iPads for Learning Trial - Report

To prepare students for the knowledge economy of the 21st century, schools must provide students with purposeful access to ICT that increases their participation, engagement and achievement in education. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (DEECD) 2011 iPads for Learning – In Their Hands trial placed over 700 iPads in nine primary, secondary and special schools and the Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute. The trial examined the use of iPads by students and teachers, and found that under the right conditions the iPad can significantly enhance teaching and learning outcomes within and beyond the classroom.

DEECD’s 2011 iPads for Learning – In Their Hands trial investigated the capacity of iPads to:

- increase independent and self-initiated learning among students
- increase student motivation and active engagement in learning
- improve teachers’ capacity to plan for and meet individual student needs
- improve student learning outcomes
- extend students’ learning beyond the classroom
- improve parental engagement in learning and strengthen home-school links.

The trial has shown that all of these outcomes can be achieved through the effective use of iPads. But it is quality teaching and support that makes this possible, not just the device.

1. The iPad (as a device) has functionality and features that enhance its use as an effective and engaging learning tool.
   a) The iPad is easy to use. It is intuitive and users of all ages and abilities (including children with learning difficulties) do not require special training or professional learning on how to turn it on, navigate through and use apps, and maintain the iPad (i.e. charge and sync the iPad, update apps).
   b) The touch-interactive flat screen tablet with pinch in/pinch out functionality provides students with autism, ADHD, Aspergers, visual disabilities and poor fine and gross motor skills with more efficient access to effective learning opportunities.
   c) High speed access to online information enables more self-directed learning and rapid access to a fast-growing market of relevant and regularly updated educational apps.
   d) Portability enhances collaboration between students and communication between students and teachers, increases parental engagement in learning and strengthens home-school connections.

2. The iPad is just a device. It is just another tool (albeit a powerful ‘anything anytime anywhere’ tool) in the teaching and learning toolkit.

3. Quality teaching is (as has been found in other studies) the factor which enables the iPad to be used effectively to improve student motivation, engagement and learning outcomes.

   ‘Learning will only be 24-7 if what students are learning is intriguing and engaging. Curriculum drives 24-7 learning, not the device.’ (Teacher)

   a) Teachers used the iPad to meet the specific learning needs of students and support
engaging, interesting and collaborative learning.

b) Students used the iPad to take greater control of their learning, using a single device to search for information on the internet, practise specific skills with selected apps, create keynotes and multimedia presentations, and present and share their learning with their peers, teachers and family.

c) Teachers found the iPad to be an especially valuable learning tool for students with special learning needs due to the combination of its design features, multi-functionality and access to specific purpose apps.

d) Students used the iPad to improve their learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy, communication and thinking skills.

e) The iPad was used to extend learning beyond the classroom, facilitating learning wherever the student had the iPad (at home, at camp, on an excursion) and increasing parental engagement in learning.

4. 90% of students said that learning was more fun when using the iPads.
   - 76% of teachers said that students had (to a ‘great’ or ‘large’ extent) greater choice and flexibility in their learning.
   - 85% of primary teachers and 90% of special school teachers thought that students were more motivated and engaged in learning, vs 32% in secondary schools.
   - 67% of teachers said that use of the iPad had improved their effectiveness as teachers, and 75% were using ICT more effectively in teaching and learning.
   - 83% of primary teachers and 67% of special school teachers thought that using the iPad had improved students’ literacy outcomes, vs 16% in secondary schools.

5. Teaching and learning success with iPads is more likely where they are used in a supportive school and home environment.
   a) School leaders actively encourage the purposeful use of iPads as a strategic support for improving student outcomes, and facilitate teacher access to pedagogically-focused professional learning opportunities.
   b) Students and teachers have timely access to quality technical advice and support. Once set up the iPad requires less technical support than similar devices, but a 1:1 ICT roll out can put stress on a schools’ ICT infrastructure (e.g. network, bandwidth).
   c) Parents are informed about and understand the way in which iPads will be used to support their child’s learning, participate as necessary in maintaining the device as ‘ready for learning’, and take an active interest in their child’s learning.

6. iPads in the trial had a significantly greater educational impact (and were more successfully implemented) in primary and special school settings than in secondary schools.
   a) This was in part related to structural differences between contemporary primary and secondary classes. That is, a primary teacher has a dedicated class of students and can more easily incorporate cross-curricular learning and inquiry based learning into everyday practice, with the iPad ever-present as a learning tool. Secondary students have multiple teachers timetabled to independently deliver specific subjects.
   b) Primary and special school teachers in the trial also demonstrated greater preparedness and capacity to incorporate the effective use of iPads into learning and assessment activities. They taught lessons where students could choose to use the iPad to facilitate, enhance and share their learning. Teachers in secondary schools were more likely to use the iPad as a simple substitution device (e.g. just to search the internet).

The iPads for Learning Trial reinforces that quality of teaching, combined with purposeful and effective use of ICT contributes to improved learning.