



Advice for Parents

Low-cost computers & software

We often get asked questions like “what’s the best computer to buy my child for doing homework on?”. Unfortunately, there’s no simple to answer to this as every home is different, so instead we’re offering this general advice around lower cost or free solutions.

New devices

The cheapest new device will be a Chromebook (at the time of writing prices start around £180).

<https://support.google.com/chromebook/answer/3265094?hl=en-GB#zippy=%2Cwhats-the-differencebetween-chromebooks-and-other-computers-like-windows-or-mac-os>

These are sold by a wide range of manufacturers with different specifications. Unless they’re going to be frequently transported and/or space is an issue, we recommend avoiding the 11” screen size models as they can be uncomfortable to use for long periods.

The included Google software will be sufficient for all general homework and many of the web based, Chrome, or Android apps we use in school are available on personal Chrome devices.

(Many vendors offer a discounted Microsoft 365 subscription with a Chromebook purchase – your child won’t need this.)

Tip: When you purchase a Chromebook, the first account that logs in will become the ‘admin account’ responsible for controlling the device settings. You can’t use a Rednock student account for this purpose as we lock those accounts down - use or create a personal Google account to initially configure the device.

Refurbished devices

These are typically laptops that have seen a few years’ service, are still fully functional, but just don’t have the newest technology. Vendors will typically install items like new batteries or faster hard drives, do safety inspections, and sell the refurbished units several hundred pounds cheaper than new models.

As a rough guide to specification, something with an Intel i3 CPU (or AMD equivalent), Solid State Drive, and 4Gb RAM will sufficient for basic word processing and Google web based apps.

Repurpose existing computers

If you have a functioning computer with an operating system that's no longer supported e.g. Windows 7 or macOS Catalina then it's possible to install a different operating system.

One of the easiest options is ChromeOS Flex; https://chromeenterprise.google/intl/en_uk/os/chromeosflex/

In simple terms this turns Windows and Apple computers into Chrome devices. It's very easy to install and you don't need specialist IT knowledge. Up until their replacement, we successfully used it for several years on our MacBooks and PCs made in 2010.

If you have a Windows computer then consider installing a Linux based operating system. It's a little harder to install than OS Flex but still doesn't require IT expertise. Linux comes in many different versions but they're all very good at working quickly on older or lower spec computers. Probably the easiest to install and use is Linux Mint;

<https://linuxmint.com/>

Free Software

Companies like Microsoft, Adobe, and Steinburg often charge hundreds of pounds for their products but free alternatives are available. Here are some examples:

“Office apps”

- **Google Workspace** – all our student accounts have access to a range of office style apps that can be accessed via pretty much any internet connected device. Documents, spreadsheets, and presentations can be easily created, edited, and shared with teachers.
- **LibreOffice** – can create and edit Microsoft Office format files and is available for Windows, macOS, and Linux. More information at <https://www.libreoffice.org/>

“Picture Apps”

- **G.I.M.P.** – Despite the unusual sounding name this is an excellent image editor for Windows. More information at <https://www.gimp.org/>
- **Photopea** – A web-based image editor that we use in school. More information at <https://www.photopea.com/>

“Music Apps”

- **Audacity** – Sound recording and editing. <https://www.audacityteam.org/>
- **Musescore** – Music composition and score writing. <https://musescore.org/en>

Advice about Windows 11 and multiple users

For most people, new Windows based computers will come with “Windows 11 Home Edition”. This version forces users to sign in with (or create) a Microsoft Account. Unfortunately, there’s no way around this but once the computer is set up we recommend creating a ‘local account’ (or multiple local accounts if you have more than one child using the device). Not only does this keep your data confidential (as you’re not sharing with Microsoft) but avoids any potential conflict between Microsoft and our Google based systems.

There’s a great explanation of how to do this here: <https://pureinfotech.com/create-local-account-windows11/>

