

Morrinsville College

Blended Learning

Frequently Asked Questions



Why is e-learning and learning with a personal digital device so important?

It's common knowledge that advances in digital technology are causing massive shifts in schools. At their most basic, digital technologies can be used to improve existing practices. More innovatively, they can be used to foster learning in ways previously unimaginable in and beyond our classrooms. In particular, digital technologies have blown apart traditional attitudes towards knowledge, who possesses it, who can dispense it, how it's dispensed, and who's qualified to give feedback on student work. Digital technologies consequently provide new and more easily manageable ways of differentiating our classrooms. Students are better able now than ever before to connect with "other people, places, resources [and] online learning sites" (NZCER: Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching). They have greater access to resources that are relevant to their particular interests and ability levels.

Students are also able to make their own decisions about which technologies to use, when to access them and who to connect with. The huge amount of material available to them also means they need to learn the basics of digital citizenship, such as protection of and respect for self, others and property, as well as the ability to be critical in their use of digital material. Key competencies such as self-management take on a whole new significance when considered in the context of e-learning.

Will students be using digital devices all the time?

No, students will be able to use their digital devices when and as agreed and negotiated with their teacher. The teacher designs the learning outcomes for the lesson or unit of work, and will decide which teaching approach best meets their students' learning needs. Students' background knowledge, academic performance and learning abilities will be taken into consideration for the selection of the most suitable teaching method and combination of teaching applications. Teachers will guide or discuss with students the appropriate use of the internet or their digital device. There will be many instances when the teacher uses non-digital teaching and learning methods to achieve the lesson's aims. For example - face to face interaction, class discussions, group discussions, lectures and direct instruction of a particular aspect or piece of knowledge, group quizzes etc. In other instances the teacher will work with students to co-construct the way digital devices will be used.

“Technology is not meant to replace face-to-face interaction, but to enhance it.” While it may be enticing to completely transition to digital creation when mobile devices are introduced into our classrooms, there is immense value in continuing to have students create in the real world. The device may allow for editing, remixing, improving and publishing, but the physical world plays no less of a significant role” (George Couros in his keynote at Leading Future Learning Conference - July 2014)

What professional learning have Morrinsville College staff been engaged in to prepare them for a BYOD classroom?

There have been six years of professional learning before school on Tuesdays focused on modern teaching and learning practices and all of our teachers have successfully delivered blended learning to all of our junior students since 2019. A large part of those sessions were directed at the use of digital technologies. To support those sessions’ staff could book weekly 1-1 sessions with an outside professional to allow them to work on specific parts of upgrading their knowledge and practice.

Who will support students to use their device (eg connect to the network)?

On the first day students will cover, among other things:

- logging onto network, password
- enabling digital devices on the wireless network
- cyber safety
- familiarisation with Microsoft and Google-Applications.

These things and the importance of good digital citizenship will be expanded on within all classes throughout the year. We also have a New Era Technician available on site throughout each school day to assist staff and students.

Is there a danger that the teaching and learning will not be as effective when using these devices?

World-wide education research indicates that the use of devices can help student learning by:

- creating a supportive learning environment
- encouraging reflective thought and action
- enhancing the relevance of new learning
- facilitating shared learning
- making connections to prior learning and experience
- providing sufficient opportunities to learn.

Students may be more motivated and engaged in learning when using technology. Teachers can better address differentiation and diversity (cultural, language, level of learning) through

personalised learning which in a class of many students is made easier with the use of technology. Technology also enables teachers to help students make learning connections between other students, teachers, whanau, the wider community and the global world. Students can access resources and information anywhere, anytime. Many of our students do this by visiting Classroom Notebook or Google Classroom to review the day's lessons and resources that are posted online by teachers. The devices will not be used all of the time; they will be used when it is relevant and when it helps the students to meet the intended learning outcomes.

Is a SmartPhone ok to use instead of a tablet or laptop?

Smartphones are not suitable as the main device a student uses. They are useful for communicating with others via Skype, gmail, FB etc..., research using various browsers, quick note-taking, creating content using the camera, video, audio, and editing functions, capturing notes, diagrams and homework from the board. Smartphones have limited use for writing comprehensive pieces and higher level editing.

What about NCEA exams, reading skills and writing with pen and paper for 3 hours?

Students will still write on paper. Many students and staff employ a combination of digital work and conventional note-taking in the completion of a task. In some classes this also includes the use of audio and video to share information and knowledge, for example in recording language activities. However, what is important is the quality of the students' thinking and the use of one-to-one computer devices has shown (especially with boys) to improve the quality of thinking and writing. Students are more likely to review and change their writing and thinking if it is in electronic format. Each year more NZQA examinations are becoming digital, another reason for all of our classes to be fully BYOD.

