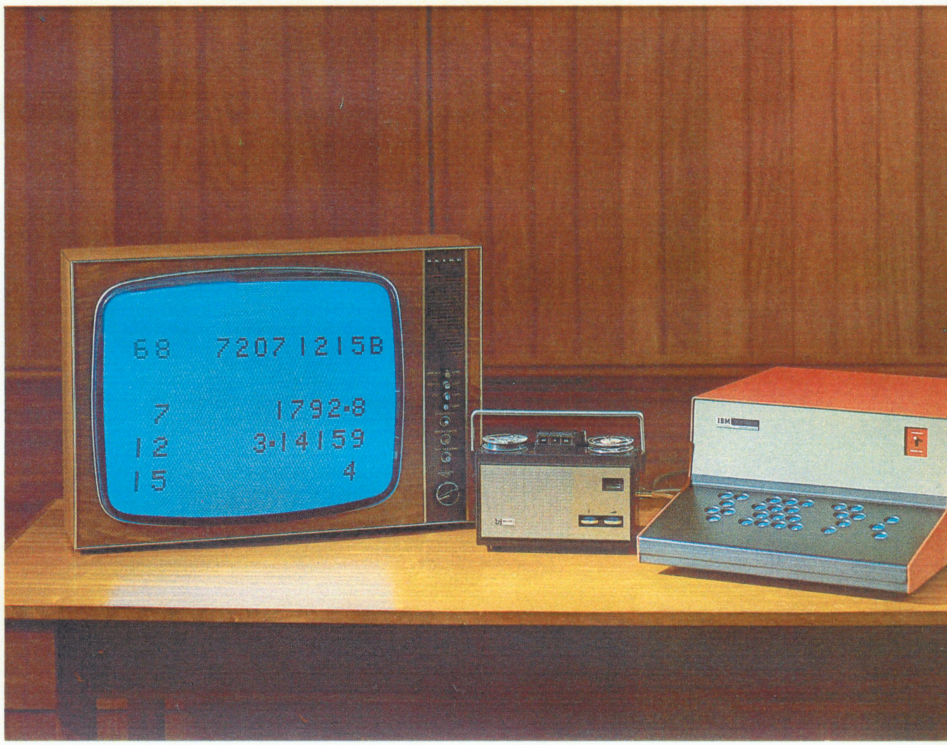
In the classroom

In 1969, the Hursley laboratory, in association with education authorities, became involved in the development of a computer for the classroom. Up to this time, computers had been introduced into schools at two different levels. At the more basic level, some schools had experience with logic trainers, useful for the teaching of computer logic principles but too elementary for serious mathematics. At the other extreme, a few schools had access to larger machines and programming experience. The gap between these two could leave the student quite ignorant of the detailed processes by which the program was executed. The Schools Computer demonstrated, by direct manipulation, the way that a computer works; it was designed to dispel the mystery surrounding computers.

The Schools Computer was a small, desk-top machine about the size of a large typewriter. It incorporated a touch keyboard for input and control, and a store that could hold 200 instructions or items of data. Instructions and data were entered at the keyboard in decimal digits, and stored and manipulated in binary coded decimal form. The keyboard was of the capacitative touch variety, so that with no mechanical parts to wear out and all solid-state circuits, the machine could withstand rough treatment. Computational output was displayed on an ordinary, unmodified television set, which also showed the contents of the computer's storage locations and registers, allowing the internal operations of the machine to be followed in fine detail. An ordinary tape recorder could be attached as an input/output device and used to hold programs and subroutines that had been prepared in advance.



Although the Schools Computer was not a standard IBM product, it enjoyed considerable success in the tests in schools. It also had the distinction of being the first device developed in the laboratory to display its output on a screen.