

Acquiring a laptop for a pupil with special needs.

This child's laptop *must* be a lightweight model otherwise it is likely to quickly fall into disuse. The machine's target weight should be no more than 1KG (Kilogram) in total including its batteries. Its power supply should also be the lightweight.

This child's laptop must also be small enough to insert into an adult sized jacket pocket (at as push), which means it must also be exceedingly thin when folded up. Here I have in mind here something comparable with the Sony Vaio PCG-C1 'PictureBook' range which has been used with great success for several years (sadly this range of laptops has now been discontinued and superseded by a slightly larger format machine).

This child also needs to be supplied with a proper purpose-build laptop carry-case -- a largish one (which can double as their satchel for school books etc). Here I have in mind something like the 'Targus' range -- yes I realise these are expensive, but a make such as this are not only padded but they are also unlikely to fall apart after just a few terms of hard use.

If mains power is not always available everywhere this child will be working, then you will also need to invest in an additional rechargeable batter pack, preferably two.

You also need make sure this child is afforded easy access to a printer close to where they work, ideally via a wireless link to the school's network. However don't assume your school's ICT coordinator or IT systems manager will be able to accommodate this.

...and finally (and perhaps most important of all) do ensure this child's laptop is covered by a comprehensive 'all risks' insurance policy with a 'loaner supplied while being repaired' facility. This is vital as relying upon the manufacturers guarantee or an extended warranty is simply not sufficient. For laptops are notorious for taking a very long time to get repaired, with the time taken seemingly inversely proportional to the seriousness of the problem.

Starting to use a laptop

In the early stages when typing speed is likely to be very slow, it will be necessary for the teacher to supply notes or for the classroom assistant to jot them down during the lesson. The pupil can then type them up at his own speed.

Examinations

A pupil who normally uses a laptop and whose typing speed is slower than most pupils' writing speed may be allowed to use it in formal exams. Pupils who use laptops need to have an Ed. Psych or Specialist teacher report which is less than 2 years old. They can use laptop if there is a good reason for it, e.g. unable to write, poor writing, slow writing speed, etc, and can also use it if using a wordprocessor is their normal means of communication. Be aware pupils cannot use spellcheck or grammar check in the exam. These facilities need to be disabled for exams or else a text program such as Wordpad can be used. Applications have to be made to the Exam Boards before mid- February in the year that the exams are being taken (for summer exams) but they can be applied for well before that.

Younger children

It might be better if a classroom assistant is responsible for carrying the laptop from room to room