

## **P.35 Year 3 pupils' changing perceptions about taking laptops home**

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### **Background**

The children in this class were in Year 1 when the ICT Test Bed project began. They have used laptops regularly within the class, but only began taking the laptops home in September. All parents and children had to sign an agreement about conditions for taking the laptops home. Out of class of 29, 22 children take laptops home. Since May half term, year 6 children have stopped taking the laptops home, so year 3 children now take the laptops home on a Monday and a Wednesday evening. It was decided by myself and the ICT Co-Ordinator that it was important for the Year 3 class to develop their skills in Microsoft word and typing as these lack of skills were influencing what could be done later on in school.

### **Research undertaken**

Through discussions with parents, generally with the children and with the Teaching Assistant in charge of sending laptops home, I began to get the impression that some children were persuading their parents that they didn't have to take the laptops home. I thought that this was an avenue exploring further, as I felt that if children, in Year 3 were becoming bored at this early stage in their primary school, something needed to be looked as to why, and how this can be stopped. As well as general conversation with parents on an informal basis at the school gates, I gave each child who took a laptop home, a questionnaire to be filled in independently whilst at school.

### **Findings regarding confidence with software / hardware**

The findings from the questionnaires indicated that the one of the main purposes of sending the laptops home, as according to their class teacher and ICT Co-ordinator, has been achieved. From the 22 children questioned, in respect to 'have they become more confident using Microsoft Word (which most of the homework tasks needed) and with their typing?', 19 children said YES, only 3 said NO. All children said they were more confident at logging on.

I did, however want to explore this further, as I felt that this could also be due to ICT lessons within school. It can be argued that this has been confirmed, as the 7 children who did not take laptops home, also said, when questioned, that they were more confident at logging on, typing and using Microsoft Word; illustrating that the increased confidence may also be due to work actually done in school, and increased use of ICT.

### **Findings about what children used the laptops for**

At the beginning of this academic year when children began taking the laptops home, children were very enthusiastic as being able to use the laptops to watch DVDs, play on Virtual Experiments. I thought that being able to have this time for exploration would be greatly beneficial for the children, allowing them to make mistakes out of school, in an environment where they may have felt more comfortable taking risks.

I asked the question: When you take your laptops home, do you just use them for homework? The results were exactly 50 – 50 – half of the children just complete their homework, the other 11 children, use the laptop for other things. From the 11 children who only use it for their homework, when reasoning was sought, this was due to not having time to do anything else once the homework was completed.

Findings regarding 'Do you like taking laptops home?'

YES = 10 children

NO = 8 children

Sometimes = 4 children

This figure did surprise me to think that on some occasions there will be 12 children, more than half of those who take laptops home, who don't actually like taking the laptops home. This figure didn't just include those children who don't like 'normal' activity based homework in Literacy and Numeracy. Some of the most conscientious pupils in the class, indicated that they didn't like taking laptops home. Some of the reasons for this were clarified by the children and link closely with the final findings from the questionnaires – the fact that problems arise, which sometimes they can't deal with it at home, and also the fact that their homework often appears to be 'lost'.

### **Findings about any problems encountered**

This final question provided children with an outlet for clarifying why they didn't like taking laptops home, and what frustrated those who did still like taking them home.

5 children discussed the battery not lasting long; 12 children had problems regularly with work not saving. (3 children had no comment, 2 children made miscellaneous comments). The battery life on the laptops has degenerated over time, so children need to be reminded of this. But just as sometimes we aren't able to charge the laptops while using them at school, this happens also at home, so some laptop's battery will only last for half an hour. Some children are unable to save work they have done, as their 'My Documents' is full, but due to limitations of storage space on the network, it is not possible to increase their size. Work that children have done, regularly doesn't appear when the children log onto the network, only to appear the following week. This, understandably frustrates the children and myself, and some children are beginning to adopt the attitude that if it's not there, when why bother. Hence, starting to regret saying they will take the laptops home.

While I can explain to the children that we will try and sort this out, we can only try. It is no longer teething problems, the network sometimes just does not pick up the work, even when children log on 2 or 3 times.

### **Conclusions**

The use of laptops at home has, from the children's and teacher's perspective improved children's ability and confidence using Microsoft Word and helped to begin to develop typing skills. Nonetheless, while this increase in confidence is evident, some children are beginning to regret taking laptops home. This needs addressing as if this continues, it could have an impact on the use of ICT for teaching and learning in later years for these particular children. Whether this can be achieved by a greater variety of activities, or sorting problems out more readily, this needs to be addressed. I feel very strongly that it is essential that any problems are sorted out as soon as possible, or this is going to stop children from wanting to use the ICT equipment, as can be seen quite clearly in this case.