School use of learning platforms and associated technologies

Case study: Primary School 3

Contents

Primary School 3

This case study is part of a suite of 12 case studies which inform the benefits identified in the main report and should therefore not be read as a stand-alone.

1. The school and the school community

This is a mixed gender community primary school with around 450 learners from 3 to 11 years old. The school has a large number of learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and more than half of the learners are from minority ethnic groups (mostly with Asian, Pakistani and Indian heritage). The displays in the school corridors and in classrooms – of Diwali dance, European language day and Caribbean day, for example – indicate that multiculturalism is celebrated. The 2008 Ofsted report describes pupils' achievements as outstanding; standards in reading, mathematics, science, ICT and art are above average and standards in writing are average but improving. The Becta ICT Mark, the Future Visions Award, the Arts council Art mark and the Creative Partnerships Change School Award are some of the awards the school has been given.

School staff described the importance of motivating and engaging learners by building on their interests, and using any teaching method (including ICT) to achieve that. Ownership of learning and independent learning are at the core of the school's work. Personalised learning is promoted through project work that is based on the learners' personal interests and hobbies. Initiatives such as the 'Learning agreement time' allow learners to negotiate the curriculum and have a say in what they learn. Face-to-face communication with parents/carers is also important and parents of younger learners (up to Year 2) are invited to classrooms every day to discuss with their children the tasks for the day and get involved with their learning. The Headteacher and other staff have worked closely with another school in Australia that transformed its curriculum through a 10-year journey from 1995 to 2005 following the belief that all learners are autonomous learners, introducing inquiry and project-based learning. This case study school has many similarities with the Australian school, in terms of creating a democratic culture and allowing learners to negotiate their curriculum and to follow project-based learning, thereby unlocking each learner's potential.

> "…Instead of saying they're going to be vessels to be filled, we actually just want them to light the fire. And that means that they come to school with certain interests and passions and we bend the curriculum to meet those needs. So … we try and create environments and opportunities to provoke their thinking and from the provocation of that thinking they develop some more general, larger based thoughts, and then they start to decide which of those thoughts they're going to pursue in greater detail. So that whole movement from provocation

> *through to starting to pursue individual projects is the negotiation of the curriculum… And so the teacher's job is then to wrap the learning outcomes that the government insist that we teach this child – because they happen to be six years old – around the kind of passions and interest that the child has.*"
> [Headteacher]

The Headteacher could be characterised as a democratic leader. He encourages dialogue between the senior management team and the staff and learners and he is open to ideas and challenges. At the same time, he raises expectations and provides coaching to staff to achieve the goals they set. A friendly atmosphere, where everybody is learning from each other and where love and attitudes for life-long learning are cultivated characterises the school.

An 'MA in new technologies, educational leadership and innovation' programme in conjunction with a university in the area is taking place in the school with 14 staff members attending, alongside 14 people from neighbouring schools and the wider area, as well as two colleagues from a partner school in Australia. The programme is led by the school's Head.

Generally, the school has a long tradition of ICT, and it is well resourced with IT suites and mobile equipment such as netbooks and mini laptops that younger learners currently use. Around 90 per cent of learners have computers and access to the internet at home. The Ofsted report 2005 described that the use of ICT across the curriculum in all subjects is aiding the good progress made.

2. How the learning platform is used

General observations

The school's learning platform consists of various Web 2.0 tools (a video-conferencing and mini blogging tool amongst others) hosted on the school website. The website home page provides links to all classroom blogs, the online staff room, the calendar with school events, a gallery with photos of learners' art/craft work, and access to the email system, which is embedded in the website. On all pages there is a counter for numbers of people visiting the page. The school uses a Management Information System, which is supported by the LA through provision of training and one-to-one guidance.

Management and administration

The headteacher and administration team have responsibility of analysing attainment data for reporting to the LA and the governors, identifying problematic areas and planning interventions. Excel spreadsheets are used for the tracking and analysis of the data, while the MIS is used as a complementary tool. Each teacher produces performance data of their learners, and the phase leaders analyse this and produce reports for the teachers and the SMT. The senior leaders do further analysis of the data. There is not yet parental access to learners' data online although there are plans for providing access to MIS data for both teachers and parents during the next academic year. Attendance data is monitored through the MIS and registration is done in the school's old system.

The development of the platform (school website) was bespoke, based on the open approach taken for various tools to be used. The school opted for Open Source Web 2.0 tools to develop an open learning platform that changes as new technology tools come along. The platform is thus evolving continuously and is enriched by all stakeholders. An ICT coordinator, who designed the school website, and a learning technologist team of teachers are actively involved in supporting the use of the learning platform, and are open to suggestions by teachers and learners and there is space for sharing relevant knowledge. An example of participation of all stakeholders in the development of the platform is the presentations on tools by learners at staff meetings. Although utilising learners' knowledge about Web 2.0 tools, staff members are expected to also become aware of these tools and to apply them in a learning context. The development of the platform is an open learning process based on the growing understanding of Web 2.0 tools for learning.

> "*You know, we have a responsibility as educators not to hide our learners from those areas of the web that we find very dangerous…The development of the platform is thus an open process, that involves increasing understanding of the use of Web 2.0 tools for learners. So for us the historical movement has been…*

has mirrored our understanding of… increasingly sophisticated understanding of what Web 2.0 might mean and what that means within a primary section so that it's not sufficient for us to set up a system where learners are simply using an online repository, but really that actually are engaging in one another's learning and commenting upon that and interacting with that." [Headteacher]

Teachers are encouraged to take initiatives, in regard to their practice.

"*…that has to be something that came from the grassroots up, that people were excited about. …You know, I could do it with all sorts of things but it follows people's passions from the grassroots…*" [Headteacher]

Beyond the fact that Web 2.0 tools are available freely, which influenced the headteacher's decision to use these for a learning platform, his aim was to enable teachers to understand that it is part of their role as educators to train learners to use the internet and Web.2 tools safely.

