



NEWS

Modern children are all thumbs

Jackie Sinnerton

CHILD development experts are warning that the one-fingered technology generation is at risk of failing to develop fine motor skills.

With rising numbers of children unable to tie shoe-laces, do up their buttons or hold a pencil for an extended period, parents are being urged to clamp down on "screen time" and let kids' fingers get some exercise.

Sonja Walker, a teacher and a national advocate for children's health through Kids First Children's Services, said: "I have seen a marked increase in the number of children requiring occupational therapy and fine motor skills support due a lack of strength and muscle co-ordination in their hands and lower arms as a direct overuse of technology."

Ms Walker is an ambassador for the Pilot Pen Creative Writing Scholarship, a national program that encourages children to step away from the keyboard and write a creative story by hand.

Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations report suggests that children aged

5-18 spend no more than two hours in front of a screen per day and under-2s should avoid all television or other electronic media.

Jenny Ziviani from The University of Queensland, an expert in child health and motor skills, said: "Children are being introduced to keyboards and touch-screens early and these are undoubtedly going to be meaningful life skills but they should not overshadow all the other skills necessary for a functional and creative life."

The professor urges parents to encourage their children to use cutlery, scissors, pencils, crayons and paint brushes.

"Manual skills needed for doing up buttons, shoe laces, helping parents with pegs when hanging up clothes all contribute to broad skill development," she said.

Education Queensland Assistant Director-General Marg Pethiyagoda said fine motor skills played an important part in a child's development.

The Queensland curriculum states that prep teachers support children to "use and extend fine-motor skills when integrating movements and manipulating equipment, tools and objects".