

School use of learning platforms and associated technologies

Case Study: Primary School 5

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Primary School 5

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 school has a larger than average three-form entry with 270 students on roll, serving a mixed catchment area. Learners come from a wide range of backgrounds. The intake is predominantly White British, and very few learners are eligible for free school meals, are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have English as an additional language. The proportion of learners with additional educational needs is in line with national averages and it is higher in Year 2 than in other year groups (about a third of learners). A 2007 Ofsted report rated the school as outstanding. Staff, parents and pupils are very happy and there is a positive atmosphere in the school. Learners are described by Ofsted as confident, independent and motivated, with all learners achieving to a high standard.

The school curriculum centres on the development of thinking skills, creativity and learner independence. The school also offers an enhanced curriculum designed to extend learners' knowledge of local and international communities, understanding diversity and special interests. These include such things as clubs where Year 2 learners can learn sign language or ICT and a summer diary on the platform for Year 2. The school also provides opportunities for parents and learners to engage in activities together, both in and after school, through after-school clubs, parents' workshops and parental involvement in teaching and learning and special projects. There is a strong School Council led by Year 2 learners to facilitate learner voice. The school has recently received a DCSF International Schools Award and in 2009 won the Best Whole School category at the Becta ICT Excellence awards. ICT is embedded in practice with a focus on engaging children and enhancing their learning:

“If it's not appropriate it's not appropriate and it's not used, but if it is and it's going to engage those kids more, then you'd use it ...” [SMT]

References to ICT and the learning platform are prominent in displays on the walls in the school, and even though of young age, learners are described as confident and competent ICT users by staff and parents. The learning platform was a subsequent step to the ICT development in the school. Equipment has been increased during the years and currently the school has a trolley with 30 netbooks, there are three laptops and interactive whiteboards in each class, and staff members have their own networked laptop. There is a digital camera per class, plus voice recorders and Beebots (little robots).

The school emphasises parental involvement and various related activities take place, for example, a ‘bring a mum/dad day’. As a result, the learning platform has been used widely in different ways to support parental engagement.

“All research shows that if parents support their children in school, those children achieve so much better than children who don’t get support or interest, so we just look at every way we possible can... [to engage parents/families].”
[SMT]

2. How the learning platform is used

General observations

The introduction of the learning platform is the most recent step in the ICT journey in the school that started around six years ago, with the vision to enhance learning. At that time, each class had a PC and five more PCs were available for staff, but their use was limited, although the Headteacher insisted that teachers use them. A turning point in this journey was the Headteacher's return to classroom teaching, which enabled her to understand that the small number of computers in relation to learner numbers was a barrier to using them. The school then purchased interactive whiteboards (IWB) for all classes, staff members were trained to use them and there were staff meetings devoted to showcasing the use of IWBs. The introduction of the learning platform was a next step in the development of ICT in the school. The initiation for introducing the learning platform came from the Senior Management Team, who saw its use in another school and in the ICT Register annual conference and believed this could make a difference in their school. Representatives from the providing company did presentations of the product in the school, and the SMT took the decision with the support of the governors to purchase the learning platform. The ICT leader who was in this role beforehand was also involved in the decision-making process.

"We felt with [this provider] we could have made our learning platform ours, it wasn't a one size fits all... we wanted the children, when they looked at it, to say 'That's my school' and ... the product gave us free range in making it look how we wanted it to look." [SMT]

The learning platform, as with general ICT, is used in all areas and for various purposes. It is not seen as separate from other learning:

"We don't see the learning platform as a sort of separate entity, it's what happens in school. The children come in in the morning and they get straight on with their morning jobs, one of which would be something on the learning platform..." [SMT]

The school website, which existed prior to the learning platform, is still used extensively by the school and serves as an information point for parents of current and potential learners. The learning platform was not meant to replace the website; however, a lot of information from the website was transferred to the learning platform too. The school also uses a Management Information System for monitoring attendance and assessment data.

Management and administration

The headteacher praises the learning platform for making communication easier, as she uses it to send messages to staff members, and to make assessment and other useful documents (health/safety/risk assessment) available to everyone.

The SMT followed a strategic action for the implementation of the learning platform similar to the procedures followed when IWBs were introduced in school. Initially two SMT members, the ICT leader, the web designer and an administration officer received what they describe as thorough training by the provider as ‘super users’ (having full access rights to the learning platform) and they then trained other staff, including LSAs. Training in school was differentiated to the needs of different groups of staff. An Inset day was devoted to the use of the learning platform. In the next stage, all teachers were required to create their class area and populate the learning platform in a way that would attract learners’ attention and engage them in learning. After the training was provided, the use of the learning platform was introduced as part of whole-school performance management.

Before the learning platform was put into practice, at school-wide level, parents received information and training about it. The SMT wanted to reassure parents about the safety of their children accessing the learning platform and at the same time, to use the learning platform to engage parents and families in the school. The Assistant Head, having a relevant background, was able to design the layout of the platform and customise it according to the school’s needs. There is an in-house web designer and a technician who visits the school once a week. An administration member is responsible for updating information, and uploading photos.

