School use of learning platforms and associated technologies

Case Study: Secondary School 5

Contents

Secondary 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.
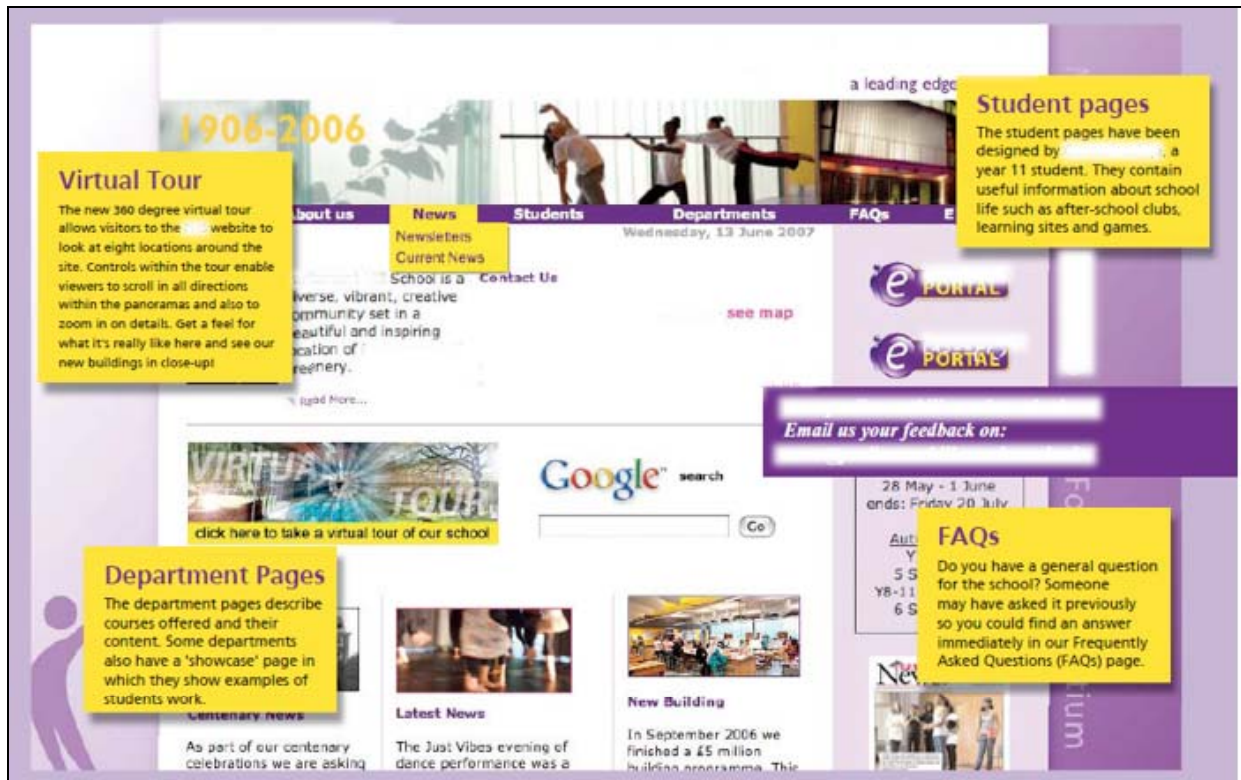
1. The school and the school community

The school is a community comprehensive school for girls aged 11 to18, located in north London. The school has a student roll of approximately 1250, including 350 in a mixed sixth form. A high proportion of learners are eligible for free school meals. More than half of learners are from minority ethnic groups and over 42 languages (with Bengali, Albanian and Arabic being the most prominent) are spoken amongst the student body. A significant number of learners (approximately 190) are refugees or asylum seekers. A high proportion of learners are described as vulnerable or as having additional educational needs. A 2008 Ofsted report describes the school as a good school with a positive learning culture which motivates and encourages learners to achieve their full potential. Standards are above average and achievement levels are generally good. The school is a specialist Technology College with a focus on Design Technology, Maths and Science. The school is currently preparing for participation in the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. It is also a Leading Edge School and a Training School and maintains close links with two London universities.

ICT has been a particular strength of the school, generating several ministerial visits over the last five years. The school has been awarded the Becta ICT Mark and achievement in ICT has increased from 46 per cent A*-C grades to 97 per cent between 2005 and 2009. The school offers a wide range of ICT courses including GCSE, AS, A2, BTEC, CiDA, DiDA and the new ICT Diploma. It is one of three gateway schools in the area and one of thirty nationally rolling out the new ICT Diploma. The current Headteacher came to the school in 2004 and describes the ethos of the school with regard to ICT as follows:

> *"Standards in the school are continuously improving. ICT has played a major role in that improvement. ICT makes teaching and learning more engaging, stimulating and more challenging for our students. We are committed to ICT. To be able to use ICT is crucial for our students. That's why we invest a lot of our funding and staff time to ICT processes and usage."* (Headteacher)

Historically, the school has a positive reputation for its innovative use and commitment to ICT and had begun to make good progress with implementation of the school's chosen learning platform in recent years. In the last year, however, there has been a slowing down of progress owing to the departure of some members of support staff and time taken to find replacements. This has, however, now been addressed and a new member of staff appointed. As a result, the School Development Plan has now been reviewed, and ongoing development of the MLE

has been readdressed as a priority element. These events do, however, highlight the importance of support staff as a key success factor in the development of learning platforms in schools where teachers may not be confident, or do not have the time to invest in supporting its adoption and use through self-tutoring.