"*I think the philosophy seems to be, really, that the learners go home and use the open internet so we may as well let them do it and make their mistakes and be aware of it instead of them going home and going on Facebook … then they come in here and we're, like, we don't know that, it's out of school. I think, if you'd let them, you can do very much more powerful work on their safety, if you actually use the tools at school that they're going to use and then you can really think about those issues with them and, you know, let them make the mistakes, here, rather than going off and making them elsewhere …*" [Teacher]

To take teachers on board with using Web 2.0 tools as a learning platform, the headteacher allowed for sufficient time for training and dissemination of information around safe internet use and he initiated discussions about the ways in which learners should be instructed when using these technologies. Concerns that staff members had at the beginning of this process regarding child protection were dealt with, and certain standards were set (such as avoiding using names with the photos uploaded on the school website) to inform teachers' use of social networking tools. Parents were sent a letter explaining that only suitable material would be published on the school website and that names would not be used with that material. Learners whose parents don't agree to them being shown in videos or other materials published on the website are still taking part in the activities but their face and details are not posted on the website.

A way of enabling teachers to experiment and start using the platform tools was to minimise time spent on planning and marking, and instead, put more emphasis on the assessment for learning process and on interventions. The headteacher removed expectations for activities that do not focus on learning and instead raised expectations about tracking the learning process. The learning technologist team, which consists of teachers who are technology enthusiasts, enable other staff to

adopt tools, by first trialling them and doing a presentation during staff meetings so that less IT-enthusiast teachers don't have to go through this initial process.

Curriculum and teaching

Various tools are used within the school website in cross-curricular ways, depending on each teacher. All classrooms have their own collective blog, which older learners as well as the teachers contribute to. Although not all teachers seem to use the platform to the same extent, all classrooms showcase learners' work through the blogs. The blogs are also used for learners to track their learning, cataloguing the learning steps and being able to reflect on the learning journey, and interacting with each other's portfolios of work.

Mini-blogging is used in different ways by staff (for example, one teacher uses Twitter for communication within school, another teacher uses it for sharing learners' work with an audience outside the school). Some tools are used widely and staff report these as a success in the school.

Video making (learners being filmed reading aloud a poem, for example) and publishing on the internet (YouTube) with links on the classroom blogs is also one of the school practices. A broadcasting studio was launched recently at the school (as a result of the learning agreement project) where learners produce radio shows. The use of Google docs and wikis is currently being trialled. Teachers report experimenting with other tools, for example free software for programming animation and games for engaging learners and increasing their motivation.

A success story that emerged from using collaboration tools such as video conferencing was the joint production of a theatrical play (with music and narration) that school learners developed working with learners from a South African school. Using synchronous and asynchronous communication, learners refined the theatrical piece, which was performed in a local theatre.

The school culture emphasises collaboration and sharing not only between learners but between staff too. Web 2.0 tools are used for networking and exchanging ideas between staff, and complement the work that school staff are involved in, within the scope of the Masters programme.

> "… So our move historically over the last three years has been towards that; it's been… and this has been true of us as professionals, never mind as teachers of learners, but just to work collaboratively and to be sharing and spending on ideas. So just to give you an example of that; we use a website for search and networking for staff." [Headteacher]

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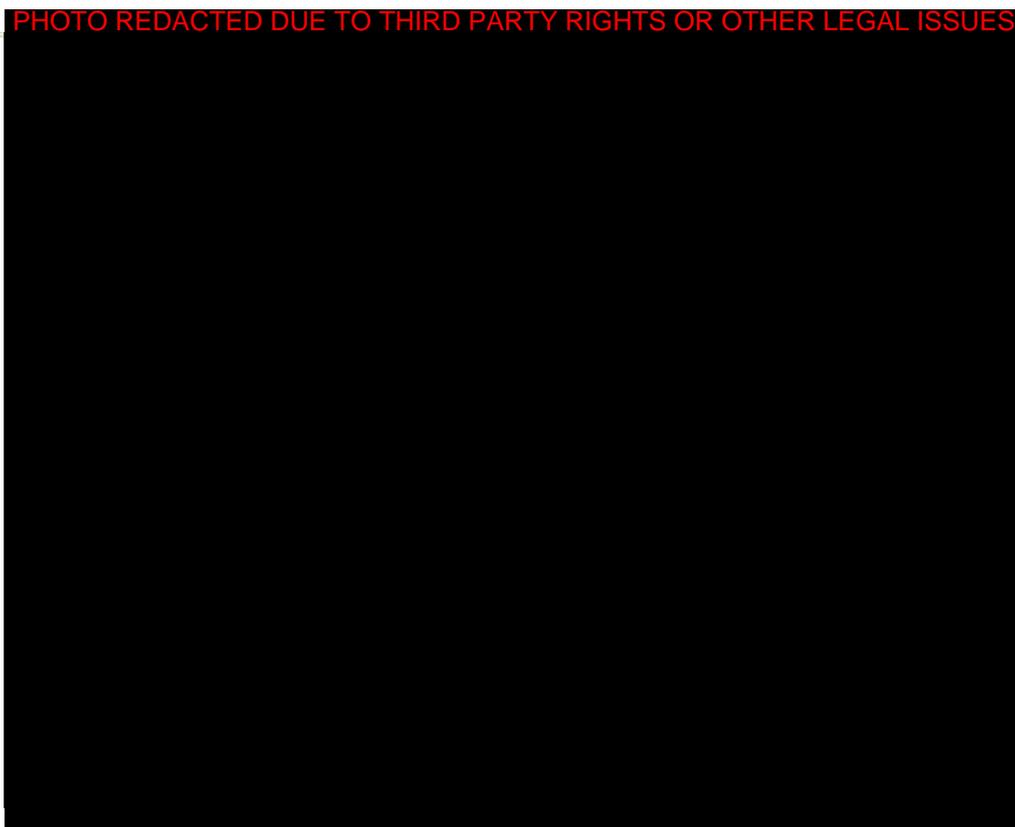
The online staff room

Learning and learners

Both younger and older learners are excited about the various activities they can do on the school website, especially the games, and the blogs that allow them to see what other year groups/classes are doing. Learners enjoy looking at others' work and sharing their own work on the blogs and they feel strongly about their school community.