The school ICT leader oversees the planning for ICT (and the learning platform as part of it) and she is involved in teaching skills, organising resources, and liaising with the school technicians. She also monitors access to the learning platform and gives feedback to the SMT or to teachers:

“You just set your own parameter for your search and then [the ICT leader] will have a discreet word with the class teacher along the lines of say, so and so has got excessive usage would it be possible, you know, just to have a little chat, make sure that, you know that...? Or, this particular child has only had ten hits this term and that could mean that it’s only ever used in school, so we need to find out whether they’ve got Internet access at home or not ...”

[Assistant Head]

Curriculum and teaching

The learning platform is used in a cross-curricular way and is part of everyday practice. Initially every teacher was required to have a class page, to achieve consistency across the school. A news page for staff and an information page were

created following brainstorming and sharing of ideas, and in the same way the team developed the learning areas on the platform: phonics, literacy, maths and poetry. At a later stage the staff decided on further areas they wanted to have on the platform. There is an all-staff area and each teacher has an e-portfolio space. Learners' IEPs are in their individual e-portfolios on the learning platform and staff can update these. There are also areas for curriculum teams, in which LSAs are included. Teachers share resources and their planning on the platform. Various areas have been created on the learning platform for different groups of learners, such as the literacy support group. Another area on the learning platform addresses learners with additional needs, and a nurture group called World Class (with learners coming from various countries) hosts reinforcement games. The Special Educational Needs coordinator participates in various events, one of them the Becta initiative on engaging parents with SEN children and online reporting. Although at the beginning she had difficulties engaging parents, after home visits during which she explained to parents how the learning platform was used, more learners were observed to be accessing this learning platform area. Gifted and talented children also have access to their own area on the learning platform. A mother talking about her son said:

“He’s in the Young, Gifted and Talented and there’s a special section for the Young, Gifted and Talented, so click on there and there’s various games, scroll down. ...It’s only available to certain children and when we had parents’ evening that was explained to me that he would be able to have access to it and click on it and play lots of games. It’s quite nice actually....in a fun way so they don’t know that they’re doing things.” [Parent]

An example of how the learning platform was used to enhance the curriculum, was in history, the scenes videoed by staff on Guy Fawkes night that were uploaded on the learning platform to be used ‘as a hook’ to draw children’s interest. The impact, as the SMT describe it, was positive for learners:

“We wanted to find out just what the children knew, so I sent a letter to them saying I’d seen that they had so much fun this week that I wasn’t convinced that much learning had gone on and because of that I was stopping plotter’s day unless they could persuade me otherwise. They wrote me letters and the amount of knowledge that children had of Guy Fawkes and the reasons behind it far exceeded what we had thought previously.” [Headteacher]

The school has a focus on reading this year, and the learning platform has been used to encourage learners to read through a forum that one of the sports coaches created, where he writes about his favourite books. In this way learners, especially boys, were engaged and interested in reading the books that their sports coach had read:

“We’ve tried to raise the focus of reading this particular year ...and we have sports coaches who come in ...and they do multi-skills with the children ...so we got [the sports coach] to read to the children...and he’s got a place on the platform, it’s called ‘What is [the sports coach] reading?’ and some children that hadn’t really, they would use the platform at school...but with minimal usage at home, and we tried different things to encourage them but still minimal usage... But when [the sports coach’s] forum went on he came up with his secret code...that really got the boys going...those that hadn’t really used the platform...” [SMT]

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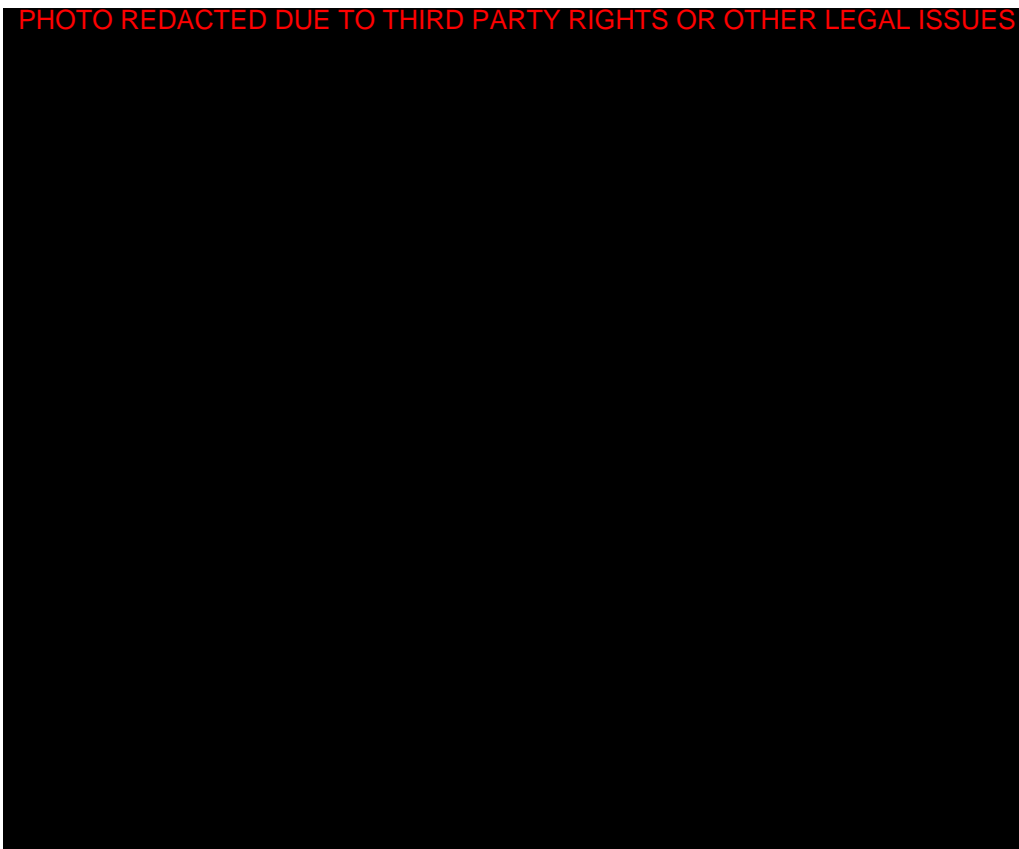


