

COMPUTERS, SOUTHWELL, AND MY KIDS!



AN INFORMATION BOOKLET TO HELP PARENTS WITH THE NEW
TECHNOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE IN WHICH OUR CHILDREN LIVE, AND
WITH THEIR USE OF TECHNOLOGY AT SOUTHWELL.

AIM OF THIS BOOKLET

To provide information for Southwell parents wishing to maximize their understanding and use of ICT at home and at school.

The document is also available from the Southwell Website [Http://www.southwell.school.nz](http://www.southwell.school.nz) from the parents menu.

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SECTION 1

COMPUTERS AND OUR KIDS, A DREAM COME TRUE

As computers become more and more numerous, with fast internet access and many people now with their own home networks; it is time to ask ourselves a few questions. There are questions relating particularly to computers in education, learning and the needs of our children in general. The following material may help to answer these questions and help our children in their learning at Southwell.

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION,

ARE COMPUTERS OF EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT TO STUDENTS?

There are many people who advocate that the basics of reading, writing maths etc are best taught without computers. There is increasing evidence that computers can improve outcomes for students. Using word processors for example is producing writing of a greater quality and quantity. Children are acutely aware of the improvement to presentation a computer can make. It is important to realise that technology is not a panacea for all learning and that bad computer aided learning is considerably worse than good traditional teaching. Real events, educational TV/video, books, conversation and life experience represent fantastic learning opportunities outside of computers. The following areas are some in which computer software tools may help.

READING

Parents often take a very active role in supporting or even teaching their children to read. These skills are not simply developed by reading through a series of books but by becoming familiar with words in many different contexts. Computer software presents a range of new reading opportunities.

WRITING

Don't underestimate the value of a word processor! Some of the great powers of a computer are found within this often taken for granted tool. The ability easily to change, add to and rearrange words can be a liberating experience, particularly for children developing their writing skills.

FINDING OUT ABOUT...

The skills associated with finding things out are ones we all draw upon throughout our lives and are important for children to learn. Like reading, this is an area where a parent's one-to-one support and guidance are invaluable. Remember here that reference software such as Worldbook encyclopaedia can be used alongside Internet and book based research.

SPATIAL VISUAL LITERACY

Visual language and other new literacies are becoming more important to our children and us. Researchers at the University of Rochester found that young adults who regularly played action-based video games showed better visual skills than those who didn't.

Also, they were better able to keep track of objects appearing simultaneously and processed fast-changing visual information more efficiently, said the study's co-author, Daphne Bavelier, an associate professor of brain and cognitive sciences.

SECTION 2

SOUTHWELL AND US

WHAT CAN WE ACCESS FROM THE SOUTHWELL WEBSITE AT THE PRESENT STAGE YOU CAN ACCESS

- School email
- Study information for students
- Home directory ie own files (copy only)
- News items – cancellations, updates, reminders
- Library catalogue
- Photo galleries
- Prep (being trialled by one class)
- The school's internal website ie intranet

HOW DO I ACCESS THESE AT SOUTHWELL

The start point for access is the schools homepage <http://www.southwell.school.nz>
From here you can access the latest news or browse to other sections from the dropdown menus for students or parents. Most items for access (see above) require the username and password that the students use when they are at school. These facilities are in regular development. Look to the school newsletter for updates on this.

HOW DOES EMAIL WORK AT SOUTHWELL WORK

Email is a great way of getting work to and from school. The general convention for Email addresses at school is `firstname.surname@southwell.school.nz`. If this doesn't seem to work then contact the school's ICT Manager. Email is a good way to send documents, spreadsheets etc if they are not larger in size than 2 MB (megabytes). Slideshows (PowerPoint presentations) can often be larger than this so may need another method. See also *I can't seem to open the work my child has sent home by email.*

WHAT IS MAILMARSHAL?

Mailmarshal is piece of mail filtering software designed to protect our network from viruses and pieces of malicious code. It also protects us from spam, and our children from being sent pornographic and other disturbing or inappropriate messages. The programme does temporarily stop a significant amount of mail that is genuine and educational. We attempt to minimise inconvenience and time delays between the sending and receipt of these messages. We ask that you be patient with us in this regard as we try to balance service with safety.

I CANT SEEM TO OPEN THE WORK MY CHILD HAS SENT HOME BY EMAIL

To open documents sent home by your children from school you will require either the same software programmes, or programmes capable of opening the files sent. The major applications used at Southwell are:

- Microsoft Paint
- Word 2000
- Excel 2000
- Publisher 2000
- Microsoft Image Composer
- PowerPoint 2000
- FrontPage 2002
- Inspiration

WHAT IF WE DON'T HAVE THESE PROGRAMMES?

The content of most work and learning the students will do is text and images. These can be sent to school using any contemporary email programme and then placed into the document, slideshow etc for final presentation. This may also help to focus students on the quality of the content over fancy formatting. There are too many possible combinations of home computer environments to cover them in this booklet. Questions relating to individual situations are best addressed by your child's teacher or the ICT staff.

OTHER METHODS OF GETTING WORK TO SCHOOL

USB KEY DRIVES

These can hold many times the volume of information held on a floppy disk are smaller and more robust. They are more expensive than floppy disks but start at around \$40 new. This information can be transferred to the network from teacher's laptops and a small number of other network points.

FLOPPY DISKS

Floppy disks can hold up to 1.44 MB of information and can be used to bring work documents to school. These need to be added to the school's network by a teacher with a laptop computer and are prone to damage and fault. Newer computers are increasingly likely to come without floppy drive access.