Our professional learning team encourage staff to ensure that there is a balance between on-screen reading and reading from paper-based print. It is important to develop both reading literacies.

Will students stop working with each other collaboratively if they've all got their own device? What about classroom discussions?

Classroom collaboration and discussion will continue. Many tasks will include co-operative strategies such as group discussion and problem solving that will be completed face-to-face or under the leadership of the teacher. Students will also be collaborating through Google docs when they are working on a group project, mind-mapping, planning, problem solving, editing. This also means that students can carry on collaborating at home, when they are not sitting face to face.

Are textbooks still used?

Absolutely, if the teacher decides that the content of the book is relevant and useful to help them achieve the planned learning outcomes. However, the nature of textbooks may change as many are becoming digitised products.

What about theft, breakage and loss of the device?

Our experience has been that security and care has not been a major issue. It is suggested that this is because the students own their own device and therefore take greater care of it. We hope that most students would look after their expensive electronic equipment as they do with their mobile phones, sports and musical gear. Student tablets and notebooks are often cheaper than many mobile phones - especially those students using an i-phone or similar smartphone. Most devices are small and light and therefore easy for the student to carry around with them. It is recommended to have insurance on your netbook/laptop in case of loss or theft. In most cases your home contents policy will cover your device but please check to ensure that this is the case.

Portable devices should be protected by a username and password. This should not be disclosed to other students. Portable devices should be stored in a protective bag and care should be taken to ensure that it is with the student at all times, unless it is placed in the cubbyholes provided in the gymnasium or technology workshops. Digital devices should never be left in unsupervised areas during the school day. The security of a student-owned device is the responsibility of the student. Where possible, laptops should be engraved or labeled with the student's name.

What about online safety?

All students sign a responsible user agreement when enrolling and will be encouraged to be good digital citizens. The school has the capacity to review any usage on-site of people accessing the wifi network.

Parents and caregivers need to be aware that students who choose to use their own 4G/5G accounts (those on a personal phone and internet plan), or the wifi in their homes, the local library or similar locations have free unsupervised access to the internet. We advise parents and caregivers to have regular discussions supporting their children to be responsible digital citizens at home and in the community.

What happens if a student uses the digital device inappropriately?

The student's behaviour will be dealt with in the same way that any other form of inappropriate behaviour at Morrinsville College is dealt with. In extreme cases, and where all other restorative approaches have been exhausted, students may lose access to the Morrinsville College wifi network and/or face serious disciplinary consequences.

What happens if the device loses power?

The device used needs to be able to last through the day. This means 4-6 hours at school. The device will need to come to school fully charged each day. Students will need to be sensible about the use of the device during break times.

What about the reliability of storage of student online work?

All Morrinsville College students have a Google Drive and One Drive account with unlimited storage. Students will be able to store their work in the 'cloud' using Google-docs or Office 365 but it is advisable to download their work to a USB flashdrive in order to have an additional back-up.

Buying Apps and software?

Our intention is to use free web-based, open-source software and applications whenever possible. There is no need to buy specific Apps. Some students may find several different Apps performing the same function and that is fine, eg Pages vs Google-doc vs Word; BubbleUs vs MindMaps.

What happens if a student leaves their device at home, or it is being repaired?

The school will have a small number of mobile devices available to book out for the day from the library. In the unlikely event that there are none available the student will need to use pen and paper for the day and catch up on the online work at home, in the school library or in their local library.

What device should I buy?

We have decided not to name one particular device for all parents to buy as the market is changing so rapidly that new devices are appearing all of the time. Morrinsville College has Office 365 and Google Apps for Education so the device must be able to run Google Applications effectively.

For most students a tablet or low-level laptop will be sufficient. We strongly recommend a keyboard attachment for tablets, especially if there is no access to a computer or laptop at home.

Features to consider when purchasing a Personal Learning Device (PLD):

1. Screen size

Minimum 10 inch screen.

The screen needs to be of a size that allows the student to use the device easily and quickly. If purchasing a device with a 15 inch screen just be aware that they are a bigger device and can be cumbersome to carry around.

2. Storage

A minimum storage would be 128GB for storage in laptops and 2 in 1. Most Laptops come with a minimum of 500GB. At least 32GB of storage is recommended for tablets.

3. RAM

Minimum 2GB of RAM and preferably 4GB to help future-proof the device.

4. USB Ports

Having a device which has a USB Port is recommended if students wish to save documents to external devices like a memory stick.

5. Wifi Capable

Ensure the device is Wifi capable as this is how students connect to our network ie. It does not require a cable.

6. Battery Life

Make sure the device will last a typical school day of 4-6 hours.

7. Durable for everyday school use

Insist on a protective case.

We do not advise purchasing a new Chromebook, as they are not compatible with Office 365 apps, however if you have a working Chromebook this will be suitable for the Year 9 programme.