I-slate to revolutionise learning in schools in southern India

By AMANDA EBER

STUDENTS in Mahabubnagar District, in India’s southern Andhra Pradesh state, will soon have something new to cheer about.

A revolutionary new teaching tool, co-developed by Nanyang Technological University (NTU), will be launched in schools there over the next three years.

The device, named the I-slate tablet, is a joint development project between experts from NTU, Rice University in Houston, and the Villages for Development and Learning Foundation (ViDAL), an Indian non-profit organisation.

In its fourth iteration, the I-slate caters to the specific needs of children living in rural areas like Mahabubnagar, which has limited access to electricity as well as a lack of teachers.

Besides being solar-powered and thus not needing electricity to function, the I-slate also boasts high intuitive usability after improvements were made to previous prototypes of the device tested by students in real-life conditions.

Despite its appearance, the I-slate’s creator, Krishna Palem, is adamant that his device is “not a tablet computer”. “It is a device designed for a single purpose: education in a low-resource environment.”

ViDAL’s founding chairwoman Rajeswari Pingali said: “The I-slate project is about empowering local communities with education and knowledge.”

With this aim in mind, Mr Palem – who is a faculty member of both Rice and NTU – managed to create the “low-cost learning tool”, featuring a new “sense-optimised” user interface that maximises the students’ education.

To date, about 30 I-slates have been distributed to a school near the state capital Hyderabad to gauge student reaction and acceptance. 50,000 more units of the device are in the pipeline for adoption by middle- and high-school students in Mahabubnagar District by 2015.