"*I just do like sometimes, I look at the blogs and like then I can see what's going on at school.*" [Year 6 learner]

Learners' motivation in sharing work through the website reinforces the school's community cohesion. They feel that they have ownership of the school website and they are aware of a wider audience they have.

"*We put it on because, you know, we wanted to share what we've done …*" [Year 6 learner]

"*It's because we need to be sharing. It's not just yours. It's everybody's.*" [Year 2 learner]

"*To everybody really because… well, it belongs to like sort of, us that come to school, but then other people get to see it as well.*" [Year 6 learner]

Year 6 learners mentioned contributing to the blogs themselves, such as this group, who had made a kite.

Interviewer: How did you use the school website then?

"We put up… we put the pictures of some kites onto the blog and then wrote about them." [Year 6 learner]

For younger classes, the blogs are written by teachers:

"We're not allowed to write on the blog."

Interviewer: Who writes the blog?

"We're only allowed to do it in class. But we tell [the teacher] what to write."

Interviewer: Okay, so you tell him what to write, yes?

"Yes."

Interviewer: Do you give him ideas?

"Yes. We get to look on other people's blogs as well." [Year 2 learner]

Other activities with the learning platform include using blogs to answer questions the teachers post, chatting with classmates about school work, doing video clips for the website using particular software (on the Battle of Britain, for example) and accessing resources that teachers provide such as links to other websites. Younger learners mentioned listening to stories on the website.

"*Yes, and sometimes once in Diwali we can listen to the Rama Sita story …there's games on there, like making a picture of Rama Sita or making a puzzle and things and there's a story and we could listen to, and play games on there.*" [Year 2 learner]

On the website, learners can find information on events and important dates (for example for test dates). The email system that the school uses can be accessed by learners via the school website but not many of them use it. Some learners described their use of the email:

"*It's called, My Internet.*"

"Always gossiping."

"Most of the time we send… we usually send our projects."

"…Yes, projects and that to our teachers."

"If you're having a struggle in a subject, you can ask the teacher for some help."

> *Interviewer: What kind of help, for example? Can you tell me an example?*
>
> *"Like you have to do some…a project, you're stuck how to do it?"*
>
> [Year 6 learners]

Learners' ICT skills are also developed through the use of various tools and software, through taking photos to make movies and creating their own websites. They also learn to use online resources appropriately and be critical about the information they find on the internet:

> *Interviewer: Do you feel that that information's correct though, are you sure that everything you find on the internet is true?*
>
> *"Not all the time."*
>
> *Interviewer: So how do you judge if it's true?*
>
> *"Because some of them don't really sound right when you read them. Because sometimes on other websites, people always give different opinions on it and they pass…"*
>
> *"On Wiki answers they…"*
>
> *"Because then they… Because then everybody has different answers and you don't know which one's correct. So we don't…so I don't use it."*
>
> *"Because I was on Wiki answers when I was at home and I typed in, because I was really interested, because I have these like, you know, random moments where I just think of, you know, the most weirdest questions, like who made the alphabet and things. So I thought of who made the bed. I was thinking, well, who made it, because we use it and it's been quite a long time since, well it was invented. So I decided to go on Wiki answers and type in the question and it doesn't come up with a…you know, a very good answer."*
>
> *"We just look at different websites and compare the answers. If they've got similar answers, then you can kind of say that it might be right."*
>
> [Year 6 learners]

Learners in Years 5 and 6 can use the IT suite for an hour every day, to explore the computers and the internet. A rota system during lunchtimes enables all learners to use the IT suite to explore educational tools once a week.

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Learning agreement: radio station

Parents and families

Although the learning platform is extensively used at school, learners and a parent interviewed report that they don't make much use of the school website at home. The website is used at the moment to provide information to parents about school activities and learners' work. On the home page, there is a link for a parents' page with a school calendar, links to useful websites and school policies and documents. The blogs also aim to engage parents, by showcasing learners' work and attracting parents' interest:

> *"…blogging ...I think, in terms of getting that message out there to parents and getting them involved to various different aspects, even if it's the allotment and so on and so forth, that the learners are using. So that's very much seen as the pull for parents – 'That's interesting, what have you been learning?'"*
> [Headteacher]

Some learners mention showing their parents the blogs on the school website and others suggest their parents check the school website for information. Others show their parents their work on their computers rather than the website.

"*I show my mum the Blog…When I learn something on the computers, I show…I tell them it and show them.*" [Year 2 learner]

"*Sometimes my parents go on there and they check that themselves.*" [Year 6 learner]

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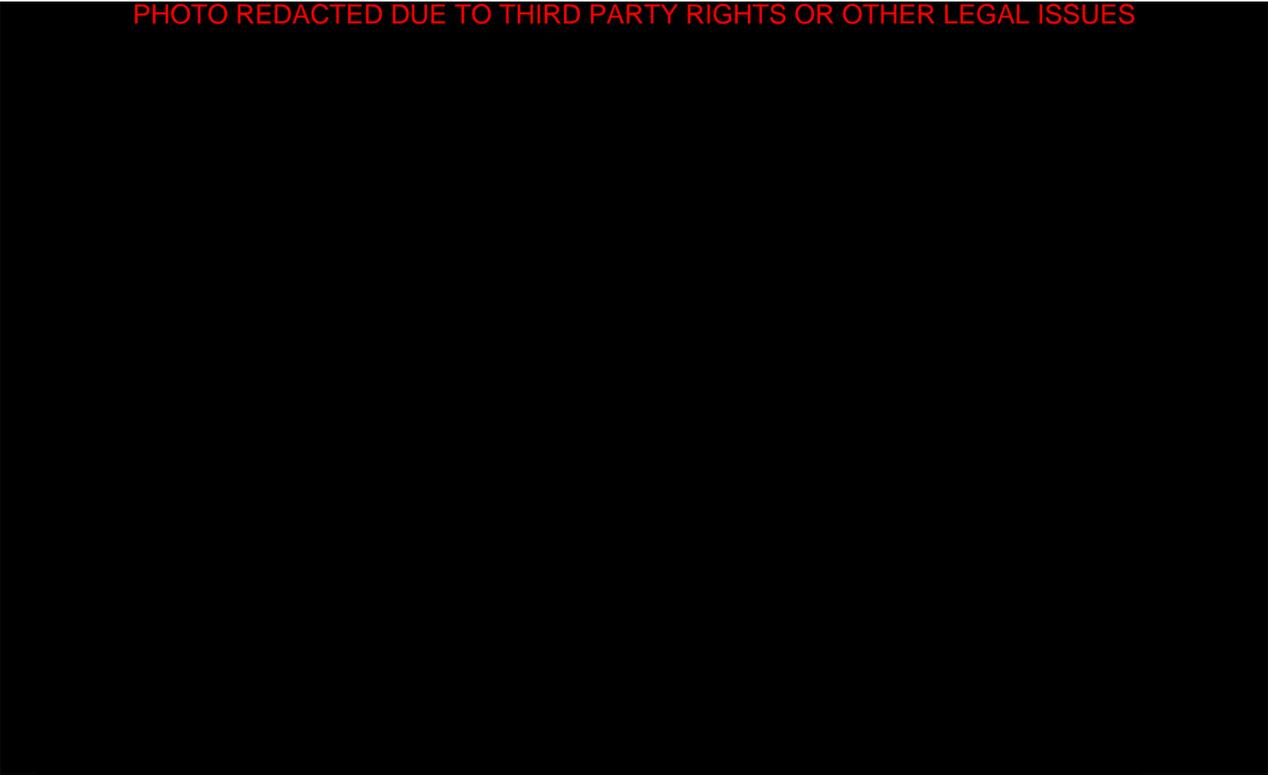
The home page

