

PERFORMANCE AUDIT IN BRIEF

Using computers in schools for teaching and learning

Follow-up of 2000 performance audit

About the audit

The NSW Government introduced the Computers in Schools Program in 1995, allocating 70,000 computers to government schools. Our 2000 Performance Audit report 'Using computers in schools for teaching and learning' examined how well these computers were being integrated into teaching and learning.

Providing computers to our schools helps students get on the right side of the 'digital divide'. This separates people into the information rich and the information poor. Being on the right side of the divide is increasingly critical to personal, educational and economic success.

In this follow-up audit we wanted to find out whether:

- students and teachers have better access to computers than in 2000
- computer use has been integrated into teaching and learning.

Audit opinion

We consider that students and teachers have significantly better access to computers than was the case when we did our 2000 audit. Teachers and students are also increasingly using computers for teaching and learning.

The Department of Education and Training has been proactive in advancing Information Communication Technology (ICT) into schools. Since 2000, it has:

- provided high-speed internet connections to schools
- invested in training for teachers
- set up a support organisation for ICT teaching resources
- integrated ICT into the school curriculum
- developed ICT teaching standards.

However we found that teachers and students are less likely to use computers if there are problems with infrastructure or technical support.

Key findings

Access to computers in our schools is significantly greater than in 2000. Schools have more computers and they work faster.

In 2004 the department introduced the \$544 million Technology for Learning Program, which included plans to maintain 100,000 computers in schools that are under warranty and less than four years old.

The department reports that the target for this program has been met, allowing a ratio of one computer for every eight enrolled students. Schools also use other funds to purchase additional computers that comply with the department's standards. The department estimates that the overall ratio is therefore one computer to every six students.



THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES



THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Further information

Sean Crumlin

Phone: 02 9275 7286

Email: sean.crumlin@audit.nsw.gov.au

The full report is available on our
Internet site: www.audit.nsw.gov.au

However there are still a few remaining problems like infrastructure and technical support holding some schools back. For example teachers are less likely to use computers where:

- high-speed cabling does not extend to all classrooms
- the school does not have enough rooms for computer labs
- there are not enough skilled personnel in schools to help out when problems occur.

There have been great strides in the integration of computer use into teaching and learning since 2000. This is shown by:

- students achieving a high level of competence in computer use
- more and more teachers and students accessing ICT resources
- the many examples of integration we saw on our school visits.

In 2006 the NSW Board of Studies tested the computer skills of Year 10 high school students for the first time as part of the School Certificate. The results showed that they rated all students as competent or better.

In 2005 the department introduced the Teaching and Learning exchange (TaLe), an online teaching resource available to teachers and students. TaLe records show a dramatic increase in access. It grew from one million hits in the first seven months to a million hits per month by the start of 2007.

In our field research, we saw many examples of teachers and students using computers for learning. In many cases, a computer is now a standard tool. Teachers reported that many students are now submitting assignments in electronic format. Students use computers for a variety of tasks including word processing, presentations, modelling and design, and research.

It is encouraging to see teachers and students using computers for learning. However schools with infrastructure and technical support problems are less likely to fully integrate computers into learning. The department needs better information on these issues so it can plan a targeted catch-up response.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Department of Education and Training identifies ICT needs in schools and develops strategies to systemically address the needs of any schools falling behind in the use of computers.

INZBR