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The Use of Laptops: a US Approach

I drafted a case study following a visit to a school in Nashville where every pupil had a laptop computer. When we get to this point in the UK we will think very differently about ICT, I would predict.

The view of teachers, and written testimonials from pupils, suggested that this approach was having an impact on:

- the effectiveness of learning for all groups of learners
- the development of higher order thinking skills
- the ability to multi task
- pupils confidence in giving presentations
- the proportion of active learning that took place during the school day

The following is a list of some of the features of their approach:

Technical issues

- There was a technical support team of a network manager and four technicians
- When laptops developed problems the technical support team would switch the student's hard disc into a loan machine while their laptop was repaired
- The carry case was of a design where it covered and protected the computer even when in use.

Practical issues

- Desks had charge points built into them
- There was no restriction on when pupils could use laptops
- An acceptable use policy was in place
- The laptops were wireless so that pupils could locate their files anywhere on the campus, and gain Internet access

Teacher development

- Teachers were given laptops one year ahead of pupils
- Staff development was provided with a focus on teaching and learning ('sage on stage' to 'guide on side' issues).

Keyboard skills

- Local elementary schools taught keyboard skills to pupils so that they were more fluent by the time they reached high school
- The use of school-run private chat rooms, between groups of pupils, and classes and their teachers, developed keyboard skills further
- Not all pupils were fluent enough to use ICT for note-taking during lessons

Curriculum issues

- When pupils have continuous access to ICT there is less need to teach ICT skills - at least not over an 11 year period as we do in the UK
- The main goal of ICT was seen as empowering pupils to learn across their subjects
- Relatively few pupils were interested in studying ICT as a subject.

Longer term

- The school was building a new library (partly electronic) and multi-media laboratory
- The school was developing 'distance learning classrooms' with video conferencing, to expand learning opportunities and share teacher expertise.

Publications

The Impact of ICT on Schooling - NAACE

Learning in the 21st Century - Insight/NAACE

Implementing ICT revision - NAACE