

Should Children use Laptops for Exams?

The importance of teaching your child to touch type...

By Wendy Petersen – Director of Click IT! and Type IT!



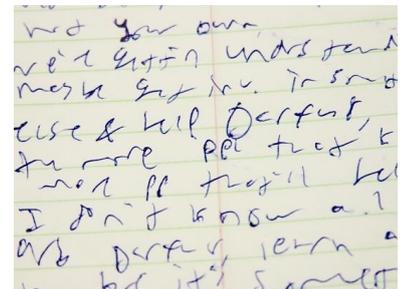
Teenagers at an independent school are using laptops to sit some exams after their former head teacher found a loophole to excuse them from hours of written exams.

In 2015, Mark Steed, the Head of Berkhamstead School in Herts, said that while schools taught using 21st century technology, they were forced to revert to outdated methods for exams.

Up until now, most schools have allowed only pupils with special needs to use laptops in exams but it clearly states in the Joint Council of Qualifications regulations that "Schools are allowed to provide a word processor to a candidate where it is their normal way of working within the centre." In other words, if schools allow pupils to use laptops in school for their everyday learning, they should be allowed to use them for exams.

Back in 2011, the chief executive of Ofqual, Isabel Nisbet, called for all examinations to be computerised in future to cater for increasingly "techno savvy" pupils. Two major exam boards warmly endorsed her views. Nisbet explained "Our school exams run the risk of being invalid, as their medium of pen and ink increasingly differs from the way in which youngsters learn". However some teachers expressed "horror" at the plan which they said threatened to increase cheating and downgrade the art of handwriting.

As a provider of Type IT! touch typing courses, I have seen first hand how using a laptop in school can benefit pupils in their classwork and exams. A large majority of my students have dyslexia or dyspraxia which means that they find handwriting difficult and painful. But touch-typing and laptop use in school can be beneficial for all children; not just for those with specific learning difficulties. Graeme Paton, Education Editor of The Telegraph said that figures show almost two-thirds of teachers admit to marking down teenagers' work because of illegible writing. According to a study by stationary firm BIC, 61% of teachers believe there has been "deterioration in the quality of handwriting among students in the last 5 years".



Handwriting experts have identified how large numbers of students have been left with blisters and aching hands after being forced to write for long periods. I see many students coming to me with similar symptoms after a day of exams at school.

Although most students use laptops for project work and essay work at school and at home, schools are not providing them with the skills to use them effectively. Very few schools offer touch-typing lessons. It's equivalent to giving a child a pen and not showing them how to hold it or form strokes on the page!

The return of touch typing

LEADING schools are putting touch typing on the timetable to make pupils more employable. It may have been a skill previously limited to clerks and secretaries, but touch typing is now being taught at Brighton College. Eton is also said to be giving classes. Pupils aged 13 and 14 at Brighton College are being taught how to type at up to 70 words a minute without looking down by New Zealand expert June Perry. Her method promises to eradicate slow typing in just a few hours, but it does require pupils to memorise the keyboard. Leah Hambletti, deputy head, said: "The vast majority of our pupils will go on to university and then to a job that will require them to type. Why not give them the skill so that it is second nature?" Touch typing is already being taught in many foreign schools. Since 2016, Finnish schools were required by law to teach the skill.

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Learning to touch type is an essential skill for all children to learn so that they can use it throughout their lives; from school, to college, university and finally the workplace. I have many adults coming to me for lessons saying how they wished they had learnt years ago. I teach many GPs and nurses, eager to learn so that they can make eye contact with their patients whilst typing notes.

For children with dyslexia, using a laptop for exams is essential – but I am in no doubt that this option should be open to all children if they use it as part of their everyday learning. Typing at 70wpm is a great advantage over a writing speed of 16wpm! It's not a question of IF exams will go computerised, it's WHEN.

If you would like your child to learn how to touch type, we run lessons after school, Saturdays and during the school holidays for age 8 – adult: Website: www.tvpeifforkids.co.uk