3. Benefits from using the learning platform

Findings from the case study are described below.

Showcasing and sharing learners' work

Learners feel proud of sharing their work with others, but they also express an interest in learning what other year groups are doing, especially in their project work. This helps them get ideas and reinforces their own interests.

> "*I like it because you can go on other blogs and look…find out what they have been writing.*" [Year 2 learner]

> "*Sometimes you get… In 6RA, in six, Year six, they're making kites and we sent a message to them and said that, is it hard to make kites and things like that? Some of them made it with metal, because I saw one of my brother's friends made one of metal.*" [Year 2 learner]

> *Interviewer: What about the school website, could you do without it or is it necessary?*
>
> "*Very useful.*"
>
> *Interviewer: Is it useful? Why?*
>
> "*Because we just want to tell them …what we've been doing.*" [Year 2 learner]

> "*We can see the blogs and the blogs can be really exciting to see.*" [Year 2 learner]

A teacher's expression about the use of blog 'for broadcasting out to the world' is related to this benefit:

> "*Other teachers in other schools and people like that across the world have tweeted back at them, 'Oh, we really like your videos' and things like that so, for my class, it's very much like a wide audience thing and publishing their work to lots of different people.*" [Teacher]

An example of collaborative work with an international audience was the use of Skype by the school for video conferencing with a school in South Africa to develop a play with music, drama and dance. During this activity, learners developed a multi-faceted network and they were involved in making choices and became aware of the culture of the group they were communicating with.

> "*This last summer the learners put on a performance … so there was a lot of learning, crashing across the airwaves, across the broadband airwaves between the two places, and learners making choices and refining and honing*

their ideas. Exactly what you would want creative thinkers to be doing and exactly how you would want them to be using this multi-faceted network of Web 2.0 technologies that constitute the learning platform." [Headteacher]

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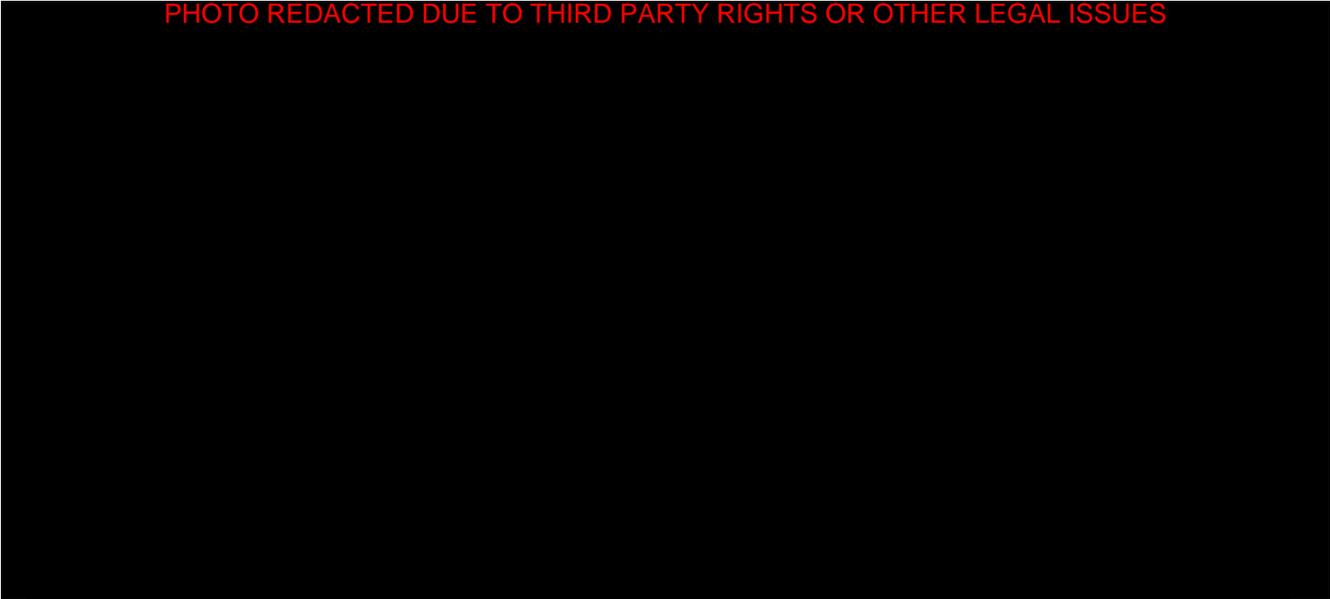
Caribbean day – showcasing on the school website

Enriching lessons and motivating learning

Learners refer to watching or producing videos as part of their lessons and suggested that in this way they remember the topic better. They also describe various games they use with excitement.