The school website from 'TechTimes' – June 2007

2. How the learning platform is used

The learning platform at the school comprises a range of materials: a school website, a commercially available MIS, a set of shared network areas for staff and learners and the MLE. The school website is produced in-house (with the help of learners) using Open Source software.

The school website is a key medium for communication between home and school with links for staff, learners, governors and parents. In addition the website provides links to the learning portal and to current news and events. The school website, the MLE and shared network areas are integrated at a surface level but are not yet fully integrated into one seamless system.

General observations

The school has seven ICT suites, each having approximately 30 networked PCs. In addition, there are three sets (x 30) of laptops on mobile trolleys. There is a dedicated suite of 20 PCs for Graphics in the Design Technology department. Music Technology has a small set of Apple Macs and Media studies a set of 12 Apple Macs. Not all classrooms have easy access to PCs, although most classrooms have at least one teacher PC (desktop). Not all teachers have laptops. A majority of classrooms have an interactive whiteboard, projector and speakers. The ratio of computers is approximately 1:4 across the school. A majority of learners (92 per cent) have home access to computers, although for some this is on a shared family machine. The school offers a lend-lease option to learners without a PC, although not many take this up owing to its linkage to free school meals and the potential stigma associated with that.

Management and administration

The school adopted the current MLE in 2006. A key driver was its adoption by the local authority as the platform of choice. The key driver from the Senior Leadership Team coincided with the LA as it pushed the authority-wide selection of the learning platform heavily, such that he felt obliged to take this on board. In the last year, however, the BSF initiative has been the key focus. The switching of initiatives within the LA was not felt to be conducive to a consistency in prioritising innovations within the school and there was a general feeling amongst Senior Leadership that they were constrained by their commitment to local and national agendas and the attendant pressures these generate. For this reason, also, the development of the MLE was not deemed a priority for the last academic year. Much has now been done, however, to move the MLE focus back to the fore.

There was some initial resistance to adoption of the MLE, mainly due to its perceived complexity and its lack of fit with existing school systems such as the shared

network. Over time, staff who did get on board felt able to take a more positive attitude:

> *"I was quite hostile to the MLE at the start... I found the Open Source stuff much more user friendly, so I kind of didn't want to get on board. But then I had to start using it and I did and I found it okay. There were some things I kind of quite liked about it."* (Teacher)

There is a dedicated ICT Strategy Group and structure for envisioning and implementing the ICT strategy at the school. A Multimedia Technician was employed in 2007 to support the embedding of the MLE in the school. However, this staff member resigned in the summer of 2009 as did the key policy driver – the Assistant Head. Whilst the current Head of ICT/ICT Coordinator is a member of the ICT Strategy Group who has sufficient scope to discuss and comment on implementation of the learning platform and its development as a support for teaching and learning, the lack of an ICT specialist involved in policy issues relating to technology development in the upper layers of the Senior Management Team has been identified as a potential gap by some members of staff.

> *"There's a gap unfortunately in our ICT leadership… so that's an issue. It's obviously something we still want to do but there's no one on the management team who has that sort of expertise at the moment."* (Head of Year)

> *"The development work was going very speedily when we had a support member of staff whose job it was to create and develop, to put these ideas into reality. Without this member of staff, our journey slowed down somewhat. We had been making good progress in that we were using the managed learning environment as a communication tool amongst stakeholders and there was a resource in place for staff for them to be able to quickly create materials online. Having support staff available is crucial. Whilst the vision for the learning platform was shared by many, time and expertise was lacking."* (ICT Coordinator)

Since the visit of the research team, the Multimedia Technician has now been replaced by a dedicated E-Learning Support Advisor with a specific remit of supporting staff in the classroom. Thus whilst these recent gaps in the development team had a slightly deleterious impact on the continued integration of the learning platform within the school over the last year, steps are now being taken to address this and to reinvigorate the MLE development plans. In particular, the key focus is on providing staff with the skills to develop their use of the learning platform independently.

Despite the issues and challenges caused by staff turnover, staff and learners are generally confident in their use of ICT and use of the school website, shared network areas and alternative e-learning environments such as blogs, wikis, dedicated

subject sites and activities such as podcasting, video conferencing and film and music production, which are regarded as particular strengths within the school.
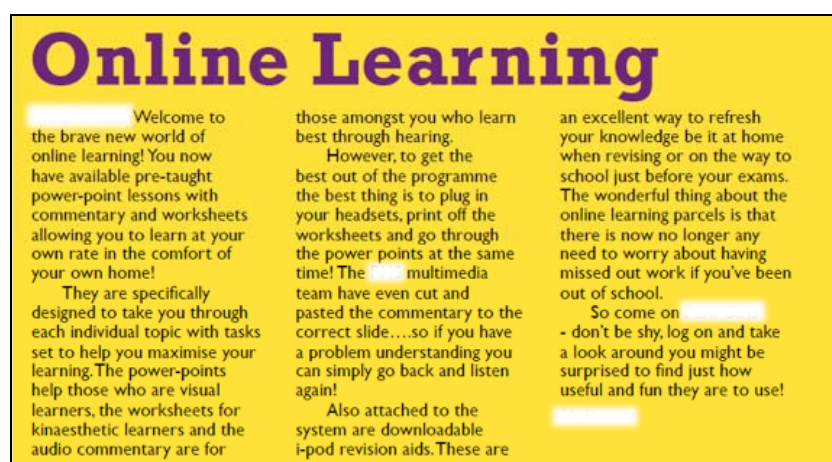
Staff members remain hopeful about the future of the learning platform and see potential for its use to support teaching and learning and enhanced communication, provided sufficient levels of support and strategic development plans are in place. The urgent replacement of the Multimedia Technician by a full-time dedicated, experienced e-learning support person is seen as key to future success, closely followed by allocated CPD time and adequate and relevant training opportunities for staff. As indicated above, the replacement of key e-learning support has now been achieved and the secondary element of CPD and training is in process.

