NEWS

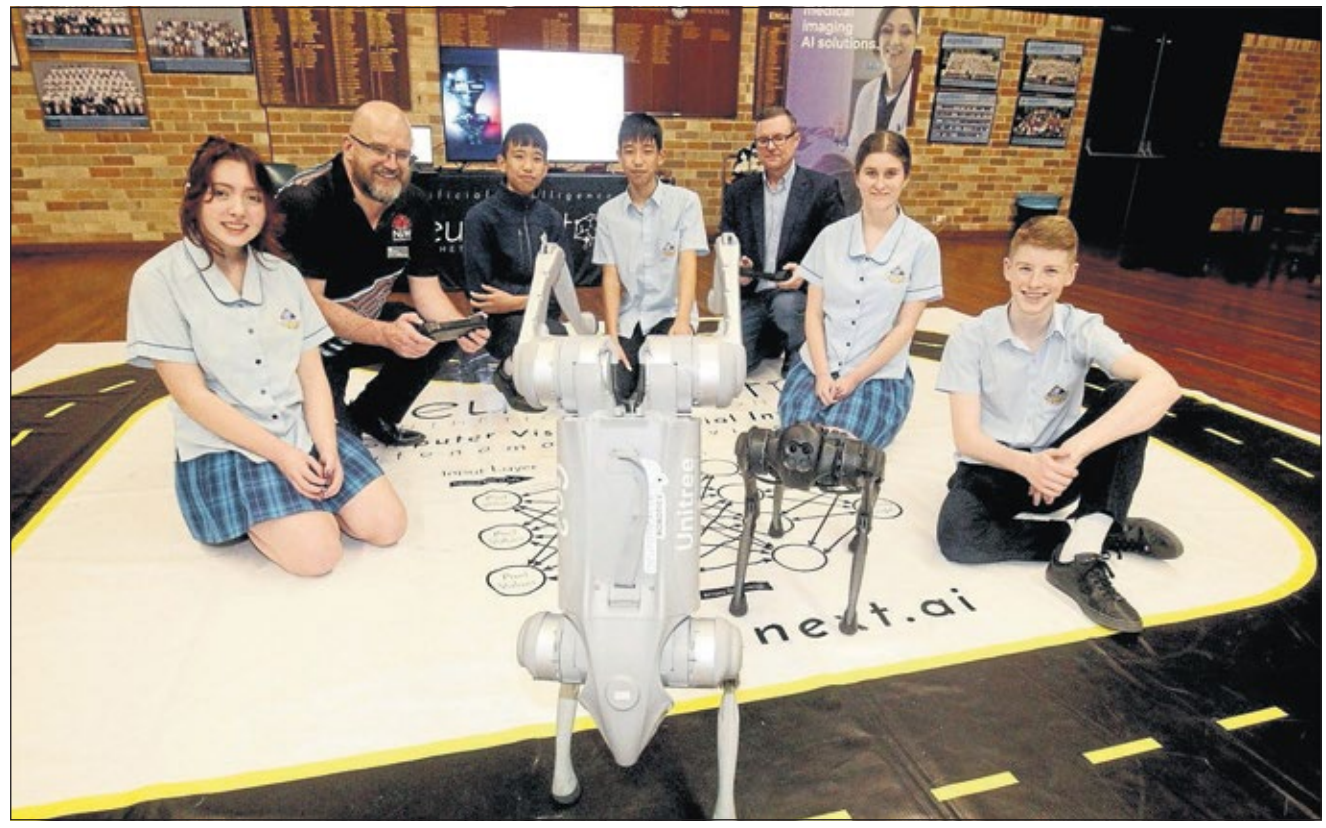
School's AI fun in action

BY **EVA KOLIMAR**

STUDENTS are getting a close-up look into their futures, with artificial intelligence-powered robotics invading the classrooms.

Robo-dog, and somewhere lurking in the background, is meta-cat - just two of the educational toys that seem like a whole lot of fun. But there is a serious side to this pet playtime.

Engadine High School is the latest school to be introduced to the Department of Education's venture in exposing more public schools to AI. The school recently participated in an AI Career Incursion Program, which was designed to spark student interest in one of the most pivotal technologies of this generation.



Sacorra OCallaghan, Hanxuan Wu, Hanyu Wu, Tara Gavagan and Zac Montgomery with Neuranext's Adrian Tyson and Regional Industry Education Partnerships Senior Project Officer Trevor Adams. Picture by Chris Lane

The Regional Industry Education Partnerships has joined forces with the department, to empower students with key knowledge about AI technology through live interactive applications, so they can explore emerging career paths in the AI sector. Students learn how computer vision AI works but actually seeing it come to life.

Senior Project Officer with RIEP, Trevor Adams, said several schools in the region had participated in the program, and more were jumping on board. "We connect employers with schools to make students more work ready. We are halfway through the program and each school decides which is most relevant cohort to deliver it to," he said. "When we take these robotics into the playground and it's like swarms to honey. Students are amazed at the interaction. It's real wonderment."

The company bringing AI to the schools is Neuranext, and its Managing Director Adrian Tyson, says the aim is to empower students with a fundamental understanding of the science and technology behind AI. "We show students how AI is emerging, and we connect them with opportunities so they can position themselves in a good spot to take advantage of these new technologies," he said.

Mr Tyson says it's important to expose students to a hands-on, tactile experience. "It has to be face-to-face because AI is abstract technology," he said. "Students need to see it in action, not just be told about it. A lot of them say they've seen in on YouTube but it's different seeing it in front of them."

"We show them how an old remote-controlled car, once powered by the brain, is powered using AI," Mr Tyson said. "It's important to bring the most cutting-edge latest technology into schools."

Statistics show, he says, that AI skills are well received by employers. "If a person has some AI credentials, it doubles their interview rate," Mr Tyson said. "It jumps to 54 per cent from 28 for males, and for girls, 22 to 50 per cent - and it's not just for people interested in hard science or STEM careers - this is across all jobs. It's critical across the board."