> *"On the school website… there's games like the CBeebies and ten…counting in tens to 20 and ABC Kids and I went on ABC Kids and there's lot's of games, like CBeebie games. Like there's one called Jacob and there's Bananas in Pyjamas and yes, and I went on Bananas in Pyjamas and I printed out some Bananas in Panama pictures for my scrapbook and there's lots of games and you can make cards and…"* [Year 2 learner]

> *"I think if we didn't have computers we…for project time it would be boring and you can learn things on computers."* [Year 2 learner]

> *"We do an educational game and then like you pick…you pick like addition, subtraction or algebra and then you can be against your class, or someone else from a different country and then if you win then you get a graduation and then you finish one level and then you have to go on the next level."*

> *Interviewer: So an open game and do you like it?*

> *"Yes."*

Interviewer: Why do you like it, does it help you with your learning?

"Yes, it helps me in my learning and it's fun." [Year 6 learner]

"I've found … that engagement can actually be really, really powerful… When we first started using Google docs on our netbooks, the kids were just so focused on what they were doing for their writing and it was only engagement, they could have been doing what they were doing on paper but, somehow, it was, you know, much stronger than I thought." [Teacher]

"And certainly the website and the links to various Mandarin-based, looked at a couple of French web pages as well, you know, again, that you can hear the sounds and then repeat the sounds, so it's, I think, languages would probably be the main one that I can think of off the top of my head." [Parent]

Enhanced communication between learners and staff

Communication between staff and learners has been extended beyond the school hours, which learners find helpful. Using emails for some learners is a way of communicating with teachers in a more private way, rather than in the classroom.

"Because we do projects in this class, with a friend and we've sent an email to Miss about what things we need and she's going to get them for us." [Year 6 learner]

"It's like more private instead of talking out in the class and you can talk to the teacher like, during the weekend and say like, you don't worry about it for like two days and then ask Miss and then you find out that she hasn't got time. That's why you have the email, so it makes your life a lot easier." [Year 6 learner]

Learners' involvement in the development of the school website and the use of Web 2.0 tools enables learners' voice to be heard and improves their communication with staff, including the senior managers.

"The one thing that's come across to me is it keeps a range of learners involved and making, getting their opinions across and getting some banter... So, it means there's an easy mechanism for somebody, for a child in any year to bounce a comment to [the headteacher], or even a teacher…" [Parent]

Teachers see the benefit of using tools, such as those for mini-blogging in relation to immediate communication, as they sometimes have for example learners working in different rooms in the school, and use mini-blogging to exchange information. Similarly, using tools for communication in class enables all learners to have a say and to contribute their opinion.

"The immediacy and the way that you can see one after another and the timescale and who's responded when, makes it really popular and they have it up as a separate tab and they just flick over to, 'Oh, I found this, it's really good' as a round the school communication tool." [Teacher]

Enhanced collaboration

Interaction and collaborative learning have been enabled with the use of Web 2.0 tools within and outside the school.

"Most times in pairs, but I think we do that so we can like learn together."

"We're interacting with the others."

"If you're working with two partners then you get the best out of their work." [Year 6 learners]

"It's so that they can compete with other learners in the world so you have an account and you'll say red tiger, 1709 and you compete with… I could compete with [this teacher] on his account, say, if he was in Australia and then I'd compete with his character…"

"So, you do times tables and maths and accounts… and they love it."

"Yes. They do love it."

"Yes. And, I guess that's like that engagement thing I was talking about earlier, that gets them engaged and motivated to see something, which, on the face of it, is dead boring." [Teachers]

Independent and flexible learning

Learners refer to the benefit of updating the blogs on school/classroom activities so that if a learner misses school they can still catch up with these. During lesson observations (in Year 3 and Year 6) some learners worked in the IT suite, while others stayed in the classroom, and the teacher was able to follow what all of them were doing, seeing their posts on the blog/mini-blog.

"You've got opportunities for interaction and collaboration and that means that you can do your learning at four or five o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning or six o'clock if you want to get up that early; you can start to pursue those avenues of thought in whatever way your project is unfolding in conjunction with your partner. So Web 2.0 absolutely extends the learning time spent for that child in their life." [Headteacher]

Learners have more choices of media and tools for learning:

"We had to watch the video when we did the World War Two project."

Interviewer: Okay, and do you find that you remember more when you watch the videos?

"Yes, you do remember …"

Interviewer: Or would you prefer to read it from the book?

"I like to do both."

"Both, so you can read it from the book."

"Because you do get, sometimes you can get more information from the book."

"Yes, it's got like different language and that."

Interviewer: So both of them, it's better?

"Yes, I prefer using a book because of the vocabulary. It's more than just, you know, finding out about this, but you're finding out about vocabulary."

[Year 6 learners]

Learners can develop their interests, looking at subject work published on the website.

"I do, but I only look for like, you know what's new or news and everything… Sometimes some of their art or whatever they're doing in subjects that we like." [Year 6 learner]

Advancement of ICT skills

Managing documents and files, opening and using different programs and searching the internet (on Google images and Wikipedia, for example) are some of the ICT skills learners develop. Year 3 learners report using PowerPoint and Word for class work and they also describe how they can search for images in Google and copy and paste them in their other work (for presentations etc.). During the lesson observation, Year 3 learners were observed navigating the school website, finding information/pictures on the internet and also using other programs like Paint to recreate the paintings of the artist they were studying.

"We haven't invested loads of effort into a [VLE] and get them to use this one system because that's … the old IT mentality …and we get loads of people who can only use Word and Publisher…that's another thing about the mix up of, like, platforms in the school…I think that it's really useful to be able to use different things …   So, if they can get some experience throughout the school on all three different things then it stops them being scared of different…Yes.

And they get a greater understanding about how it all works, really, don't they?" [Teachers]

"…Producing videos and putting those on – YouTube, I think it was on – are quite phenomenal, really. Really well produced." [Parent]

Digital literacy, including being critical about information on the internet, is also developed alongside other ICT skills. Using Web 2.0 tools is a way of extending learners' learning of how to deal with online safety.