Curriculum and teaching

Basic departmental information is available to all via the school website. Teaching and learning materials are primarily sourced via the school's shared networks at present, with only a small amount of content currently available via the MLE. Both the shared network and the MLE are accessible from home and at school by staff, learners, governors and parents. The parents' area has yet to be populated with data from the MIS but there are plans to implement this as part of the BSF ICT strand of the school development plan. The MIS is available to staff at home and is viewed by them as a valuable and useful resource. Whilst current use and development of the MLE has halted to a certain extent, there is evidence of some progress and success in its use to support curriculum development, communication between staff and learners and between school governors.

An early adopter was the history department, which made use of the MLE for resource sharing with learners in the form of 'online learning parcels'. Unfortunately, the member of staff driving this initiative moved on to another school, taking his resources with him so that, whilst remaining staff shared his desire to continue the work, they were left without many of the resources. With the employment of a new E-Learning Support Advisor, however, this department has become one of the first to take advantage of training and CPD now available., The advantages and aims of the initiative are clear: to extend learning practices between home and school, to bring resources together in one place, to provide a range of learning styles (audio, visual, textual, interactive, mobile) and to support learners when revising for exams, or to cover lessons missed at a time that best suits the learner whether at home (via computer) or on the go (via iPod).

Other resources used to support teaching and learning mentioned by staff and learners were the use of dedicated subject sites on the web, such as MyMaths, spelling sites, and dedicated diploma sites. Links to relevant websites are made available to staff and learners within the MLE and via the school website and ePortals.

Online Learning

Welcome to the brave new world of online learning! You now have available pre-taught power-point lessons with commentary and worksheets allowing you to learn at your own rate in the comfort of your own home!

They are specifically designed to take you through each individual topic with tasks set to help you maximise your learning. The power-points help those who are visual learners, the worksheets for kinaesthetic learners and the audio commentary are for those amongst you who learn best through hearing.

However, to get the best out of the programme the best thing is to plug in your headsets, print off the worksheets and go through the power points at the same time! The ___ multimedia team have even cut and pasted the commentary to the correct slide….so if you have a problem understanding you can simply go back and listen again!

Also attached to the system are downloadable i-pod revision aids. These are an excellent way to refresh your knowledge be it at home when revising or on the way to school just before your exams. The wonderful thing about the online learning parcels is that there is now no longer any need to worry about having missed out work if you've been out of school.

So come on ___ - don't be shy, log on and take a look around you might be surprised to find just how useful and fun they are to use!

An invitation to e-learning with the learning platform from the history department

Learning and learners

Learners all have log-ins for use of the MLE and were first introduced to the learning platform by their tutors in 2006. Most learners have had access to the MLE for three years now.

> *"Well, we had a session, we had a tutorial, when you're with your tutor in the class and then we got given our codes and stuff and so we were told by the teachers... our tutors."* (Learner)

Learners mostly use the learning platform for revision, homework and accessing teaching and learning resources. However, they mainly used the school website and the shared network area for these things rather than the MLE. Access to the MLE was mainly done at school and not at home and to access resources rather than for teaching and learning in lesson time.

Other than their use of the MLE in connection with Year 9 Options, learners appeared unsure as to how it was being used in school. When asked whether their teachers used the MLE in lessons, responses were:

> *"I'm not sure about that."* (Learner)

> *"I don't think they do, it's not a learning... I think it's what students are learning on."* (Learner)

This does not mean that the learning platform is not being used, just that its use is not widespread as yet and, without e-learning support, may currently be in hiatus in some subject areas. As indicated above, there was evidence of its use in history and of trials in various areas such as Year 7 French, the School Council and the library. There is also evidence that some teachers have been using it to support teaching and learning.

"I've used the MLE for three years. In the language department we've put things on there that the students can access. We've also got on the computer all the past exam papers and links and the listening papers, so you know that the girls can go away to revise from." (Teacher)

The learning platform has also been used more extensively by sixth-form ICT classes – an outcome pushed particularly in order to support learners being taught by a supply teacher at short notice.

"This is actually an A2 course... I had to very quickly come up with something – this is a class where the teacher resigned and I had to quickly find a replacement in January and we had a supply teacher who needed additional support – so I used this as my way of getting them to... we've got to work together." (Head of ICT)

