Children today are increasingly using their tablets and other personal devices to access information and to communicate with friends and family. Some children also use these same devices outside school time for ‘informal’ learning using apps, games and educational websites. Rather than devices staying at home, idle, during the school day, there is a significant global shift towards using these same devices as ‘mobile learning’ tools in schools, using an approach called BYOD.

So what is BYOD?
Bring your own device (BYOD) involves allowing pupils to bring their devices, especially tablets and other suitable personal devices, into classrooms to support improved learning outcomes. BYOD can be used both as an alternative to, or as an additional level of support to computers provided by the school, such as a set of tablets being shared between classrooms. Many ‘BYOD suitable devices’ are more capable and up to date than some school computers. Schools are beginning to see the potential of BYOD to support a more student-centered, active learning approach, with students taking more responsibility for their own learning. This also presents potential opportunities for differentiation in classrooms. Though only a small number of Irish schools are using BYOD, adoption is growing.

Potential benefits
Schools in various countries are implementing BYOD because of its potential to deliver benefits to learning. Some comments from Irish primary teachers on BYOD benefits include:

“BYOD can promote greater participation from all pupils in the classroom.”

“Familiarity – most people are most comfortable with their own devices.”

“If a child owns the device, they are more likely to look after it properly.”

“Offers the potential of every pupil using their own device or where this is not possible, sharing a device in pairs.”

“Homework – class assignments can be finished at home.”

Potential challenges and school readiness
Given that BYOD would be a significant new initiative for schools, careful planning and consultation with all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, pupils and BOM is critical to achieving successful outcomes. Because of each school’s unique situation, some schools may encounter significant challenges in implementing BYOD. As such a ‘school readiness review’ is recommended. This review would assess school readiness from a number of perspectives. Along with teacher readiness, some of the main challenges include potential inequality/digital divide issues, having suitable wireless and broadband access, and the school Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

Inequality and digital divide issues may exist between middle and low income families as all pupils may not have suitable devices at home. Some families may feel under financial and other pressures to be involved. Some potential negative student behaviours may need to be considered including comparisons between desirable ‘top of the range’ devices with other students’ lower capability devices. To address these situations some schools have provided devices to certain pupils, or have a ‘sharing of devices policy’ in place between students (eg., working in pairs).

Broadband and wireless
The school needs to have a reasonable quality of broadband into the school and also have a wireless network that is ‘fit for purpose’ to meet increased demand from additional devices. For more on this area, refer to the link below.

Review acceptable use policy (AUP)
The school AUP in relation to use of ICT will need to clearly state the school responsibility and the responsibility of pupils and their parents/guardians. For example the main responsibility for the device (including breakages, insurance etc.) needs to be with the pupil’s family rather than with the school. Again, for more on this area, refer to the link below.

Some practical tips
- Planning, consultation and communication with stakeholders is critical.
- Form a small team to co-ordinate the initiative, include key stakeholders.
- Expect issues to arise, see these as learning opportunities and for improvement.
- Start small, possibly with two teachers working together, review before next steps.
- Seek advice from other schools and teachers.
- Review advice and guidelines from PDST Technology in Education – see link below.

For more information on advice on BYOD in schools refer to: www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/ictadvice/byod

Written by Tom Lonergan, PDST Technology in Education.