new telescope which students will use as part of an international research program.

The 50cm (20 inch) telescope is housed in a 4.5m dome purpose-built at the school, allowing students from Tara and other schools in the area to undertake major astronomy projects and observe the night sky in stunning detail.

Tara was selected as the Australian site for Oxford University's Global Jet Watch program, a project which also involves girls' schools in India, South Africa and Chile, and is aimed at uncovering new information on black holes by studying nano-quasar SS433, the "cosmic corkscrew".

Head of science Bronwyn Walters, the observatory's manager, said the school was ecstatic with having unrestricted access to such a world-class facility.

"This telescope is as big as you get before you start looking at the ones that cost millions," she said.



Emma Johnstone and Georgie Appleby with the new telescope.

DID YOU KNOW

■ The closest star to our solar system is called Proxima Centauri and it's more than four light years away.

■ Our galaxy, the Milky Way, contains more than 200 billions stars. The diameter of the galaxy is approximately 100,000 light years.

■ The light of the Sun takes 8 minutes to reach Earth.

■ Lightning is about 3 times hotter than our Sun.

■ Supernovas are explosions that can destroy an entire star.



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"It's the best telescope in Sydney at the moment . . . Sydney Observatory only has a 16 inch telescope, so we're the envy of facilities all over Sydney."

Tara has established a leadership program with talented students from 10 other schools called Space Odyssey, which has been set up to manage the observatory and promote its use within the community.

"We ran a viewing night for the year 3s," Ms Walters said, "which was the first viewing night we've had, and it was a great success."

"It was the most exhilarating experience to see the wonder in (the students') faces."

Installed in June, the telescope is a reflecting, robotic design, which can be controlled remotely, enabling astronomers to position the device and capture imagery

through it from anywhere around the world.

"With telescopes like this, you don't view through an eyepiece. Everything is put through a computer," Ms Walters explained. "Telescopes like these are too good to be wasted on the human eye."

"I've got kids in year 9 operating it and taking pictures of galaxies 60 million light-years away. It's extraordinary."

Substation location's a hot topic

INTEGRAL Energy should rethink its plan to build a substation in Elizabeth St, Granville next to a TAFE college and a residential area, according to Greens NSW MP John Kaye.

Dr Kaye visited the proposed site last week and agrees with angry residents the site is inappropriate.

"It is in a residential area and adjacent to education and child care facilities," he said.

"With alternative sites available within nearby industrial areas, an opportunity exists for Integral Energy to relocate this facility without having an impact on the community."

Dr Kaye said the Greens had placed questions on notice in parliament over the issue and the government revealed Integral Energy had not ruled out moving the location of the substation.

"The Treasurer is yet to reply to questions from the Greens as to whether Integral Energy has followed their own procedures in regards to determining the site for the Granville substation," he said.

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