This response to an immediate need was perceived to have worked very well and led to a deeper engagement with the learning platform and its facilities and also generated additional solutions for populating the learning platform with content. The Head of ICT now plans to use this course as an exemplar to show other staff members what can be done with the MLE and how it can support teaching and learning.
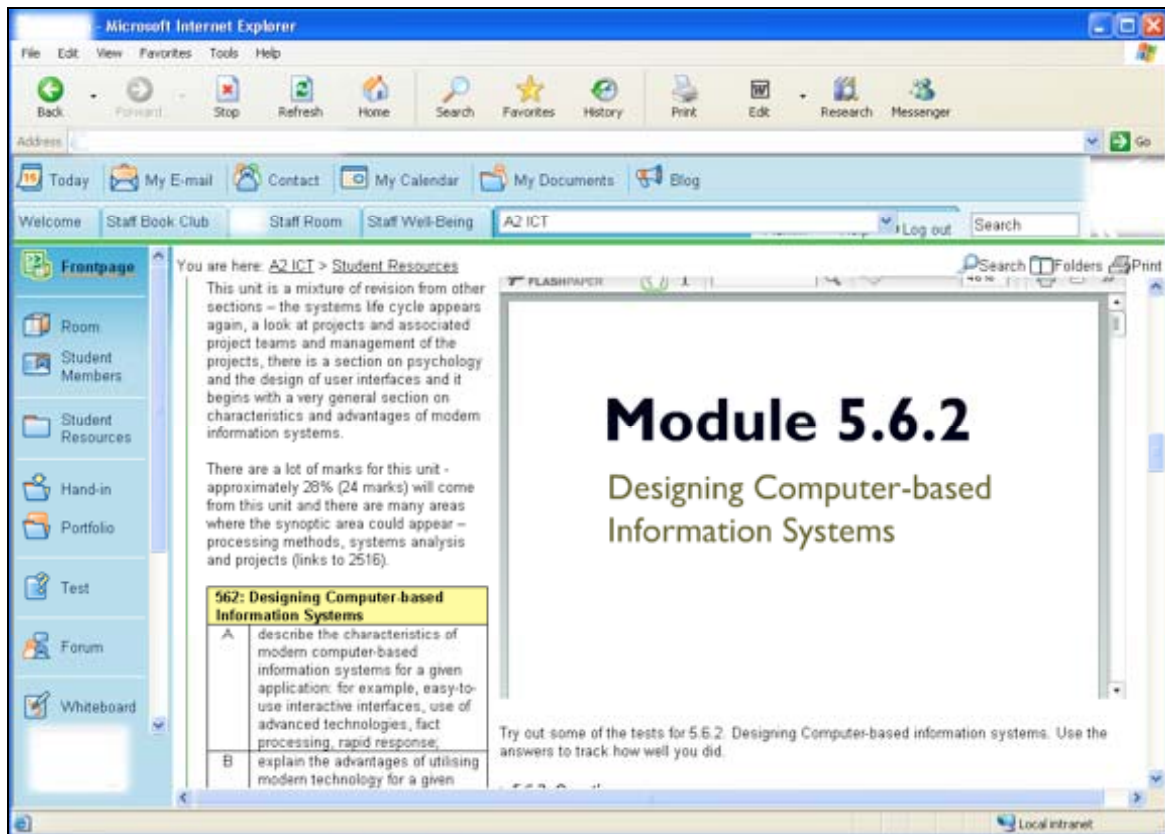
The A2 ICT Course on the MLE

The Head of ICT hopes to use the existing course to develop a template and activity approach to developing the website, involving teachers and learners. His aim was to incorporate a range of styles – text, visuals, etc. The site was also used for tests and collaboration and feedback. This in turn provided an evidence base for student progression, achievement and monitoring/discussion of progress with parents, learners and others.

> *"I involved the students essentially – I had 17 workers – and I was able to produce it much faster. I basically left everything in Word ... for the test, then PowerPoint, and I told them to hand it in to the shared area and then I was very quickly able to convert the lot – copied and pasted the test into the learning platform so we had those.* (Previously)... *we didn't have the ability to 'copy room' but now we do, so I should have the ability to duplicate this and then basically say to teachers, 'Pick on edit, change your title, add your new PowerPoint'.* (Head of ICT)

Parents and families

Communication with parents is currently effected mainly through the school website, paper-based materials and face-to-face meetings. The school website has a prominent Parents' link which provides information, contact details and information on adult learning classes, school policies, events, news, etc. Currently, parents do not have direct electronic access to student data. Reports are paper-based. Other communications (attendance, behaviour, urgent notices, etc.) are sent by text message or via student planners. Negative behaviour is reported by telephone, report or planner and positive learner behaviour is reported by postcard and planner. Parental communication was acknowledged an area for development but it was felt that interim priorities such as preparing for the BSF programme and embedding and integrating the use of the learning platform in teaching and learning were slowing down that process. The general perception was that parental communication could (and needs to) be improved and that the learning platform combining website, data management and the MLE was key to this. The school is aware of this need and future progress in this area is linked to the school's BSF development plan and in line with government targets for parental reporting. However, it is felt that this should not proceed until systems have been evaluated and agreed at whole-school level, given issue of data security and confidentiality, which are deemed too complex to rush.

> *"For parents, unless you're looking over your daughter's shoulder, there's no way to see. I would love to see a twitter broadcast at least once a week for parents... I want to be able to go in there and see what my kid's doing at any time and to make that a more open process."* (Parent)

At present most home to school communication is made in person, by telephone or, more rarely, by email. And, in relation to parental access to the MLE:

> *"There should be a parents' room. If there isn't one now, I think there should be. Yeah, there should be a parents' room and there should be a parents' forum."*
> (Parent-Governor)

