



Powerful mate revs up remote students

REBEKAH CAVANAGH, May 28th, 2009



MOVE over conventional laptops - these Territory kids are crossing the digital divide with "green machines".

Weighing 1.5kg and just 24.2cm long and 22.8cm wide, the compact XO laptop is being delivered to disadvantaged primary school-aged children across the nation as part of the One Laptop per Child initiative.

About 100 students from Shepherdson College on Elcho Island, about 550 km northeast of Darwin, were among the first to receive the new learning tool.

Outback students at Newcastle Waters School, north of Tennant Creek, and Rawa Community School in WA also got the laptops.

Many of the children would never have dreamed of owning their own computer.

"I can't believe it's actually mine," Shepherdson College Year 5 student Dion Dhalkawuy, 11, said.

"It's cool - I love going on the internet."

His classmate Sheena Bawu wants to be a teacher when she finishes school and said she has already learnt "heaps" in the three weeks she has had the laptop.

"We use it every morning when we first come to class," she said.

"It's fun to use - I like doing the math games."

The children could not wipe the smiles from their faces when showing off their new XOs at the official launch at the remote NT school yesterday.

The laptops are loaded with more than 30 educational and entertaining programs to help them learn - as well as browsing the internet.

With Territory schools, particularly remote indigenous communities, having poor attendance levels and the worst numeracy and literacy levels in the nation, the NT Government hopes the new laptops will help.

Education Department chief executive Gary Barnes said while the laptops would be good tools for learning they would not be the "silver bullet" to change education levels of all remote children.

But Sheperdson College principal Bryan Hughes said the joy of owning their own computer had already seen a boost to children's attendance in the four classes that now own the devices.

"OLPC's program has lifted attendance and added a valuable teaching tool," he said.

"It is making life easier for the teachers, and more enjoyable for the students.

"The XO laptops are not toys - they are a robust, quality machine with a range of exceptional programs that have stimulated students and teachers."

One Laptop per Child Australia executive director Rangan Srikhanta said yesterday's launch was the start of a program they hoped would see 400,000 laptops distributed to children living in remote Australia.

He said the charitable program, which started in the US, needed more support from the Australian business community.