

Robot attends Russian school to help sick schoolboy

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Stepan, a plastic robot, attends a lesson at Moscow's school number 166, on January 19. The real Stepan, a 12-year-old boy who suffers from leukaemia, sits in front of a computer at his home and takes an active part in the lesson with help of his plastic friend.

A very special student is attending a lesson at Moscow's school number 166: Stepan, a plastic robot, is in the classroom to help a little boy with leukaemia to follow the lesson through his eyes.

In the meantime, the real Stepan, a 12-year-old boy with big blue eyes and brown hair, sits in front of a computer at his home and takes an active part in the lesson with help of his plastic friend.

Stepan Supin has been suffering from [leukaemia](#) for two years and his immune system is too fragile to allow him to leave home.

Equipped with a webcam, a microphone and a loudspeaker, the robot broadcasts in real time what happens in the classroom to the computer at the boy's home.

A screen in front of the robot actually allows the human Stepan to intervene at any time to ask for the teacher's clarification or to answer a question, teacher Alla Gevak said.

"We also call our robot Stepan. When the lesson begins, he starts working as an ordinary student and participates very actively," she added.

Since September, the robot has been helping the boy to follow history, geography, English, and French lessons. Other subjects, such as Russian and [mathematics](#), still require a teacher's visits, Gevak said.



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Stepan said he feels like his is actually present in the classroom as he can fully control the robot's movements.

"I can change the robot's speed, to go slower or faster. I can move his head to look left or right. I really feel as if I am in the classroom," Stepan said.

Gevak shares the feeling. "At first it was a bit strange, but we got used to it. During breaks between lessons, Stepan communicates very actively with other students. We treat him as if he is here with us," she said.

For the boy's mother, Nina Supina, this "presence" is really what matters.

"Children have fun in the [classroom](#), frolic and communicate. Stepan can take part. He lacks it -- a little boy's normal life," she said.

Designed in 2008 at a Moscow institute, the robot which costs 3,000 dollars, can receive orders remotely via the Internet from anywhere in the world, the project coordinator Vyacheslav Kravtsov said.

"It can be used in many spheres of life. We intend to use it primarily in the social sphere -- in education, healthcare, and for disabled people's remote work," he said.

"There are many disabled people in our country and they need help."

Stepan Supin's school received the robot for free as part of a pilot project launched by its designers.

But no matter how grateful he is to his [robot](#), Stepan said he hopes though to get away from him one day and go back to school like every

other boy of his age.

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