CDR/CDRW

Information written to CD can be a good way of getting electronic work to and from school. The advantages with this are that a CD can hold larger files and are generally more robust than floppy disks. These need to be added to the school's network by a teacher with a laptop computer or at a CD enabled workstation.

COMPUTERS CAN'T DO EVERYTHING

Don't forget that the computer, though a powerful resource, is only one aspect of a child's work and learning. And, of course, there is no substitute for talking to your children about what they are doing and learning. We attempt to let parents know in advance what topic areas they will be covering each term. This enables you as parents to think about the books, videos, software and Internet sites, which can support these topics. But don't forget to find out what you can borrow from your local library or video store. Look out for programmes on television and see if there are visits to museums, exhibitions, galleries, the cinema, theatres or parks that might link in with what your children are studying.

SECTION 3

KEEPING IT POSITIVE

ISOLATING AND ANTI-SOCIAL?

You may be concerned that the use of computers can be isolating and addictive. This again is where the value of becoming involved with your child's use of a computer can make a real difference. If you are involved as a parent, you will be able to talk about the work children are doing, the ways they are using software and the Internet, and understand some of the fun they are having. Also be aware that the computer often mediates communication with email, discussion boards, instant messaging, online gaming etc

Putting the computer in one of the commonly used rooms in the house also reduces the isolation of its use. By placing it in the lounge, kitchen or hallway (space permitting) you know what your children are doing, how long they have been using it and, importantly, you can more easily join in every now and then.

HOW DO I KEEP MY KIDS CYBERSAFE ?

Cybersafety represents a present and escalating challenge for parents in today's world. Thirty-five percent of girls age 12-19 have met in person someone they have met online. Only twenty-five percent of those told their parents that the meeting was to take place.

FIRST THINGS FIRST ...

Keep Internet-connected computers in a communal area of your home with the screen facing outwards.

Be clear about what you consider to be unacceptable information to look for and use on the Internet - egs. sexism, racism, violence, bad language, pornography, etc. Make a family code of conduct.

Agree, if possible, who can use the Internet, and when

Emphasise what you have already taught them about 'Stranger Danger'.

Try to ensure your child knows it is safe to tell you about anything that bothers them so that they don't feel it is their 'fault' (they are more likely to tell you if you have already made a Family Code).

Mobile phone technologies and internet cafes make access easy and our relationships with our children are of foremost importance to keeping our children cybersafe.

For our home environments there are various options of filtering and monitoring available. There is one internet site that is the focus of internet safety efforts in New Zealand. It is [Http://www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz). This site contains information regarding filtering, legal issues, software comparison etc.

THE NEW PLAIGARISM

As James McKenzie (1998) notes, "We have moved from the horse and buggy days of plagiarism to the Space Age without stopping for the horseless carriage."

We can justifiably be skeptical about homework produced on computer. The high quality printout can make it difficult to know who has actually done the work. Does it belong to the child, has a parent or older brother or sister typed it up or is it just copied from a computerised encyclopedia? In many ways this is really no different from hand-written work, which has been copied from somewhere. However, the fact that children can correct mistakes easily and will enjoy spending time presenting their work well when using a computer means that they can, and most likely will, genuinely produce work of a higher standard. This is something that teachers are finding ways of assessing, as well as considering how they make judgments between children using a computer for homework and those who don't.

When using a computer to search for information, the temptation can be to print out pages of content found on the Internet or CD-ROM and be done with it. An important skill for children to learn is how to select the important information, working out how or why it answers their original question. Encourage children to think about what the information is saying and then to make their own notes in their own words. By piecing the bits together they can present their answer in a way which shows understanding.

It is important to get a balance between what a piece of work looks like and what it is saying. A piece of computer generated homework can look very impressive against hand-written work but, just because it looks good, doesn't mean that it answers the question or is well thought through. Printing out reams of pages from a CD-ROM reference title is of little value. Children need to be able to show that they have thought about their answer and have selected only the information that is relevant and of interest.

Children need to be encouraged to sift through information, apply critical awareness and make something of it that is their own.

Don't feel that this needs to be done in the same way as it is at school. The use of a computer at home is a different experience. There is the opportunity for more one-to-one help at home and more flexible timings.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN EDUCATIONAL COMPUTER SOFTWARE

It is most important to remember that software plays the major role makes a computer a CAD design station or a recording studio etc.

The things you should look for in educational software are found below. Producers of good educational software include Broderbund, Edmark, The learning company, Sherston

- Structure, design, 'usability'
- Sound, Graphics, Presentation
- Educational value
- 'Come Back for More' aspects
- Depth/ Range of content
- User support
- Enjoyment factor

Some Links that may help

English

<http://www.rhymezone.com/>

Games

http://www.game-research.com/art_myths_of_gaming.asp

<http://www.kidsdomain.com/games/java2.html>

General

<http://www.netguide.co.nz/kids/>

<http://www.ncrtec.org/picture.htm>

Girls and tech

<http://www.girltech.com/index.html>

Juniors

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/Dictionary.html>

Netsafety

<http://www.pin.org.uk/safety/familyCode.htm>

Social Studies

http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/infonation/e_infonation.htm

Software

[Http://www.edmark.com](http://www.edmark.com)

<http://www.superkids.com/aweb/pages/reviews/reviews.shtml>

<http://fmp52.red.net:8080/parinfontwk/dbsearch.htm>