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HI-TECH MINI NETBOOKS TO BOOST LEARNING IN 2009

The Brumby Government's three-year trial of mini-Netbook computers in schools has begun at Mount Clear Primary School with the arrival of the new student computers today.

Geoff Howard MP, Member for Ballarat East, was there to see the Mount Clear students become the latest of the 86 participating government primary schools in the Grampians region to start receiving their new, portable, mini-computers.

"This latest technology education boost adds to the technology-rich schools our students are learning in as we continue our program of investing in technology to equip young people with the skills they will need in a 21st Century world," Mr Howard said.

"This Netbook pilot will open the door for thousands of students at more than 344 schools in regional and traditionally lower socio-economic areas to keep pace with all the benefits of modern learning by making 24-hour online access possible for just \$1 per week.

"The Victorian Labor Government has made a commitment through our Education Blueprint that we don't want to see any student left behind when it comes to education, no matter where they live or their social circumstances.

"This program sends a clear signal across the state – especially to families with concerns about their ability to afford their child all the benefits of a modern education – that our Government will continue to stand up for them and provide their children every chance to succeed and shine.

"These powerful and compact netbooks will allow students to take their learning anywhere, anytime beyond the classroom walls.

"Students can take them home to finish work, do homework, research in depth or connect online to their classmates so they can continue working together on great new projects – the possibilities are exciting and endless."

Mr Howard said this latest initiative is part of the three-year Netbook Project that will see nearly 10,000 students across Victoria using the latest compact mini netbook computers equipped with 28 educational software programs.

"Education is our number one priority and what better way to give students the best possible start in life than with the latest in ultra-light information technology," Mr Howard said.

The Acer netbooks, which weigh around one kilogram, will come complete with a webcam and a comprehensive suite of software.

Software will include Microsoft Office, Microsoft Student with Encarta Premium, animation program Kahootz, computer aided design program Google SketchUp and a range of other free open source multimedia programs.

The Victorian Government is contributing to the purchase of these netbooks and software so that they are available to families at a fraction of the commercial retail price.

Parents will only pay \$156 for the netbooks over the three year trial period, an equivalent of \$52 a year or \$1 a week. Schools will own the devices in the first two years of the trial and ownership of the netbook transfers to families with the final \$52 payment in the third year of the trial.

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Mr Howard said parents would not only save hundreds of dollars on the netbook and software, which would be covered under school licensing agreements, but they would no longer need to buy a scientific calculator and atlas.

“This exciting trial will provide light-weight, compact and economical modern technology to the current generation of tech-savvy students,” Mr Howard said.

“Access to this technology will mean students no longer need to wait until they get to school to complete projects or research information.

“Our Government is committed to providing universal access to the best information technology learning opportunities across the board, so it is particularly exciting to see the Netbook Trial supporting so many country schools.”