"The dangers aren't… we have totally misunderstood that the dangers are in a child's face being on the internet. That is not what the danger is; you know, the danger is actually about a child's ability to discriminate and discern and to safeguard their private information about where they go to school, what their name is, you know, what clubs they go to… they're using it out of school anyway but they're using it without any kind of training; that's an abdication of our responsibilities…" [Headteacher]

Improved quality of work

Teachers report that the learning platform tools enable them to prepare, edit and re-edit the published work (theirs and their learners') and as a result, they put more thinking and time into these. Teachers interviewed also suggest that learners work harder to produce a piece of work, for example, when preparing a radio show, or making a film, as they are aware that other people are going to listen to or watch these. Teachers suggest that the authenticity of these learning situations is beneficial for learning and development.

"When we did our poetry reading videos the other week… people from other schools and loads of people had commented on previous work and stuff…and I think they really tried a lot harder because they knew people were going to see it and they were nervous as well … but it's great to give them those experiences, I think. They're real, they're authentic experiences and that's why they're nervous." [Teacher]

Resource saving

Saving paper is one of the results of using the school website for communication between stakeholders and communication of information.

"Up until recently, it was all paper-based and, as much as possible, I'm moving everything over to electronic forms of communication, avoiding all these sort of folders and folders of paper which you really do not need. So there's obviously, there's environmental advantages of using blogs, emails, and these forms of communication for governors, and we could, as a board of governors, we could probably do more." [Parent governor]

More flexibility in teachers' work

Some teachers find that using the Web 2.0 tools allows them to be flexible in managing their workload and also matches their teaching style.

"*I, personally, find it less workload because I do everything on the computer anyway… and my handwriting's terrible so marking work on [a computer program] is a dream to me because I can just go in, I can do it from anywhere, I can do it from home.*" [Teacher]

Enhancing community cohesion

The headteacher referred to the significance of employing tools in schools that learners and staff use in their private and social life. Teachers also suggest it is important to build on the aspect of social learning as this is a natural way of learning for people. As a result of using these tools to communicate and share, the community feeling amongst stakeholders has become stronger. An example that illustrates this comes from the parent who referred to a teacher being away on maternity leave who posted on the classroom blog while being away and learners responded to her.

"*Yes. And there's a picture of her baby, and I could see that the kids had, you know, bounced some comments backwards and forwards, which is great to see.*" [Parent]

Promoting lifelong learning/skills

Staff members utilise tools in the learning platform to enable learners to gain skills and develop abilities that will help them become independent and lifelong learners, for example using various systems.

"*And, it also keeps learners tuned in to what's going on, currently, which I think is really important …You know, we don't know what these learners when they get to 18, when they get their first job, the job that's not been invented yet, you know… But we're keeping them current and enabling them to, hopefully, carry that on when they get to secondary school and so on even if secondary school doesn't.*" [Teacher]

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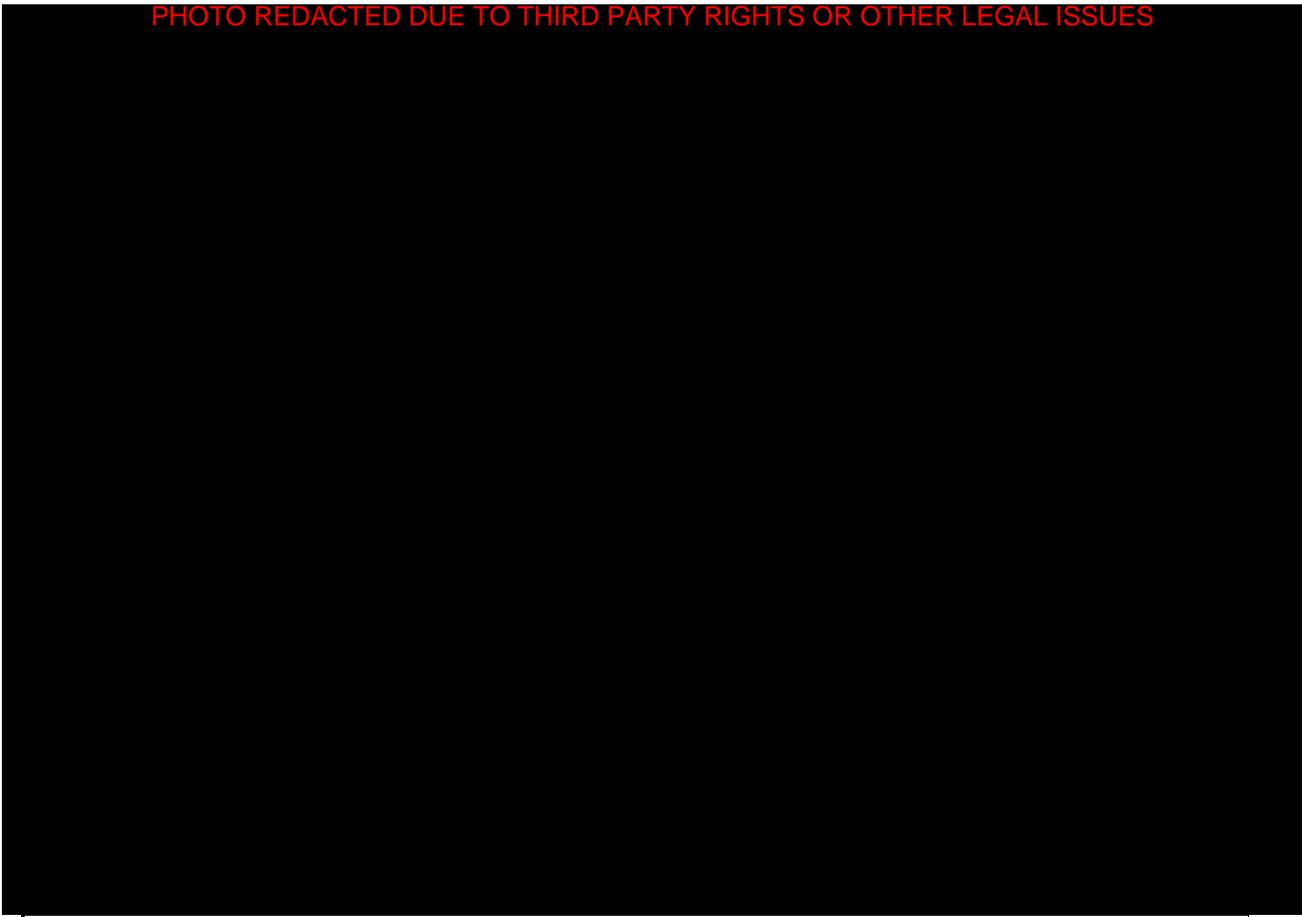
Showcasing learners' work through visuals

4. Challenges and solutions

Issues arising from using social network tools within the learning platform are related to e-safety and child protection. This was dealt with training and discussions around ways forward at the school.

