



Donald Grant, Western Cape Education Minister with visually impaired learners of Athlone School for the blind, trying out the devices.

Sight impaired go hi-tech

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The quality of teaching and learning for visually impaired learners at a Bellville South school last week improved significantly, through a donation of three hi-tech devices.

Ten portable Braille computers (the BrailleNote Apex), a device for scanning and reading printed text and a portable MP3 player designed for blind users, were donated to the Athlone School for the Blind.

More than R1 million was invested by the Western Cape Education Department

(WCED), in this new technology, that was also donated to the Pioneer School in Worcester.

Learners from the Athlone School hail from all over the peninsula.

This donation follows a recent study by the Directorate: Specialised Education Support in the WCED that looked at ways in which the department could best support blind learners by different technologies.

The device allows learners to type text in braille and to listen to the text via computer-generated speech.

Learners can read and listen to electronic text in various formats, including PDF and Word files.

Two devices that can scan and read text to learners via built-in speakers, the EyePal Solo, were also provided.

The devices also allow learners to browse the internet via wi-fi and connect to other devices through bluetooth.

Gerhard Erasmus of Edit Microsystems, who too is visually impaired, said one of the benefits is the conversion of electronic and hard copies to Braille.

Donald Grant, Minister of Education in the Western Cape, said this project is the first of its kind in Africa. "We are the second country in the world after the UK to have this technology for our children," he said.

"This is going to change the way teachers and learners interact and will change the way learners act with the outside world," he said.

He said these devices will make it possible for learners to listen to a document and subsequently save a lot of time in the classroom.



Gerhard Erasmus of Edit Microsystems explains how the devices work.

PHOTOS: JANA BEKKER