

A Christmas gift to schools - General - Rural Connect

Written by John Allen

Tuesday, 20 December 2011 13:27

Harrisville School Principal Kris Burden is excited that ultra fast broadband is coming to her school. Last week, contractors were seen installing ducts nearby with the fibre drop in to the school expected to be completed early in 2012.

Principal Burden sees the major benefit of the fibre connection being in preparing her students for the future. The school uses netbooks in the classroom now but the slow speed of their existing DSL connection means that classroom time on-line is restricted. She is looking forward to the day when all classes can use the Internet at the same time.

Harrisville School uses the on-line teaching aid Mathletics and also works with their school's name-counterpart in the USA so collaborative learning via video sessions are planned for the future.

Teachers will use the new Internet connection for research, sharing resources and to supplement their teaching resources with e-books.

Completion of the school's ultra fast connection will change the their approach to teaching and enable the broadband aspects of their strategic plan to be further developed.

In the near future, teachers will monitor their student's learning progress via an on-line 'dashboard' application where resources can be published and homework can be set and marked. Some schools are using a similar app for parents to monitor their child's progress at school.

Principal Burden says that around 25% of her students do not have internet access at home. In the short term, that represents a cost in terms of printing homework resources but more importantly, that aspect of the digital divide needs to be addressed so that no student gets left behind. Primary Focus Trust is working on a plan to solve that issue.

Other schools in the Franklin area either have the fibre connection to the school completed or

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planned for completion early in 2012. Contractor Chorus are cracking on with their program of work which appears to be ahead of the published schedule. As one Principal said, the fibre cable is being "very efficiently put in".

Regrettably, the same cannot be said about schools' actual use of the fibre.

Many schools with a fibre installed are still unable to use it because there are no retail service providers offering a fibre-based product.

This issue was raised with the Ministry of Education two months ago. At the time of going to press, the Ministry have not returned calls to explain why there is this hold up in getting a service connection over new fibre cables.

We all hope that the excitement generated from the roll-out of the long-anticipated ultra fast broadband is converted to actual usage in time for the commencement of the 2012 school year. That appears unlikely at the moment.