The learning platform in use in the Foundation Class

Learning and learners

Learners use the learning platform extensively in the classroom, as a whole class, in pairs or individually. They are competent in logging in, using various tools such as microphone and safeguarding their personal details. They are aware of the rules of use (for discussions, for example) and consider the learning platform mainly as a space for fun learning and showing their work and interests. Learners in Years 1 and 2 have their own home pages on the platform, with their photo, learning goals, ‘all about me’ and the class mascot diary which they can update using the Dictaphones that they can take home. This allows them to take ownership of the learning platform.

“In Year 2, they get a Dictaphone to take home, if they’re a star helper. And they speak into that and then in the morning it’s uploaded onto the platform. So, everyone can share what they’ve been doing and they can listen to it at home or at school.” [Teacher]



A learner recording her message individually

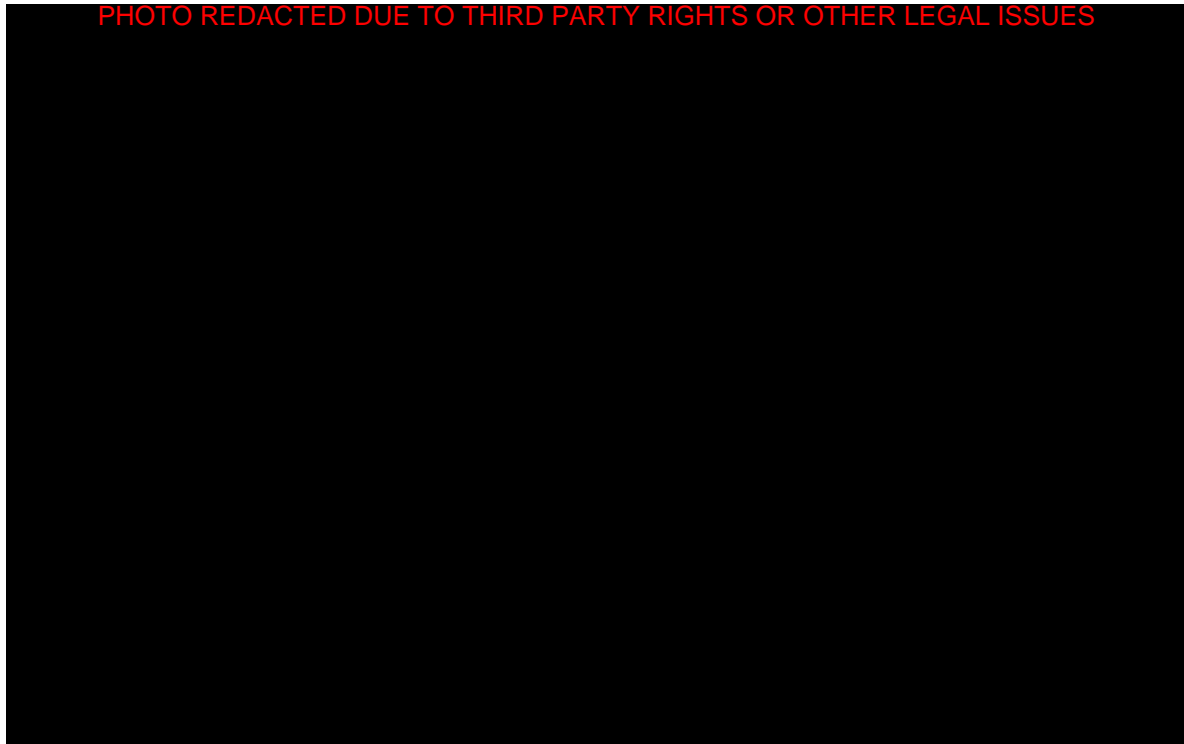
Teachers and learners use tools to capture the learning process and school activities and keep records on the learning platform that can be revisited, as well as being accessible to parents:

“And the children, today, recorded cell-clips to say, you know, who they particularly liked and what they felt that professional did in their job. And then they’ll go home tonight and hopefully play those to their parents.” [Teacher]

A group of learners who are talented in ICT belong to a group (Megabytes), which evolved from the ICT Club. The group makes videos of sign language and the sign of the week and updates an area on the learning platform. This group has also won a website design competition.

The School Council use their area on learning platform to gather opinions through forums about issues, for example the recreation of the school courtyard as a learning

space (which university students have initiated as part of their dissertation) or the kind of stall that learners would like to have at the school May fair.