> "*Certainly, for me, it was… there was a bit of a danger about starting things up that you're not sure whether the child protection things are all there because that was a big concern for me last year when I was doing my blogging … And, now we've got that sorted out, basically, everybody's just said, 'Right, we need to get this sorted out' and everybody has told everyone what they need to do. It's fine as long as you haven't got their names up there so… You know, we've been released a bit from that and that was what I was always concerned about last year, you know. And, a lot of people were, I think.*" [Teacher]

Parents' concerns about e-safety of the learners also needed to be addressed.

> "*My only concerns on that are, I mean, if you're going to put photos or videos on an open website, you've got to cover it with parental consent.*" [Parent]

Teachers report that they put time into experimenting with the Web 2.0 tools and reflecting on how these could be used in practice. In some sense, workload for staff is increased, as new tools come along continuously. However, the general climate in the school is such that not much pressure is put on staff to use specific tools, rather the headteacher promotes democratic participation in decision-making and also utilising learners' experience of using Web 2.0 tools. The school also promotes professional development and the headteacher enables the staff to work towards enhancing effective teaching and learning by minimising time spent on planning and marking and paying attention to intervention during the process of learning rather than reporting.

A teacher notices that as learners are motivated and produce more work even when not asked to, he has to give feedback/correct this, therefore increased workload:

> "*Every time we did a piece of work … at the weekend I would get five or six pieces of writing sent to me that the learners had done just of their own accord, just… Sometimes, they got, you know, their cousins to help them with things and that is absolutely brilliant and I loved it …*" [Teacher]

A limitation some teachers see in using various tools making up the learning platform is that they have to use different accounts/passwords for each of them, which is complicated for learners, although they see this as a learning point.

Another challenge the school faces is related to the need for the Local Authority (LA) to approve the use of tools. The headteacher mentioned the example of the Local Authority taking six months to allow the school staff to use a tool they wanted to employ for staff development purposes in connection with the MA programme. Although the headteacher says the LA provides good support for the use of the MIS through training and one-to-one support, he considers that the LA is far behind on what the school wants to do and needs in terms of using tools for developing personal learning environments for learners. The headteacher suggested that people in the LA may not fully understand the pedagogical value of various tools, therefore their help to the school is insufficient.

Technical issues in the school are dealt with by the ICT coordinator and the learning technologist team. A teacher with previous experience as an IT technician also provides support.

Some interviewees raised the issue of home access, as some learners lack equipment and/or internet access and in some homes with access, other members of the family have priority in using the equipment:

> "*Some learners don't like the computer because they don't know what to do. If they miss one day they won't know and they don't know what the computer is like and they don't have them at home, they won't know anything. And some people don't like the computer because sometimes it is really hard.*" [Year 2 learner]

> "*Yes, but I can't use it because of my sisters…because my sister also goes to college and she's got to do her homework.*" [Year 6 learner]

> "*Not all kids have computer and internet access but the majority do, and they've all got access to library computers outside of here as well.*" [Parent]

Another issue that emerges is that when using various tools, sometimes on different spaces on the web, learners' work can be lost. One of the teachers mentioned his idea of using the blogs for creating portfolios of learners' work, in order to have everything in one place.

> "*We did some timeline work on a website with my class. Well, we're probably not going to use that again this year and they may not use it again until they're in Year 6 so the stuff they've done is just kind of going to sit there and whilst you do have this wonderful publishing kind of thing, you also have a great load of different places where stuff can get lost. I think what I would like to do is look at using the blogging to make sort of portfolios of their work and the more of these tools that come out that we can bed stuff from them in a blog or another Bing so that they get… have it all in one place. I think that's really important and*

> *I think that's going to be a make or break thing for our kind of approach, really…*" [Teacher]

Parents raise concerns about learners' performance in writing, which may be hindered by the use of IT. This may be related to parents not being aware of how the platform is used by learners.

> "*I'll only be aware of certain snapshots. I don't know, I won't know the range of the things that are going on, that you will probably see in your trip today.*" [Parent]

> "*… I mean, it, IT can work against improving performance in handwriting and presentation, so you do have to balance that. So, could be… it could be the reason the handwriting's poor, because we've been working so much in technology.*" [Parent]

5. Drivers

The school philosophy of learners having ownership of their learning has led to the use of Web 2.0 tools for the school learning platform to enable learners to create their personal learning environment, making their voice heard, sharing their work, following their interests and learning from others. This also applies to teachers, who are equally learners in this process.

The choice to use Web 2.0 tools in the development of their learning platform was driven by the headteacher's and the staff members' feeling of responsibility to ensure that learners are equipped with the skills to deal with problems arising from using these tools (cyber bullying and exploitation for example), safeguarding their information online and foreseeing the dangers, but also to enable them to build their own learning environment using various tools.

> "*Now, the added benefit for me conceptually is that actually that's also helping learners understand that they can build their own suite of tools that they might use in their own personal learning environment. So we're not wanting to give them a 'one size fits all' approach and say, use this; we are wanting to embed the culture of build your own kind of front page.*" [Headteacher]

Usability and affordability of the Web 2.0 tools were driving forces for the choice the school made:

> "*…So we look for the kind of things that people would possibly use in their social life on the one hand; and on the other hand we never ever paid for it because we don't think it's necessary to pay for it …And we think it could all be done through off the shelf, freely available licence. So that's our starting point.*" [Headteacher]

The headteacher's belief about technology and its potential was influential in the way the platform was developed.

