

Amongst the top

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Established eight years ago in the family home basement, Smart Kids is led by husband and wife team, Joint chief executives David and Sun Milne and their sons Duncan and Fraser. She Milne, an ex-teacher, says from Just 30 products when it started, the company produces more than 200 produces catering for student" s activities, grammar concepts and innumeracy. She says the international appeal of Smart Kids products was highlighted recently, when company" s SMART PHONICS was listed amongst the top five products out of almost 100 in the education trade show in the United Kingdom.

The key requirement for every new Smart Kids products is that it stimulates student" s minds in the classroom, teaches them a specific concept easily, enjoyably and permanently and enables problem solving. David Milne says Smart Kids started selling its educational games and resources to New Zealand schools in 1995, drawings an immediate and strong response. It quickly became apartment that the New Zealand market was not large enough to sustain considerable investment in product development, and secondly, that their products have done so well that they deserved wider exposure. Our export research came down to two options.

Find educational distributors in other countries or set-up our own operations. The first option was less risky and easy to manage but it meant that Smart Kids products were lost in a wide range of materials. So we went for the second option and over the next few years established offices in Australia, in UK and Canada". This has successfully branded Smart Kids as a leading supplier of educational resources in these countries. Mr.. Milne says the Smart Kids product catalogue is now sent secularly to teachers in more than

50, 000 schools across the I-J, Ireland, Canada and Australia. We also sell to schools in the US. In that market we elected to work through a distributor, we didn't have the financial resources to set-up an operation that could cover almost 70, 000 schools and compete with every established educational publisher". He says annual exports now exceed \$2. 2 million and account for more than 90% of turnover. In order to grow the business, surplus profits are reinvested back into product development, infrastructure - the company recently moved its Auckland operation into new 20, 000 square feet premises in Leieriest.

Mr.. Milne says the Smart Kids brand is now well established internationally with the company enjoying many competitive advantages, including its New Zealand origin. New Zealand education is highly regarded overseas and we find that international teachers to get hold of educational products made in this country.