There is actually a parents' room on the MLE, alongside provision for a Parents TV channel within the MLE. Parents were given a general log-in for the facility and in the early stages (2008-9), 36 visits were made by parents. An MLE user guide for parents was also provided within the room.
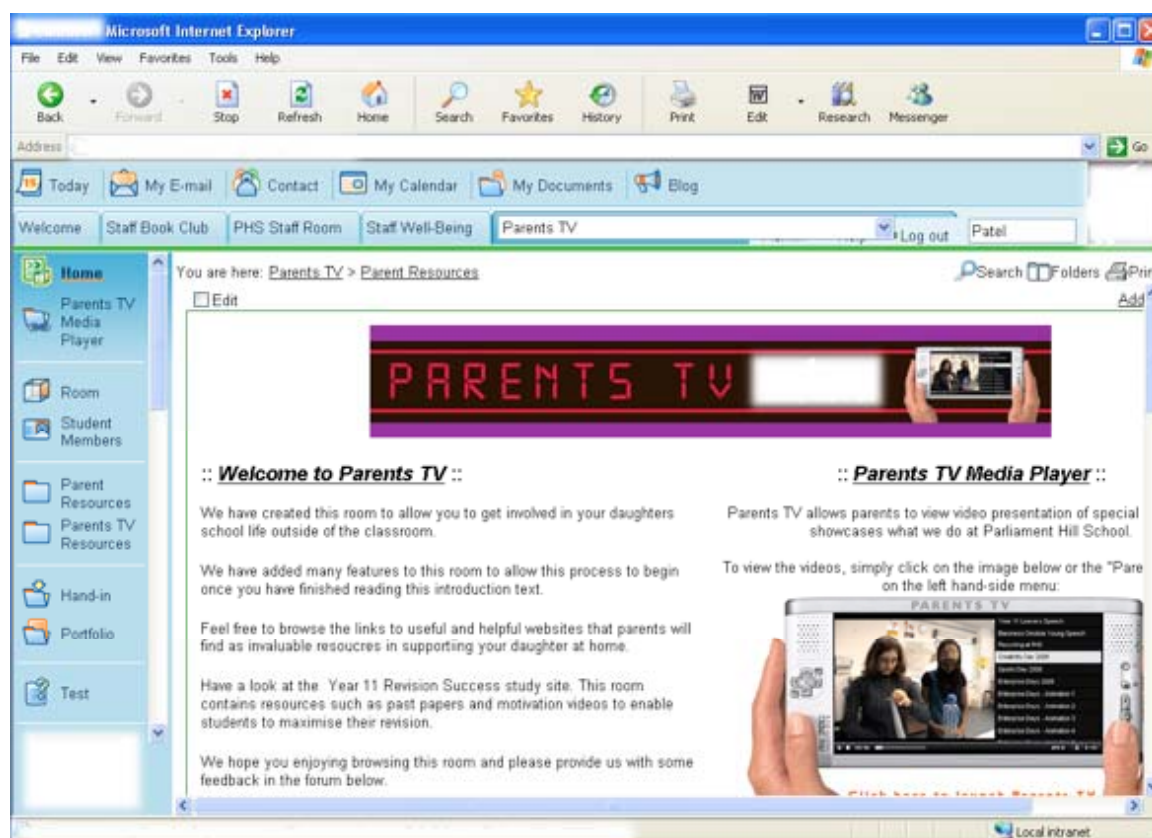
The learning platform TV – Parents' TV Channel

A recent area successfully developed in the learning platform is the Governor's room. A key driver in pushing this development and implementation is a recently elected parent-governor with a high level of ICT experience. The room is being used as a document repository and communication device. Set-up was initially supported by the Multimedia Technician. The aim was to move towards a paperless governing body and increased transparency of data and information flow. The paperless realm has not yet been achieved and in practice a hybrid system continues, in which both

are used. Some governors prefer hard copy and staff members, lacking technical support, are sometimes unsure how to disseminate documentation. Also, an issue arising has been the wide range of formats of electronic documents and it has been suggested that a single format be used – PDF – to prevent alteration of documents and ensure accessibility and compatibility across systems. Whilst there are some 'teething troubles' the system is seen as an improvement on a solely paper-based system and a positive step forward.

The benefits of the room are mainly seen to be the ability to share data, to provide a forum for discussion, an opportunity to bring together in one place a body of evidence of how the school is operating (useful for Ofsted), accessibility, and the ability to review and comment on data easily (financial, behavioural, operational, etc.).

A stakeholder success story – the Options Project

The introduction of a 14–19 Options area on the MLE marked a significant success in the use of the learning platform last year and this was commented on positively by all stakeholders – senior management, teachers, learners, parents and governors. The learning platform was used as a supplementary resource for external activities and events. Information about Options procedures and pathways, together with downloadable resources in the form of an Options booklet and the ability to watch online videos in which staff and learners talked about and demonstrated subject areas, were much valued by all. The site also included a discussion forum which enabled learners to communicate with careers tutors and Connexions advisors in the school and this was viewed extremely positively by both learners and teachers. Over 180 posts were dealt with.

> *"Yes, we had an online careers surgery on the MLE where students could write in and ask questions and myself or the careers advisers would reply to these questions. And if we needed to see them face-to-face we could give them an appointment time to drop in. So that was a good idea, that worked quite well. They enjoyed that. We had over 180 postings, some from the same girls. But what happened as well, through that forum, the girls were communicating with each other and offering each other advice on what they should do and what they thought about it. Yeah, the girls took it very seriously."* (Careers Tutor, Year 9)

> *"I did [ask questions on the forum] but then they sent it back and I had to go to some careers meeting or something. They respond to you quickly if you just send a message. I saw other people's questions as well."* (Year 10 learner)

Videos were presented within the MLE using a media player – Options TV – which was easy and simple to navigate. Videos were produced by learners and teachers with the support of the school's Multimedia Technician. Each video was generated

using a script and this was seen to be beneficial by both learners and parents in terms of knowing what to expect and in terms of their being just long enough and relevant enough, to be fit for purpose.

