# Public school goes 100% digital e-books

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# Striving excellence

With the 2012 Limpopo textbook delivery saga, and the rising cost of printed textbooks, one public school has decided to take a bold step into the future and convert to using E-books for all their learners.

Although there are a few government schools in South Africa that have run pilot projects with selected grades and classes using E-textbooks, Sunward Park High school in Boksburg, Gauteng have taken the plunge and converted to 100% digital technology. And they did this from inception in October 2012 to full implementation in January 2013.

Furthermore, most E-learning pilot projects in public schools are funded by corporate social investments (CSI), hence it becomes a “testing ground” for technology where only designated groups of classes benefit. However, with the blessing of the parents, teachers and learners, Sunward Park High has converted to the use of tablet technology, digital resources and E-books in the delivery of education to 1 220 learners registered at the school.

**The cost saving**

During the AGM and a special parent demonstration held in November last year, Principal Ansie Peens pointed out to the parents that “there is potentially a saving of 80% over a three year period by going digital.” Whereas parents would spend up to R2 000 per year on printed textbooks, set works and additional resources, now they have the option to purchase all the required digital material for a set fee of R300 per year.

The only initial outlay is the tablet. Learners can bring their own tablets (preferably android, but iPad can be used) or parents can purchase a 7-inch tablet (R1 000) or 10-inch tablet (R2 000) from the school. For the next two to three years the only cost is the R300 per year for the digital books and resources licence. All textbooks and prescribed reading are loaded on the tablets for the learners at the beginning of the academic year. Over the past two months the school has also reported a massive reduction in their internal printing and paper costs.

# The companies that made it happen

MIB Technology, through their product platform TRAIN YOUR BRAIN™ installed a fully comprehensive educational portal on the school’s server. TRAIN YOUR BRAIN™ has partnered with South Africa’s most innovative and comprehensive content providers to ensure that the on-site school cache system is populated with resources that will assist learners and educators. TYB’s™ content is adaptable to dynamic ever changing hardware and offers complete solutions for all grades.

MIB Technology MD Vivian Naidoo explains: “We are growing and learning with the school and constantly adapting the portal for specific needs, including an internal emailing system for all learners and teachers at no extra cost.

Our vision is to facilitate the roll out of this affordable technology to all public schools nationwide, using Sunward Park High as a model school. For us this is not about products and brands and profits, it is about providing a holistic E-learning solution for South African education.

“A note of commendation to the two supporting publishers, MACMILLAN and MASKEW MILLER LONGMAN. They have considered the needs of a public school and sold the E-book licence at a low, fixed cost.

How it all works – the techno details

All the learners have their prescribed (pdf) textbooks saved on their tablets. During school hours, teachers and learners log on to the TYB™ portal through the school’s WiFi connection. MIB Technology installed a WiFi hotspot in each classroom that allows for 50 connection points each. The system can handle over 1 200 simultaneous connections and is load managed so no single switch will be overloaded.

The portal has a cloud system for back up and storage that provides a fully searchable archive. Teachers can share and collaborate with lessons, learners can retrieve content on similar topics and levels – even years later.

For security and cost purposes, no one needs to connect to the internet during school hours as everything is available on the intranet portal. Access control is managed, so learners cannot “hack” into a teacher (or another learner) profile.

## Resource Library:

The **Resource Library** on the portal offers an array of E-books, classics, video lessons, science experiments, additional explanations and CAPS aligned past exam papers and memos. Some of these preloaded resources include:

* Learning Channel
* Siyavula
* Mindset Learn
* Khan Academy
* Wikipedia
* SchoolNet

If a learner needs extra lessons on a topic, the above resources provide them with a selection of personal tutors. Teachers can also make use of these resources as part of their lessons.

## Communication:

**Teachers**and **learners**can communicate through the portal’s messaging system and share information, calendars, homework, assignments and links to lessons. This can be done teacher-to-teacher, learner-to-learner and teacher to individual learner, class or grade. Sunward Park High School has paved the way for other public schools to go 100% digital and use E-learning to achieve educational excellence.

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| **Subject** | **Textbook** | **e-Books** |
| Mathematics | 158.00 | 136.00 |
| Accounting | 185.00 | 166.00 |
| CAT | 190.00 | 175.00 |
| Business Studies | 160.00 | 145.00 |
|  |  |
| Total |  |  |