

LESSON IN TECHNOLOGY

HERE are some of the gadgets parents might consider buying for schoolchildren:

Memory stick: All students should have a school email address and/or a memory stick. Get two 256MB ones, clearly labelled, rather than a 512MB or bigger, if you're worried about your child losing them.

Mobile phone: Primary students don't need mobile phones unless they travel on public transport and/or their parents want one for peace of mind. Junior secondary students can be offered the choice.



MP3 player/iPod: If the iPod is being used regularly for schoolwork, parents could consider buying one.

PC: Stick with brand names. Cost will depend on whether you want to use the computer solely for schoolwork or whether you want to use it to play games and DVDs, edit videos or create graphics.

Laptop: Some schools have compulsory one-to-one laptop programs. Parents usually buy it through the school, depending on the deal with a computer company.

Broadband access: All students should have access to a computer with the internet at home. Plans are as cheap as \$5 a month for internet access. If you can afford it, choose broadband.

Printer: Printers can copy, scan, colour print and print photos. Inkjet printers start at about \$50, but ink cartridges are expensive and running costs can be higher than expected. Worth getting a bundle deal.

Internet filtering device: Choice has recommended these free government filters via NetAlert — Intergard, Safe Eyes (for Mac) and Optenet Web Filter.

Rudd's revolution: The ALP's National Secondary School Computer Fund offers all high schools, whether state, Catholic or private, the chance to apply for grants of up to \$1 million to acquire new, or upgrade, information technology equipment such as PCs and laptops. Parents need to ask their child's school if this affects what they need to buy.

Children will love the many features of this DVD portable, writes Peter Familiari

EVEN in a world conquered by the ubiquitous MP3 player, there is still a place for DVD portables as good as Wintal's PD900.

Moreover, at \$349 the PD900 (right) is an audio-video bargain.

Though our household iPods seem to hang permanently off our ears and are tailor-made for music on the move, our two Generation Y youngsters took a shine to the PD900.

At first the main attraction was the novelty of using a DVD portable with a rotating screen that looked and felt like a tablet PC.

They took turns borrowing the PD900 so they could lounge around in bed, staying up late to watch the latest releases rented from our local DVD store.

Connecting the player to their ancient CRT TVs in their bedroom was a cinch, thanks to the amount of input and output connections built neatly and discreetly into the PD900's chassis.

These include a 2.5mm headphone jack and single 2.5 AV input and output, 2 USB ports, RF-in for an antenna and a slot for a card reader. Cards supported by the PD900 are SD, MS and MMC flash memory cards.

The kids liked the size and clarity of the PD900's 9.2-inch 16:9 widescreen, as well as hearing the movie soundtrack through the supplied headphones.

They were also surprised by the range of discs read by the player.

The Wintal will play back DVD, all the DVD recordable and rewritable formats including DVD-ROM, CD-R/RW, and discs recorded with MP3 audio, MPEG4/DivX (four and five-channel) video, and S/VCD, CVD and JPEG files.

It has a USB port and a card-reader input that supports audio and video formats via USB devices and SD, MS and MMC cards.

In the following weeks the Wintal was used to fight boredom in the back seat of the family car.

The 9.2-inch screen rotates through 270 degrees and is quite large for a DVD portable, most ranging from 5-7 inches.

The screen can be folded back against the PD900's main chassis facing up, which makes for neat and comfortable in-car viewing.

The 12-volt power supply was convenient, too. When the built-in battery ran flat the fix was as easy as plugging in a cable bundled with the PD900 into the car's 12-volt cigarette-lighter socket.

The Wintal is a dual power supply model that can get its power from a 240-volt mains power outlet as well as a 12-volt power



A picture of luxury, kids

supply. Fully charged, the battery provides up to 2½ hours of viewing.

You might be wondering how you could get a TV station on to the screen of a DVD portable.

The PD900 is the first of its genre to have a handy built-in standard definition (SD) digital TV tuner, as well as analog TV reception.

It's not a feature that proved useful for us, because our vehicle doesn't have a TV antenna.

But many caravans and boats have sturdy, sophisticated fixed aerials.

With a strong TV signal, the PD900's tuner pulls in any available telecasts.

When you're not watching DVD movies or TV on the PD900 you can play games.

Wintal bundles a joystick and a disc with 300 games into each PD900.

So how does it perform?

Very nicely, thank you. Provided you are using a quality DVD or a decent broadcast of a digital-TV channel, video images are crisp and laced with powerful colours.

Moreover, they're delivered without a trace of digital distortion.

When it comes to sound quality, the PD900 won't create the nuances of the subtle high-treble frequencies, nor does it dig deep into the lowest bass notes.

But what's there is tonally full and satisfying.

The PD900 isn't the last word on sleek styling.

However, there's no shortage of features, a good picture, a reasonable sound — and it's well made.

Throw a low price into the mix and the PD900 clearly emerges as a best buy.

Radio Parts Group: 9321 8300, www.wintal.com.au