> *"I think there was enough information because, like, we don't need that much, it's just like a short bit saying how the lessons... Just briefly explaining, you know, is it worth taking."* (Year 10 learner)

> *"I looked over the shoulder of my daughter as she flipped through it. All her things because I wanted to see if she could use the interface and the interface came there with all the videos and the students being interviewed about what's involved in taking their GCSE and all the other bits and pieces."* (Parent)

Options page on the MLE

The scripts took the form of a brief introduction to the curriculum, an example of a lesson in action and commentaries on subjects and experiences by learners.

> *"We pretty much had a template which is ... 'Tell us about the exam board, tell us the weighting of coursework to exam, what sort of students would like it' and we all followed the template."* (Head of ICT)

> *"That script was really good only because you knew what answers you were going to get without having to search a long, all over the place and it was up-to-date. I think it was a very useful resource."* (Parent)

> *"So we went through this with the Options TV and looked at different subjects, right. What do I do now... scroll... so, let's do triple science and we watch video together."* (Parent)

A key driver for the development of this project area on the MLE was the introduction of many new curricular pathways and the need to inform parents of changes and what they might mean for their children.

> *"Parents say it's good. I mean, look, the kids who made this stuff in media studies – their parents were saying, 'Oh, you've got to look at the website because my kid did this one, my kid did this one...' – pride... pride of school, of place, everything."* (Parent-Governor)

> *"It was a motivator, it was internally created, it had internal actors and actresses – but – it gets the message across.*" (Parent-Governor)

As well as being motivating for parents and learners, it was also an effective exercise for teachers, both in terms of time-saving (not having to talk about their subject repetitively) but also in terms of having more informed learners apply for their subject areas.

> *"I do actually think it's really good. It's a really good idea to watch the Options videos. It was really good for the Options process, especially for parents as well to actually see the teachers and the kind of stuff they're doing. I would say I was very specific in my Options processing in terms of how I placed it and we've had a better calibre of students this year, not just the "I'm going to sit and watch films" students – we've had a lot of people who are a lot more interested."* (Head of Media)

Learners were particularly motivated by the Options videos and information page on the MLE as they felt more informed, from a range of different perspectives and felt this gave them a forum to raise questions and discuss future opportunities with their friends.

> *"Graphics – I didn't know how they did their lessons, so when you looked on the videos, you got more interested."* (Learner)

"They were more useful because you'd get kids' opinions as well of what they thought of the subject, not just the teachers." (Learner)

"I didn't have anyone to suggest to me this lesson but I watched the videos and then I just chose them myself with my parents." (Learner)

"We watched them in school as a class once and then by ourselves and we'd call our friends and say, you know, 'Look at this!', you know – stuff like that." (Learner)

GCSE Drama video on Options TV

"We actually learned a lot from it and what we should do – it boosted up our confidence if we should do it or not." (Learner)

"When you read, like, you don't get much interested but when it's on video, you can see what's going on." (Learner)

3. Benefits of using the learning platform

Findings from the case study are described below.

Data management
The school has a two-member team (Data Manager and School Information Officer) dedicated to data management. The MIS is valued by staff and is used to track attendance and behaviour as well as monitoring student progress. The benefit of the system is seen in its ability to provide 'at a glance' data. Recently, the reporting system has been extended to allow electronic entry of learner, tutor, and head of year feedback and this is viewed positively by staff as a time-saving and efficient device.

> *"Having the ePortal definitely helps because the first year it was all on pro formas on the computer and it took me about seven hours because you had to – there were two sides for every student – and now we can just put in a 500-600 word comment that then gets collated and given to the tutors, so it's massively time-saving."* (Teacher)

> *"I'm very much a champion of this (MIS). Because it makes much more sense, it's much more efficient. I can plan at home. I can get hold of the kids' data at home... account for differentiation from there. It's very useful for me to keep a record of past assessments, levels given and comments and its – just to me it makes more sense than paper which is just dreadful – it gets lost so much."* (Teacher)

However, MIS data is not yet available to parents and this is seen as a significant gap in communication.

> *"It's [student data] stored somewhere that parents can't get to. Only staff can get to and that's one thing I'd like to see if a personal report could come out for each student that's both electronic and written... that would be progress. That all comes in written form now not in text form."* (Parent)

But there are issues, from a privacy and data management perspective:

> *"Well, yes, that's the kind of thing they should be able to get access to – results and stuff like that. Only, it's going to have to ... it's going to be quite tricky because you've got to assign – now we're talking about assigning student access rights times two because it's got to be, you know, mum and dad logging in – how secure is that, who else can see it. You know, it's a thorny issue."* (Staff Member)

Transparency of data flow and direct access to data were seen as positive benefits by governors.

> *"One year ago, we made a learning platform for governors. Without having to ask a secretary, I could go click, click, click and get everything now. I could go straight there."* (Parent-Governor)

Learner behaviour and motivation

Sharing data electronically has been a particular benefit for staff members as they can see 'at a glance' how a learner is performing, whether there are any concerns, where they are meant to be in school, etc. As indicated above, however, this level of data sharing hasn't yet been replicated between home and school although the desire to do so is there.

> *"The ePortal's ... great because you can see incidents that girls have been involved in. Like, the Year 10s – incidents are logged, their behaviour is logged. If they're excluded you can see the exclusion letter. You can see their attendance; you can see where they're meant to be, their timetables, everything."* (Teacher)

> *"We have serious concerns screens where progress is viewed. You have your class list on ePortal and you say 'Do you have any serious concerns, equipment, deadlines, punctuality?' and you can choose to just tick the boxes or you can put a comment in and say... It's like 1, 2, 3, 4."* (Teacher)

Learners were generally positive about technology-mediated learning, although they did raise lack of computers in some classrooms as an issue.