Megabytes

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British Sign Language on the learning platform

Parents and families

Through the school website and the learning platform, parents get information about the school but also information on events happening in the community. The Headteacher's vision beyond engaging children and enhancing their learning was to showcase the work of learners to parents/carers, who, for various reasons, could not be physically in the school, by filming assemblies and making them available on the learning platform:

"We've done some research with parents, to find out what they like ...and that comes down to they like seeing the photographs of what their children do at school and the videos... because a lot of parents can't get in, because they are working, so they don't get to see it, and they love that. We've had some wonderful sort of letters from parents who couldn't come because of work commitment... grandparents living a long way away, were able to see their grandchildren performing in their Christmas production ..." [SMT]

For young learners to explain what they have worked on at school may be difficult, and having photos or text or other indications on the learning platform makes their work more visible and accessible to parents and families:

"It's great for the children to share that and be able to talk about it because if the parents say, 'What have you done today?' they say, nothing, but if they've

got that and they say, 'Let's have a look at what you've been doing', it all goes on the platform." [SEN coordinator]

The school has received encouraging responses from parents about the learning platform, especially about being able to see photos and videos of what learners do at school. The learning platform is not only used for communicating and showcasing to parents but also involving them in school life. A specific example is of a parent being away with the armed forces, who was invited by the school to use the learning platform to keep in contact with the family at home, and to teach other children about his job:

"This parent is currently at sea, he is in the Royal Navy...that's been an amazing success...it was Becta who gave him a Flip video and he's taking that to sea with him. It's had such an impact on the children in the school, all the children in school cause they love to see what he is up to, so there are pictures of the helicopters and the refuelling at sea, and there's a couple of new videos on this weekend...of the inside of the helicopter... the impact it's had on his children is immense..." [SMT]

Additionally, parents can access their children's e-portfolios with their child's login. Families can borrow laptops from the school to use at home with the learners, and the school has an Acceptable Use policy in place.

Governors received training in using the learning platform at school and have their own area on the learning platform for sharing minutes and other confidential information, and for communication. This has resulted in reduced paper usage as agendas, policies and other documents are found on the platform.

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‘What’s needed for the Foaming monsters’ on the learning platform – parents can understand now what learners did at school for this activity

3. Benefits of using the learning platform

Findings from the case study are described below.

Digital literacy

Through the use of the learning platform learners gain transferable ICT skills.

“Their ICT skills generally have improved a massive amount since having the learning platform, just being able to generally be competent at using a computer, not just the learning platform but them transferring those skills into other things as well. So that’s been a massive success.” [ICT leader]

As the learning platform is part of learners’ everyday work, they learned to troubleshoot and navigate within it:

“With the platform they can go straight to whatever it is they need. If it does take them out of the screen they know exactly how to get back through the platform...they can now troubleshoot and solve those problems themselves. And they know where to go and what is right for them.” [Teacher]

Parents trust the platform for being a safe environment where children can practise these skills.

“It’s a safe way for them to sort of start using computers as well, isn’t it, because they can access, they can talk to their friends and they can, you know, send their friends messages and the friends can reply, but it’s all 100 per cent safe and you don’t have to worry...” [Parent]

Teachers also take the opportunity to teach learners about e-safety:

“And also we talk to them about the e-safety and the contract. And when I talk to them about PIN numbers and how you keep safe, they know about their parents and credit cards and things like that. And it’s quite amusing in the classroom when a child in my class is saying, ‘I have to logout first, that’s my private thing’.” [Teacher]

Differentiation of learning

The learning platform enables teachers to differentiate learning for groups or individuals and learners can work simultaneously on different tasks.

“If you’ve got separate pages that you want certain children to access, you can upload games that might be differentiated for your higher ability children and your lower ability. So that there’s a targeted game for them to play ...rather

than just logging on and playing whatever's on there. That's really helpful, as well." [Teacher]

As a result of differentiating learning, learners are more engaged:

"The thing with the learning platform is it engages them because it is targeted at them and their individual need. They're more likely to stay on task and focused. Well, from my experience because it's targeted to them ..." [Teacher]

Motivating learning

Learners find the activities on learning platform fun and parents think this is improving their learning:

"I like Phonics because you can always like learn the rhymes and you can like do loads of things on there, that's why I like it so, so, much, it's so, so, fun." [Year 2 learner]

"I think it's support, it's fun and they don't realise they're learning, so because they're playing games they don't realise they're learning. If they do these and print them out, and bring them into school they get praised at school for doing them. I don't think he realises he's learning all of the time when he's playing on these." [Parent]

Raising aspirations and learners' confidence is also part of what is achieved with the learning platform:

"If a child's got low self-esteem and they log on and they can see their picture with something really special that's happened, then they often do come back in and say, 'Oh, I saw my picture' and you can see that it really made them feel good about themselves, which is really nice." [Teacher]

Immediacy of feedback

Learners appreciate the immediacy of getting feedback to quizzes or other tests they have on the learning platform:

"[I prefer] having it on the computer because then you get your marks faster. Because you get your correct answers first." [Year 2 learner]

Independent learning

Enabling independent learning is also a benefit of the learning platform.