> "*And I think that for me, if that's what the use of new technologies embedded within the curriculum is about, which I believe it is, as a tool to give learners' imagination room to run, then it was tremendously effective.*" [Headteacher]

The involvement of staff members in the MA programme is considered powerful in terms of steering interest in using technology and promoting collaboration and sharing of ideas amongst the staff. Professional development of the staff is an important priority in this school and this is achieved in various ways, including the use of the learning platform tools for blogging and discussions.

> "*…We've started with this new technology, this MA, and it's all come to life for me and I'm really excited because I've kind of, you know, nailed what I want to*

in my practice and now I can put all these sort of extras on top and I'm feeling much more comfortable about doing it. So, I think it's… I think that it makes the job much more exciting, to be honest, you know. It clearly benefits me…"
[Teacher]

"*I think the MA has been really good for that. I mean, I wasn't here last year so I don't know, but from what people have said I've got the impression that that's been a real kick start to that kind of discussion about new technology.*"
[Teacher]

"*That's been a really amazing thing for me because I've ended up spending, you know, MA sessions, debating stuff with headteachers and deputies from other local schools…*" [Teacher]

Governors' financial support has also been a driver in the implementation of the learning platform. One of the roles of the governors' group is to visit the school as a curriculum committee and through discussions with staff to value the outcome of the school investments to resources.

"*We have to make the decisions as to what, should we pay it, should we get this money and then obviously, our role as governors is to make sure that, yes, we've invested in this IT lab, for instance, or whatever, and Apple Macs and whatever. Have we got good value for money? And that's, you know, have the learners gained from having this resource?*" [Parent and Chair of governors)

6. Conditions for success

A democratic climate in the school has led to the development of a positive environment. Praising individuals about the work, and learners responding to things is positively driving implementation. A teacher referred to the successes with ICT being celebrated at the school, which encourages teachers to learn about and use new technologies. There is space for dialogue and sharing of ideas.

"*Even people who maybe are more of that old school of lots of files and paper, are actually really open to learn from other …I've just come here…and I've had, you know, conversations with the headteacher, deputy heads, everyone about ideas and I've said that I feel that I'm able to say things and challenge them on things and they challenge me on things and it goes both ways and, again, I think that's something that's not just in IT… Pretty much everyone I've met here has been really open to ideas, no one's gone, 'Oh, I'm not doing that'.*"
[Teacher]

Embracing the philosophy of the school around learners' negotiating the curriculum and building on their interests, is reflected in the use of the learning platform tools too and the way the school is open to new technologies rather than constraining its

learning platform to one system. In this, the role of the senior management team is important in prioritising goals (personalisation and ownership of learning, for example) and raising expectations for staff. The headteacher cultivated an ethos in the school of high expectations for teachers as professionals. This ethos also applied into developing the learning platform, placing every teacher as responsible for the learning they lead, including safe learning when using the Web 2.0 tools.

> "*Obviously, there is a certain element of that but what they tend to do is kind of like just almost challenge you to do it and raise your expectations and make you feel like you want to do it and you want to improve what you're doing, or that's the way I feel … It's about raising the expectation in everyone, just like you'd, ideally, want to do with learners, not telling them they will do this and they will do it then but raising the expectation and hoping that they strive to reach it and I think that's really done with the staff here.*" [Teacher]

The ICT coordinator explained that during the process there are 'little tipping points' when teachers experiment with new tools and thereafter the use of these tools is spread across the school.

> "*It's because of that positive ethos it doesn't take a lot to tip people into experimenting with new things; they're certainly not reluctant. Well, [this program] literally, within a week of people having heard it, had tried it through the whole school right down to Year 1, which is lovely, and, I mean, with, obviously, a lot of teacher support that they had experimented with it.*' [Teacher and ICT coordinator]

Engaging staff in the development of the platform improves their motivation to try new tools.

> "*Doing it the way we're doing it takes contributions from everybody, input from everybody and we've got a kind of collaborative staff effort at building something…I think it's so important to have done this process first to engage staff and to make them feel like what we were saying about learners' ownership of it, that the staff have ownership of it rather than it being… You don't feel… want to feel like something's thrust upon you.*" [Teacher]

The ICT background of the school and the well-resourced infrastructure were conditions for the successful development of the learning platform.

> "*We've obviously got quite decent technology available to them in the room that you may… I mean there's been a real push to keep that forward, keep moving that forward…*" [Parent]

Having a teacher with previous experience as an IT technician has helped other teachers to experiment with tools and improve their practice.

7. Lessons learnt and future plans

The headteacher reported that there will be developments in using the Management Information System to involve staff in tracking, monitoring and analysing learners' achievement data.

Individual teachers suggested their plans, for example, using the blogs as individual portfolios and as tools for assessment rather than collective (classroom) tools, or software such as Second Life/the SIMS, to achieve immersion in a language context for teaching language. Teachers also talked about their plans for doing research as part of their MA programme, connected with the way they use Web 2.0 tools at school.

In terms of how governors use the learning platform, the chair informed us that even though communication and file keeping was mostly paper-based until recently, efforts are currently made for transferring everything to digital files. He also suggested that governors would like to use the school website more in the future for communication and interaction.

The parent (and chair of governors) suggested the school and governors could do more to encourage learners and parents to use the school website at home. Parental access to learners' data is in the plans for the near future, and some administrators received training in entering data into the MIS, to enable parents who have two or more learners at school to access all the data with one password rather than using different ones for each child.

In terms of further tools that will be employed as part of the platform, the headteacher suggests that these would be collaboration tools, alongside tools that allow independent learning. The school is currently trialling collaborative tools for education in Years 3 and 4, looking at the flexibility of the system, and the plan is to make it school-wide from the academic year 2010–11.

> "*So again, just to look forward, where that will move towards is much more use of [this program]; much more use of collaborative wiki creation, I suppose, in a sense; that sort of notion of multiple of those of various documents. So the child's record of achievement now won't be the child's isolated record of achievement – this will be the child's portfolio of independent and collaborative work: 'This is the learning I've done; sometimes it's been just myself and other times I've been in collaboration'.*" [Headteacher]