> *"For me, it's quite good because I understand it more than just reading it in a textbook, write it down, put it in your brain, you know... when it's on the computer, you know, it's animated, it's more like fun, it gets..."* (Learner)

> *"We have MyMaths. The teacher's put homework for us and then we do it and she checks every week if we've done it, who hasn't done it, why haven't you done it. It's a website. We're familiar with it now, so we just log in... say when you log in and it says – you have this much homework – you can't do anything without doing it. It's really good."* (Learner)

> *"It would actually be quite hard because not every class has a computer and when you have homework, for example, in maths we don't have computers."* (Learner)

Enhanced communication

The most common means of communicating within the school and wider community were email and telephone, followed by face-to-face appointments. Learners and teachers felt that communication of data and information between home and school was generally good, whilst governors felt it could be improved. Overall, there was still a heavy reliance on paper-based communication but, where used (feedback comments on reports, data sharing amongst governors, options videos, for example) electronic solutions were viewed positively. The potential of the learning platform to bring together communications and to improve data flow between stakeholders was recognised and a desire expressed to take this forward in the near future.

> *"[Parents] don't have access to student data yet but it's something we have been discussing about how we are going to start sharing this information and we have been discussing how we do that – that is, we are aware of that."* (SMT)

Learners communicated confidently with teachers via email. Homework was sometimes submitted electronically. Some staff members valued the use of collaborative tools such as wikis and blogs and these have been used to facilitate learner peer-to-peer and school–public collaboration and feedback and to showcase learners' work. Some frustrations were expressed at school filtering and the inability to use sites such as YouTube within the school setting. At least one parent expressed a desire to see the use of Twitter for news updates.

Assessment

Tests and teacher and peer feedback and review were used within the MLE to support teaching and learning in A2 ICT. It is hoped that this exemplar can be used to show teachers how to make effective use of the MLE for teaching and learning, and assessment for learning.

> *"I was able to pull up on the board all the students' answers... each individual answer, so that when we did an assessment for learning activity – why did this girl get full marks and why didn't this student get the full marks? What had they missed out?* (Head of ICT)

These activities were also regarded as beneficial in terms of providing evidence of learners' learning for Ofsted – particularly in subject areas like ICT, where learners no longer use exercise books. The ability for learners to access these resources at any time was also viewed as beneficial for revision and exam purposes.

Resources

Learners liked having access to resources via the shared networks and found this helpful in managing their work between home and school, as well as for sharing and collaborating with their peers and uploading homework and class work for teacher review.

> *"In school we have this document – it's in RM shared, it's called 'ICT Diploma' and it has all the units that we do."* (Learner)

> *"We put them (homework and class work) in our own accounts and then when we need them, we just print it off and give it to teachers or send it by email."* (Learner)

The staff area in the MLE is quite well populated with content but is not used much as yet. The perception is that this is because its benefits were not promoted sufficiently to staff. The area is well populated with links to teaching resources and other areas of the school's learning platform and there is a Staff Book Club.

> *"The staff room was begun... it was intended as an intranet... there's a lot of information that has to be – it's normally stored in a combination of places, emails, pigeonholes, post-its... so this was kind of meant to bring it all together and become like a one-stop shop for staff to find things out."* (Head of ICT)

> *"I've actually started to realise that the diploma is going to be taught much better if I kind of have it in the MLE. I've got the structure going and that's kind of the most important thing and when you start to create these things you've got to think about your structure, think about what you're going to have in there before you get going..."* (Head of ICT)

Staff expressed a willingness to use the learning platform but indicated that they need time and/or support to enable this to happen.

> *"With the MLE system, I think it would take people's confidence a while to build up to it and I would probably be happy to play around with it and I did... I was happy... but now I've forgotten over the summer exactly how to add it in and I think, as well, it needs to be a non-teaching member of staff. It needs to be someone who specialises in it."* (Teacher)

> *"I think – making it more fun... making it a part of a daily habit because I don't think teachers have a lot of time. So ... maybe a bit of time, to say, well, actually, we're going to take you off timetable for the afternoon – we'll finish at 2 o'clock, everyone can have a bit of time just to get stuff on there."* (Teacher)

Critical thinking

Key areas where use of the learning platform encouraged learner reflection and discussion were the provision of the Year 9 Options page and videos and the use of the MLE to bring together theory and current technology news using RSS feeds for A2 ICT.

"I used the functionality of bringing in the technology because the problem I had at A level was the students weren't reading outside of the subject, not reading around the subject, so this is the RSS feeds I brought in, the theory pages which I set up..." (Head of ICT)

"Yeah, we'd have discussions, like – me and a group of my friends would sit down and say, like, 'So what do you want to pick – have you seen that?' and like, 'Yeah, I think that one's quite good' and we'll talk about it and pick what we'd like to pick." (Learner)

Online quizzes and tests were also used in AS/A2 ICT to generate learner discussion, reflection and peer feedback.

Access

Access and ease of access were seen to be key drivers by all stakeholders interviewed. Access was not universally available within the school. Some staff members felt that increased access and availability of technologies in non-specialist classrooms would encourage greater use of the learning platform for teaching and learning, such as where learners were engaged in group learning or learning carousels in English or Modern Languages. Access was perceived to be not only about availability of equipment but also about support networks – technical, pedagogical, administrative and managerial.

Variety in learning opportunities

There was evidence of a wide variety of e-learning solutions being used in the school and of a wide curriculum offering, much of which was enhanced through technology use, although this was more likely to occur via websites and shared networks than the MLE at present.