"Because then if somebody knows your words, and then you say, 'I don't want to know, please, because I want to try and work it out by myself', that is really

good because you're trying to learn the word by yourself. So you learn more stuff.” [Year 2 learner]

“On the learning platform you can do whatever you want, but at school you can only do it five days in the week.” [Year 2 learner]

Extended learning – remote access

During school closures (such as during the snowfall this year) and holidays or in cases of absence, learners can benefit from having access to the learning platform and can continue their learning even if they are out of school. Parents and learners appreciate this.

“We had the first day, the second day off that we’ve been off, and there was [the teacher] had done a forum already. ‘Talk about what you’ve made, what you’re doing in the snow.’ So, you wasn’t coming to school but they wanted to go on it to do some school things. And if, I mean, we don’t have to do it, but people were uploading pictures on there and things. And you think, well that’s like, even doing work when you’re not here.” [Parent]

“I’ve got a little boy in my class who only today came back from [abroad] and he’s been there for five weeks. And he actually came in this morning and told me that he’d seen the reindeer page. And so, when he was in [that country] he was actually logging on, so he said that he saw pictures of what the class had been doing, so it felt like he hadn’t been away quite so long.” [Teacher]

“[The teacher] very kindly put a form on the learning platform... On snow days, and then if we wanted to tell our friends and teachers what we had been doing, we just had to type it onto the learning platform, and our teacher would pick it up and put it onto a big screen.” [Year 2 learner]

Encouraging literacy, speaking and listening

The school has a focus on reading this year, and the learning platform has provided the space for encouraging reading and improving literacy skills in various ways.

“At Christmas time they set up a Santa so they [learners] could talk to Santa on the learning platform, and Santa replied to them which was fabulous ... They’ve started a World War 2 topic ... they could ask questions to Kay and Kay would reply, because, I think there’s a real purpose for them writing, you know, it obviously brings out the literacy skills because they’re having to write and ask the question, but there’s a purpose to it. They know they’re going to get a response.” [Parent]

“And I just think, in school as well, it helps the speaking and listening side of things. Where the children can, not just go home and say, ‘We did nothing’, but they can actually show you actively what they have been doing.” [Teacher]

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Speech and language games

Sharing and collaboration amongst staff

For teachers, having access to other groups’ planning, activities and resources means that they can share practice.

“I think regarding the planning, you know, we plan as a year group and then we put it straight on the platform and you can like... I can go and have a look at what [the teacher’s] doing in phonics, for example, the way they set it out without having to say, ‘Can I have a copy?’ all the time.” [ICT leader]

Improved communication between stakeholders has also been achieved:

“But it also means that I can read that before a PTA meeting, glean any possible ideas, go back, get an answer, and the communication is just there and it’s brought the children closer to the PTA and vice versa ...And from the governors’ point of view, you can go into anything, you can understand and just keep updated, which, when you’re working full time, you can’t do that. So, it’s just making everybody’s role far more proactive.” [Parent, PTA, governor]

School management – monitoring teaching

Planning has become easier to access and monitor for the headteacher:

“What it means to me now, as a headteacher, is I don’t need to have huge folders with schemes of work in and then planning. I can now log in now and I can go and have a look and see what one year group is doing and then I can wander into the classroom.... it enables me to see whether progression is going on from Foundation till Key Stage 2 and that’s just, you know, I’ve always had that ability but it just means [the Administrator] doesn’t have to file it so much for me now.” [Headteacher]

Parental/family engagement

The learning platform makes school life more inclusive for parents or carers who cannot physically be in the school. It is also enabling the school to reach out to the wider family.

“And the parents that do work full time that can’t get into school, and have childminders, they can have contact with the school, keep up to date with what the children are doing at school, and feel really part of it. Parents that are working can watch. You know, if they can’t get to the assemblies they can watch it.” [Parent]

“We’ve got a little girl in my class who’s got a grandparent in Scotland, who can log on and see exactly what her grand-daughter’s been doing at school. So, it reaches further than just the parents and the children.” [Teacher]

The learning platform being a secure and private area (password is needed for access) allows for publishing of photos and movies and for learners to make contributions, which was not the case for the website. Parents are now more informed about school work. Access to examples of work on the platform allows parents to be more involved in their children’s learning.

“It’s just nice to be a part of what they’re doing in school, to be able to have a go at things at home.” [Parent]

“Well, it’s certainly made me more aware of what’s going on every day in the classroom... I think it’s all absolutely brilliant, I really do think, you know, because it’s involved me much more in what he’s doing at school. It’s lovely to see photographs of him doing the things so I can say to him, ‘Oh, what’s this all about?’ So that I can get more involved in what he’s doing at school, talk to him about things at home, maybe go to the library and get information books out as well.” [Parent]

Parental engagement translates to more consistency of education for children.

“Yes, because my teaching methods would be completely different than the teachers here, but it gives us common ground. It gives us consistency especially for my son. That’s given him even more confidence.” [Parent]

Making the school work more explicit to parents has also improved communication with them.

“And it means we... it just makes life easier – the communication – we don’t get as many questions from parents about when things are happening. They know how they can support their children. It’s quite explicit in how they can support their children.” [Teacher]

To achieve this benefit, the school has been continuously showcasing the use of the platform to parents when they were at school, providing support and advising them about being able to book and use the laptops from the school. Information and advice on e-safety is also provided to parents.

