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OLPC boosts outback education with laptop deployment

Australia's Indigenous communities to benefit from new educational tools

One Laptop per Child (OLPC) Australia, has launched the first deployments of laptops to primary school children in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.



Shepherdson College on Elcho Island, who hosted today's event, is one of the first three remote Australian schools to be involved in the program. The other two schools are Western Australia's Rawa Community School and Newcastle Waters in the Northern Territory.

Executive director of OLPC Australia, Rangan Srikhanta, says the organisation is hopeful the laptops will help the school children preserve and sustain their local culture, language and way of life.

"In Australia this means helping children in remote communities cross the 'digital divide' by giving them laptops that are not only fully loaded with educational and entertaining programs to help them learn, but that can also be connected to the Internet so they can share their experiences with the rest of the world and, likewise, learn from others," Srikhanta said.

Since March, executives and volunteers from OLPC Australia and funding partner the Commonwealth Bank (CBA), have been deploying XO laptops to the students, training teachers and installing servers.

The XO laptop is designed for use by school children in developing countries, featuring the ability to run on solar power. The laptop has also been praised for its innovative hardware features and environmentally friendly design.

OLPC founder and Chairman Nicholas Negroponte, told the *IDG News Service* in February that the organization had shipped 1 million XO laptop over the past 12 months in 31 countries, with a backlog of more than 500,000 orders.

"We feel strongly about the laptop being child- and learning-centric, collaborative, rugged, low-cost, low-power, sunlight-readable," Negroponte told the *IDG News Service*.

The Linux-based user interface which runs on the XO laptop, Sugar, is currently developed by the open source community.

Principal of Shepherdson College, Bryan Hughes, says the OLPC's laptop deployment has lifted student attendance. "As a remote, Indigenous primary school, we face many unique challenges from getting the kids to even come to school," Hughes said. "It is making life easier for the teachers, and more enjoyable for the students."

The CBA is providing technical resources to help with the deployment and ongoing maintenance of the laptops.

Some 30 programs which have been specifically written for primary school-aged children and are pre-loaded on Shepherdson College's XO laptops.

OLPC Australia also announced plans to roll out another 5,000 XO laptops, with the next deployments to be carried out in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

The organisation aims to roll-out 400,000 laptops to all the primary school-aged children living in remote Australia.