"We have staff who use ICT quite competently, they just aren't on board with the managed learning environment." (Teacher)

"I mean there's a lot of things that we've done in our department... a website for students' coursework, embedding videos – very simple to do. Uploading it onto the MLE was very difficult. So, there were movies... and the students loved it – we put in audio files, writing frames – we put everything in and then we thought it would be a great idea to put it on the MLE because then that gives 170 kids straight access to the learning platform and gets them familiarised with it and it was just very difficult." (Teacher)

There were some frustrations at the level of in-school filtering of potential resources, such as YouTube, preventing opportunities for feedback from, and collaboration with, wider audiences and a desire was expressed that such tools be incorporated into the learning platform. Innovative use of ICT in other areas – wikis, blogs, podcasting, digital radio, music technology, film production and video conferencing, graphics and

the use of existing shared networks suggest that the confidence and skills levels are there for a successful expansion and integration of the learning platform, provided there is relevant and cooperative support and training. In addition to in-school opportunities, partnerships with area consortia and external organisations, in particular those linked to new diploma qualifications, also offer new pathways for increased variety in learning opportunities available to learners.

4. Challenges and solutions

The initial implementation and integration of the learning platform has met with both successes and challenges. Commercial solutions are not always the best fit and communication and feedback opportunities with users are desirable. Issues of staff retention and the loss of ICT champions have generated continuity difficulties in developing and integrating systems. This realisation has led to the understanding that responsibilities have to be spread across a wider user base, with champions at all levels and for ICT specialist input at senior management levels. Lack of time and confidence in skills transfer and creation/regeneration of existing resources is perceived as a possible barrier to positive uptake of the learning platform by some staff members. An e-learning support advisor is planned to address these issues.

Other issues relate to ease of use, lack of direction, multiplicity of types of e-learning, multiple and competing priorities at whole-school level (a shift in focus from ICT to Design Technology, Maths and Science in the school's specialism, new curricular demands, additional responsibilities as a Training School, and a sense of 'being in limbo' whilst moving towards participation in the BSF programme). Despite these complex and shifting needs within the school community, overall the school retains a positive attitude towards the use of ICT to support teaching and learning and facilitate home–school communication and partnerships. A few key stakeholders amongst staff remain committed to reviewing and auditing the progress of the learning platform and to making informed, practical, phased opportunities for future iterations, building on what has worked successfully, learning from identified issues and acting on stakeholder desires. In order for this to happen, all stakeholders need to be brought on board, including management and administration, teaching and support staff, learners, parents and governors.

5. Drivers

The key drivers for implementation of the learning platform were:

- adoption of the MLE solution by the LA
- a group of ICT champions at the school; a Multimedia Technician employed specifically to assist with the implementation of the learning platform; some key technology-motivated teachers, and
- an ICT Strategy Group (comprising the Headteacher, the school's Finance Officer, the Assistant Head/Head of ICT, the ICT Coordinator, and others).

More recent key drivers (a second wave is currently developing in the school) are the current Head of ICT/ICT Coordinator, Head of Media, Business/ICT teachers and an ICT-specialist parent-governor. Each of these brings different elements to build towards a cooperative vision:

- a coherent ICT strategy
- e-learning resources that are fit for purpose, easy to use, create, disseminate and share
- e-learning resources that permit learner collaboration and showcasing of work
- ICT that facilitates communications between home and school, school and community, learner and teachers, teachers and parents and between communities as well as providing a transparent flow of data and resources.

The school also has a BSF consultant driving forward the ICT strand. An E-Learning Coordinator has been appointed and the replacement of the Finance Officer with a Director of Operations has seen an increase in the ICT competence of new staff.

6. Conditions for success

Key conditions for success were having available ICT champions promoting, developing and implementing the learning platform at multiple levels; having full-time dedicated e-learning support to assist staff in populating the learning platform with content and helping staff with their training needs – a technology specialist with sufficient confidence to be able to lead/support staff effectively; allocation of training time for staff; generating a sense of shared ownership in the learning platform with opportunities for feedback on systems; exemplar materials showing best practice; easy integration and the ability to import existing materials into the learning platform. Involvement of the wider community, particularly parents, and increased transparency of communication and availability of data was also a key criterion for success.

7. Lessons learnt

What has become clear since the recent departure of key ICT champions is the need for a clear, coherent, cooperative strategy, integrating not only existing school systems but also human systems. Participation needs to be more democratic and a shared vision at all levels needs to be encouraged and supported if an integrated learning platform is to be sustainable. Development needs to involve a committed team of people and should not rest on the shoulders of one or two people who then depart, taking the knowledge base with them. A phased, scaled implementation is desirable, based on a basic exemplar framework of best practice in (1) teaching and learning, (2) data management, (3) communication, with adequate e-learning support and the support of senior management. The view was expressed by staff members interviewed that the current implementation needs to be audited and trimmed back to generate a more coherent system. When this is in place, with new communication pathways, teams should be generated. Training needs to be of the 'just in time' variety rather than 'one size fits all'. Staff need to be introduced to the learning platform in ways that make sense to them, in ways that fit their needs.

> *"There are a number of resources on the network which, you know, training materials – so people can go with it. But what I see as a problem is, it was unveiled and rolled out but it didn't have anything on it. There was no content. There was no content driving it."* (Teacher)

> *"We were offered three training places, two-day training places which is not enough for teaching staff, it's really not."* (Teacher)

> *"Someone went on the training and then went off on maternity leave – obviously we can't control that but it means there's a whole big gap in that department."* (Teacher)