“It’s also modelling it when they are in... I gave the example of my nurture group parents yesterday and just putting on the platform and making use of it when they are there, when they come in for science morning, and that, have it running so they can use it and drop in for that. So, they’re getting... and in assembly it’s being used, you know. So, it, they’re seeing it being used and the benefits of it.” [SMT]

Another way of encouraging parents to get on the learning platform is sending them text messages to remind them to look at the learning platform. Senior managers highlight the importance of continuously updating the learning platform and reminding parents about this.

“I also think it’s something that we have to be constantly working at. We can’t, I don’t think, ever sit back and think, ‘We’ve got this learning platform and the parents are using it’.” [Headteacher]

In the case of engaging parents of children with additional needs, the SEN coordinator did home visits to establish a trusting relationship with parents and then enable them to work on the platform, as well as showcasing the platform when parents were in school.

“This year has been the best year but it’s not just the learning platform. It’s doing the home visit, setting up a trusting relationship and then saying, ‘Have a go on the platform now and come in if you go wrong.’ Home visits because we have to do something to get ... parents in and I didn’t want another year of setting up lots of things and getting colleagues to come in and be our special people and not the parents...” [SENCO]

Parental engagement has been successful owing to the hard work of the school staff to involve parents through various activities. The learning platform is another tool in achieving that, and in turn it has enhanced parental engagement.

“We look at the variety of ways in which we can engage parents...we have been having curriculum evenings in the first half-term. Then it was at my suggestion, which came from a previous school, that they would do afternoon workshops. So, that worked. And then every time we had a workshop we would do something on the learning platform...So, we're trying to think of different ways to bring parents in. And then we'll say to them, 'Go back and look at the learning platform because you'll see yourselves on there'.” [SMT]

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Advice for parents on how to support learners

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Audio recordings

Improved communication with the family

The materials on the learning platform encourage interaction and communication within the family.

“So, the children take that home and want to show, you know, not just parents, I mean, their grandparents look at it, older brothers and sisters can access it. So, everyone in the family can feel a part of what they’re doing.” [Parent]

In the case of a parent who is away with the Navy, the learning platform has given the opportunity for bringing the family closer while he is away:

“The children don’t very often get to talk to him, whereas they can put messages on there and feel like they get to talk to him a bit more than they would otherwise. They’ve asked him questions and he’s replied... It’s made them closer, because when he’s gone away we’ve had this big time difference and they don’t really get to speak to him.” [Parent]

Community cohesion and inclusion

Communication between stakeholders and community cohesion have improved.

“I think you also get an insight into what everybody’s doing across the school. You’re not just closed into Year F, you can see what they’re doing in Year 1, in Year 2...It just harmonises everything that we do as a school.” [Teacher]

“I like on the learning platform that you can do different sorts of things, and you can find out what other year groups are doing on there.” [Year 2 learner]

Children have a voice about issues concerning the school, through the learning platform. They also have the opportunity to demonstrate their social identity and share this with their schoolmates and teachers:

“It makes them feel valued, as well. You know, we want to know what you think, not the teachers will decide.” [Teacher]

“Because we value what they do out of school as well and then we do celebrations equally, those children who have perhaps achieved, you know, a certificate in football or in dance; they have a chance of being in whatever they’ve been awarded with and then that picture goes onto the learning platform, as well. So, it’s not necessarily just celebrating what they can do in school ...” [Teacher]

“And people can go on there and see...our favourite foods, and how old we are, and how many pets we've got and our...”

“What we like to do.”

“And our New Year's resolutions in 2010, like we wanted to do it, like my mum's was to eat more fruit.” [Year 2 learners]

The learning platform is inclusive for all members of staff, and the PTA.

“... I'm chair of PTA so that means that I can go, I have my own log-in, so I can go in and look at the PTA stuff and update that etc. And I can also get messages out and various things, and we're heavily involved with the school council...” [Parent and PTA member]

4. Challenges and solutions

With implementation of the learning platform, the school has faced a range of challenges, including engaging all staff members, addressing the needs of young children for using the equipment available, managing the content on the learning platform and integrating different systems (MIS/VLE). Issues were raised about the part-time and support staff not seeing the value of learning platform. To address this, the SMT members included use of the learning platform in the performance management and the expectations were set for support staff to use it as part of their work. Young learners find it difficult to type using the normal keyboard, so the school has purchased netbooks (instead of laptops), which are also cheaper. The school also employed tools and programs to teach children touch-typing. Sound recording is used more widely than text for lower years:

“The biggest barrier is typing skills for any children. So that’s the only barrier that we do have which is great. We’ve got the sound recorder but ultimately you need a bit of typing on there and them logging on and things like that...” [ICT leader]

The learning platform is not yet integrated with the Management Information System because of technical difficulties and because the SMT would like to first provide training to teachers on using the MIS and then allow access to it through the platform. Compatibility of the platform with Mac computers and a specific browser has been a challenge, and the school has advised parents/families to use a different browser, but more generally, problems with the home computers are out of the school’s control.

