

calls home. But now, instead of sitting with her mother all day, she and her siblings grab identical green IRC backpacks and head to the large white tent the group has built as a classroom.

Of the 28 pupils inside, aged nine to 13, many never had a chance to start school before Syria's four-year civil war began. Most of Laval's other classmates forgot all their schooling after so many years without education.

Of the almost 5,000 students the IRC teaches, nearly half were unable to test to the most basic educational level, which requires them to identify letters and numbers.

Inside the IRC tent, children recite the Arabic alphabet and sings songs in English and French. Rows of feet flail beneath long white desks — some covered only in mud-caked sandals, despite it being the middle of winter.

"I didn't think I'd ever go to school, so I

from Homs in Syria study art at a school in northern Lebanon run by the International Rescue Committee

Sam Telling

Laval says. But like many of the children in her camp, she was too embarrassed to come to classes at first. Laval is still learning to hold a pencil, and is keenly aware of how far behind she is.

"I told her it's better she starts learning now than getting even older and still not knowing anything," says her teacher, Mayada Shular. "She can catch up along with everyone else now."

About one in five schools in Syria are closed because of the violence, Unicef says, either destroyed in shelling or converted into refugee housing.

The IRC calls its educational programs in Lebanon "non-formal education" because, although they follow state curriculums, the classes are not officially recognised. Lebanon, which bears one of the region's biggest refugee burdens, with more than a fifth of its population now Syrian, wants all children integrated into its state schools.

through two shifts of schooling to increase the number of refugee students — currently 200,000 — that it can educate. That still leaves 200,000 other children without formal education. So far, the IRC and other organisations reach some 40,000 with their programs.

Because resources are limited, teachers working with the IRC often teach children at different grade levels.

"I have students in grades five, four, two, one, as well as kids with nothing at all. They're all in the same class," says Nawal, who teaches in an abandoned building near another refugee camp. She crams some 20 students into a dark cement room and splits them into teams for each lesson, rotating among tables to help each group.

"They shocked me. I wasn't expecting to have kids who didn't know how to write a letter," Nawal says. "But now



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they've shocked me again; they're already starting to read, to learn English and French, to write. I'm really proud of them, they've gotten so much better."

Another problem, teachers say, is the psychological affect of the war. Both Nawal and Ms Shular spent the first few weeks of classes convincing students not to yell or hit each other.

"You'd hear them say things like: 'If you talk to me that way I'll shoot you.' They'd just absorbed all the violence they'd seen," Nawal said.

In Ms Shular's tent in Lebanon, children's sketches of trees and dogs hanging from the ceiling are interspersed with drawings of tanks firing shells into houses. She says she encourages them to draw anything they want.

"I want them to get it out, and rest their mind. This is the hardest thing I've ever done," she sighs. "But when you see them take the pen and move it on their own, it feels like the biggest victory."

Behaviour study

Research reveals 'creepy' findings that suggest your computer is your best friend

MURAD AHMED — LONDON

Ever feel misunderstood by colleagues, friends or even your spouse? Perhaps a computer, with a little help from your social networking profile, will be able to figure you out.

New research suggests that a computer model is a better judge of an individual's personality than those closest to them. The judgment is based on an analysis of what people "like" on Facebook.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge and Stanford University admitted the findings might be considered "creepy" by some but said it could also lead to technological advances, such as helping artificially intelligent machines understand the emotional

needs of their human creators.

In the study released yesterday, researchers analysed thousands of Facebook users, tracking the pages on which they clicked its "Like" button, the blue thumbs-up symbol familiar to the social network's 1.2bn users worldwide.

These likes, of anything from company brands to a cat video, are seen by a user's friends but can often be viewed by anyone else on the internet.

Users on the site gave the scientists access to their Facebook "likes" and completed a personality questionnaire created by psychologists. More than 17,000 volunteers then invited friends and family to judge a user's psychological traits through a different test. This allowed researchers to compare human

judgment with a machine's, finding that when given enough data the computer model scored higher than siblings, parents and even spouses in understanding the character of a loved one. The model was able to judge personality more



'Like' for like: researchers analysed thousands of Facebook users

accurately than a work colleague through analysing just 10 Facebook likes, a friend with 70 likes, a family member through 150 likes, and a wife or husband using 300 likes. On average, a Facebook user has 227 likes on their social network profile.

"What this says is that a computer can understand a person and may eventually be able to react to them as an individual," said David Stillwell, co-author of the study and deputy director of the psychometrics centre at Cambridge University. "The scenario presented in *Her* [a science-fiction film] where a man starts dating an advanced AI is not impossible."

The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of

Sciences journal. It built on work from a 2013 study that showed an analysis of Facebook likes could help predict characteristics such as a user's IQ, political preference, drug use, sexual orientation and if parents separated while young.

Mr Stillwell said he understood that some people might have privacy concerns with the findings. "It is creepy, but we should ask, why is it creepy?" he said. "It's not necessarily a bad thing for computers to understand us as individuals. But [there are problems with] companies like Facebook and Google, which are not transparent on how they do their online advertising. They don't explain why you're seeing this advert."

Facebook declined to comment. Flawed humans page 13