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Thursday, November



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KANE MILNE WITH MAGGIE ILI (PHOTO: BRADLEY AMBROSE
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Turning 'em on with IT

An Otara school's computer clubhouse, abuzz with creativity into the evening, is training youngsters for careers in computers and design, writes Andrea Jutson

At first glance, it looks like a games room. Near a model building made of K'nex, one 11-year-old is playing on a computer, someone else is nodding his head to music from a CD-Rom. A third student is taking apart a robotic dinosaur.

Few schools can say their students beg to stay on at 7pm, but this unique unit at Clover Park Middle School is having just that effect. However, playing is not what it's about.

Children as young as 10 are being fast-tracked into careers in IT or design via the Intel Computer Clubhouse, a dedicated computer lab at the school.

"Kids can't come here and play games. If they play a game, they've actually made it," says Mike Usmar, chief executive of the Computer Clubhouse Trust.

Most students at this Otara school are underprivileged. Mike freely says that the New Zealand education system has not done its best for Maori or Pacific Island students. At Clover Park, he realised he needed to find something new.

The idea behind the clubhouse, modelled on a worldwide network based in the United States, is to teach skills to enable children to go into worthwhile careers. This could include software programming, sound engineering, graphic or web design, robotics, photography, or even architecture.

The students here use the same software that professionals use, and at a not too dissimilar level. Clubhouse co-ordinator Kane Milne agrees: "The future of New Zealand's IT industry is going to come from places like this."

The clubhouse is a not-for-profit venture funded by private trusts and Manukau City Council, but the pair hope to get the Government on board, going national. A pilot programme at Clover Park attracted 20 students last year. Since the beginning of this year, that's shot to

TURNING 'EM ON WITH IT

The Hard Question

Freeze the people

He aha te mea nui te ao? Maku e ki atu. He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. For those who are not as...



Don't throw kids on the scrap heap

Ratbags. Tow rags. Call 'em what you will, hard-to-handle students have been around since the first...



The old hometown's not the same ...

Sure, I'm an Aucklander. Mum used to take me, and an assortment of brothers, to the swings and roundabouts...



Sport

120. Guided sessions last from 3pm-7pm, with students working on whatever projects they want. Mike is working with the Media Design School to fast-track his students through their courses. Top games company Sidhe has also come knocking. Next year, provided the school can get funding, it's hoped Clover Park and its sister high school, Te Whanau o Tupuranga, will have a purpose-built block for the clubhouse, with a recording studio. The current prefab has only nine computers, though 20-50 students come through every day. Children queue for up to two hours, waiting for their turn.