An issue emerging from the county level is the blocking of internet access for safeguarding children, which prohibits access of good material too:

“We’ve had a real problem with the Council’s attitude to the internet – ‘block it’ seems to be their attitude to e-safety, block everything and then nobody will get into trouble, but it blocks good stuff too. So I know there’s some dreadful stuff on YouTube, but there’s also some fantastic stuff on it which of course is blocked ...” [SMT]

Home access to the internet is also posing a challenge for parents/families and for learners. The school conducts an annual audit to identify levels of internet access at home for learners. Currently, there are only around four or five families with no access to the internet and the school provides laptops for learners to take home and also plans to use the funding received by the PTA to buy nine more netbooks with dongles that children can take and use at home. Another issue regarding access is that even though there is computer or internet access at home, children who have older siblings have lower priority to use them than their siblings. Taking laptops provided by the school to home is one way of addressing these issues.

“But where children have older brothers and sisters who need to use the computer at home for course-work or any other things like that, and ... parents will give preference to those children as opposed to the younger children.”
[Teacher]

“We had to go round to Nanny's for Christmas Eve for a couple of days, [the teacher] gave the school's computer to us to take round, because the one at home can only stay at home because it can't get away from home.” [Year 2 learner]

Parents' ICT skills are also an issue:

“The only drawback for me is I'm not from an IT background ... So, for my four-year-old to teach me how to log on to a website, it was very empowering for them, but it's quite demeaning for me. ... So, I think that's the only drawback that the parents might not keep up to speed with technology as quickly as maybe they should.” [Parent]

Learners' enthusiasm and excitement about using the learning platform outweighs the issue with parents' ICT skills.

“I'm also a parent of a child at this school and whenever they have writer's group and a blog is set, he's always keen, as soon as we get home, to go on and to answer the question that's been set. So, I know that it's... sometimes that it's an incentive and they get a sticker but the enthusiasm is still there that they want to go home, they want to log in, they want to put their post...”
[Teacher, parent]

The school is recognised in the area of ICT, and has been providing help and support to other schools locally. It often accepts visitors, and a terrestrial French network is interested in the use of learning platforms. However, through the school's connection with national agencies (Becta and the ICT Register, for example) staff can have access to others' outstanding practices, though this also has disadvantages:

“Well, that can be tough, as well, because you want to find other examples and find other ways of doing things. So...” [Teacher]

Having a few individuals who have received more training in using the learning platform (as super users) and who are responsible for enabling the use of the learning platform in the school, poses a challenge for sustaining the success with the learning platform. For this reason, other staff members will need to be trained to a similar level.

5. Drivers

Within the school the team with technical, teaching and leadership expertise is an important driver. Ideas of the Headteacher, ‘not an ICT person’, are translated to the technical staff by the Assistant Head who is more knowledgeable in IT and has a relevant background. Becta has been a driver for the school to be recognised as an ICT successful school, with the ICT Excellence award, as well as through initiating publicity for the school in the local and national news, which opened up collaboration with other schools.

“Winning a major award with something like Becta is always going to flag up, you know, within the ICT community, it’s always going to flag up...but locally the only success we’ve had is because Becta had come in really...which is a bit sad.” [Assistant Head]

The ICT leader plays an important role in driving the implementation. In turn, she has support and access to best practices from other schools through the provider, the technicians, the BETT show and a local forum.

“... Our technicians are fantastic. They’ve got their finger on the pulse and, you know, because they deal with other schools. They go to other schools and they can see what they’re doing. They can see new practices that are coming out ...” [ICT leader]

Collaborations (work with other schools, provision of /receiving support for other schools) have also been realised through the ICT Register. Staff members with creative ideas push the development of the learning platform further although these ideas can sometimes go beyond the current school capability.

Learners’ enthusiasm is also driver for staff (and parents) to use the learning platform:

“It’s definite pressure from below going above because they’re so enthusiastic about it you don’t, you can’t say no. If you’ve got a kid who’s saying, ‘Please mum, I need to take, in fact I’ll just log on and I’ll show you...’” [Parent]

Realising the benefits of the learning platform and the impact it has on learners is motivating staff to develop the platform further.

“But I think what motivates me to use it is because it can make my life be easier, as a headteacher, but also I can see the power it has on the children’s learning. And I think that’s probably where teachers who are at my level of expertise are at.” [Headteacher]

6. Conditions for success

Some of the conditions for success identified by SMT include enabling stakeholders to see the purpose of using the learning platform and the impact it is going to have, taking the whole school on board but with the leadership backing all the efforts and being involved in the process, giving time to teachers, and understanding their overloaded role. SMT members' leadership style was collegial, based on a vision directed from the top, but not a top-down implementation.

The SMT being very aware of CPD provided differentiated training, addressing the needs of groups of staff, which was a great enabler. The training took various forms, with workshops, open-door sessions, and help sheets with screenshots on the learning platform. The teachers' enthusiasm and commitment is another condition of success. Working together, supporting each other and sharing practice and ideas on a daily basis has led to success shared by everybody:

"We're in a culture of supporting everybody and I think we're all working together. It's not a, 'Well, you can't do it, so you're left; you can't do it, so you haven't got anything on your page'. Everybody helps each other ... I mean, I heard it down my end this morning about my LSA is trying to put her PowerPoint together for me for next week for my assembly, which she would never have done before. And she's done most of it herself. So, people's skills are improving all the time. I hadn't asked her to do it because I thought it was a job for me. And she's got on and done it while we've been in writing skills this morning and she's so pleased with herself." [SMT]

Rather than seeing the learning platform as an add-on, it was introduced as part of other technologies that have been in school previously and it has been embedded into all subjects and a part of everyday routine.

"...it's become almost the same as adding to a word display, it is now, it's the norm and it's not additional work..." [SMT]

"Even now, although it's not that long since we had the system implemented at school, it seems like we've always had it here. It doesn't feel like a chore to upload things, it just feels as if it's been part of school life forever." [Teachers]

SMT members also consider important the fact that they could tailor the learning platform to the school's needs. Allowing for ownership thus was a reason for selecting the specific platform but also a condition of success.

"If you buy somebody in to do it for you, it's not yours, which is why it was so important to us that it was ours from the start." [SMT]

The school could decide on the learning platform without having to be dependent on the LA, and at the same time had the support of the governors.

“If I see something, or [the Deputy Head] sees something or [the ICT leader] that we think is going to make a real difference, then I don’t really see the point of waiting for the Local Authority to come, you know you could be in the first wave, the second wave or the third wave. If it’s going to make a difference, I want it in here as soon as possible.” [SMT]

Continuous collaboration with the provider and opportunities for dialogue and mutual feedback are important. A person representing the provider had teaching experience, which staff considers a key aspect of support. The school has also presented on the provider’s behalf at different events (at BETT for example) and has been providing ideas for further development of the platform.

“Of course, [the ICT leader] had put together some best practice things and sent it off to [the provider representative]. And then...they’ve got a meeting set up for them to create some things ... So, it is a ‘you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’ type of thing. And they’re very open to suggestions and very open to new ideas, ways of using the platform.” [SMT]

In addition, collaboration with other organisations with an ICT focus is an enabler for exchanging ideas and practice with like-minded colleagues.

“Sharing good practice with other practitioners is absolutely crucial. Because if you happen to be an infant school, as we are, where in our local authority we are ahead of the game, it’s very hard for us to keep developing. But because of these national bodies that we’re part of, we get to go and see other outstanding practitioners... And you can’t stay isolated.” [SMT]

Following slow steps, allowing time to staff and having everyone on board is crucial for achieving a success. Support on the spot (access to people and use of help sheets) when needed, and ongoing training for all staff are also important.

“The thing that worked was giving staff time to learn and experiment on using all the different forms of ICT, really. ... Staff were much more confident before we even launched it for the children. It was very successful ... and one thing that we do have to pick up, as a school, is, particularly with support staff, is keeping that training ongoing.” [SMT]

The learning platform has reinforced parental engagement, although the relationship of the school with parents has always been good and a range of activities for bringing parents in the school was in place before the learning platform was introduced. Parents feel free to come to school and ask for help, which also enables the staff to identify problems with the use of the learning platform.

7. Lessons learnt and future plans

SMT members and teachers describe what they learned during the process of implementing the learning platform. For the SMT and the ICT leader who received more advanced training and are more competent than other staff, moving at an appropriate pace, respecting other staff members' capability was a lesson learned.

Similarly, introducing the learning platform to parents had to be a step-by-step process, and importantly to do that from the first day that parents come to school.

"...The thing is to get the parents engaged on day one because the first... what happens here is that we do a staggered entry. ...So, those parents who think, 'Oh, my God, this is my first time my little one's going to away', they can actually see them in the classroom. So, hopefully, that will be a reassurance because of the emotional intelligence bit, but also they will immediately see the power of this learning platform." [SMT]

Teachers also mention how in the process of using the learning platform they learned how to use other equipment, to produce materials for the learning platform, such as Flip cameras to produce small file types that suit the storage limitations of the platform. In addition, the SMT report that when introducing new equipment is important to allow time for staff to get used to it:

"Every time you buy a new piece of technology or somebody comes back with a new piece of technology it's ensuring that it can be multi-used and that all staff know how to use it." [SMT]

At a whole school level, e-portfolios would be a next step, following the suggestion of an HMI who came to school for inspection.

"We've done bits of it but we haven't pushed it as far as we could at all. You know, we've uploaded IEPs now, but we need to start uploading children's work, we need to start getting children more involved in it but it all takes time and training on the children, which is why we've started earlier this year with Year 1. So, that hopefully they've got their e-portfolio in place, so that when it comes to Year 2, all we have to do then is just show them how to do that." [Teacher]

Other staff mentioned the online reporting as a goal for the near future. Areas on the learning platform can be made private, so this would allow for online reporting for parents. However, some teachers are sceptical about the information that will be provided to parents:

"...I mean you need to know that information but how much information do parents need to know? It's actually about how much do we need to know to teach the next step. But, I do think at the end of a term ... that parents have a

right to know where their children are, but it has to be managed sensitively because otherwise you'll end up with a workforce of nervous breakdowns, and what purpose does that serve? If it's not helping the children to move on it's not..." [Teacher]

The SMT also talked about the idea of building portfolios for staff teams to enable collaboration and differentiating learning.

"We're all in different teams and we're all working on certain areas in the curriculum. And the work that we're doing, we're going to build portfolios and put that on the learning platform... it's a work in progress at the moment but that will be something that will be really helpful to everybody." [SMT]

Individual staff members have their own ideas for future plans; however, realising them may not be possible in the immediate future within the current capacity of the school (building an interactive map of outdoor spaces to be used by learners, for example).

Other plans mentioned include extending the parent page adding forums for parents, and creating partnerships using online tools for collaboration.