

## **School use of learning platforms and associated technologies**

### **Case study: Primary School 4**

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## Primary School 4

*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 opened in 2000 with just four teachers and has grown since then to a large primary school with currently 420 learners. It belongs to a rural partnership between schools, a cluster of 19 primaries, and this was one of the driving forces for the adoption and development of the learning platform. The governing body, which was formed one year before the opening of the school, had a vision for the school to become a Beacon school for ICT and to have ICT-skilled staff and learners. Therefore the drive to develop technologies was there even before learning platforms came into place. The school holds the ICT Mark.

The school could be considered as well equipped, with Year 6 learners having a laptop each (that remains in school), Year 5 learners sharing one laptop between two, 16 mini books for Years 3-4 (mainly for internet browsing), 2 trolleys of 15 laptops each for Key Stage 1, and 2 PCs for Foundation learners. In addition, all staff have laptops. There is a Green Screen, a Mac in Year 6, interactive whiteboards, MP3 players, digital cameras, and Beebots. The initial building area has been expanded and the school now has extra rooms, including a small room for teaching assistants and mentors. The ICT coordinator appointed in 2000 only stayed for a short time, the second ICT coordinator worked there for around 3 years, and then there was a time that the head and deputy head were leading/coordinating ICT use until the current ICT coordinator was appointed.

The school has collaborative links with other schools within the cluster, within the broader LA as a member of the local Learning Zone and within the learning platform community. The rural cluster of 19 primary schools aimed initially to use technology to enhance communication and collaboration. The cluster has thus been piloting the learning platform sharing resources (equipment, materials/planning), practices (using tools, for example), knowledge (content) and ideas. In addition, the school is operating within a triad (with two other schools) and collaboration has been established between heads, between staff through shared planning and between learners through visits for joint projects. The three schools have recently signed a joint contract for a teaching assistant/peripatetic teacher and plan to do the same with other staff contracts to provide more opportunities for staff. The learning platform has been facilitating this collaboration, from sharing equipment to celebrating work, showcasing it outside the individual schools. The Issue Log is an area on the learning platform where teachers can fill in a form describing the issue, in a category (hardware/software) and the technician can provide a solution, comments and suggestions. The Issue Log was created by the e-learning coordinator on the learning platform at first as a trial, to enable the technician who is

shared with four other schools (and visits this school two days per week) to solve technical problems remotely, and to identify common technical issues and analyse trends across schools, therefore being more efficient as well as saving time and money.

The school also has links with external agents, for example through the Future Creative government initiative. An example of collaboration with external agents is the involvement of a musician from a rock band who visited the school and helped learners to write songs and shared those with the community on the learning platform.

In line with the Rose review, the senior management team restructured management teams, so instead of appointing subject leaders, the school has now teams (with four teachers and support staff) leading two to three subjects and working towards school improvement.

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*Rural Cluster collaboration on the learning platform*

## **2. How the learning platform is used**

### **General observations**

The learning platform was chosen collectively by all the cluster schools. Initially the partnership was given funding and took the learning platform at a pilot stage, then funding was ensured for members of the local Learning Zone and the school decided to stay with this learning platform. The decision was taken after demonstrations of other platforms were arranged for the school and attended at BETT. A reason for choosing this over other learning platforms was its interoperability with the Management Information System. As a result, data from the MIS can be exported to the learning platform and this meshing was seen as a great advantage. In considering which platform to adopt, the school looked for its potential for the future and teachers were involved in this process. (A teacher champion mentions that the Vme (virtual me) avatar creation tool was one of the things she liked about it.) The school signed the contract to get the learning platform for two years and then another contract until 2012. After that, it will be the decision of each school in the cluster concerning which platform they will employ.

### **Management and administration**

The SMT uses the learning platform to communicate information and in general to streamline management. The senior management team monitors learners' progress and teachers' work (such as planning) more easily and in a more immediate way using the learning platform, without for example having to chase people for their planning. The way the data is presented on the learning platform allows the senior management team to monitor whole class or individual learner progress and to identify children that need support, as well to show this data to Ofsted or external visitors. The headteacher is also responsible for the governors' site on the learning platform, which is used for uploading minutes and general information. The collaboration between schools within the cluster has been made possible because of the learning platform. At management level the learning platform has facilitated other processes such as exchange and sharing of equipment across the schools (through booking on the learning platform), comparing practices and knowledge (about quality of different printers, for example) and solving technical issues using the Issue Log.

Initially, the senior management team established the 'Staff area' on the learning platform, and initiated its use by teachers by making it a main way of communication (for example, the Briefing sheets with important information were put up on the portal and that was the only way the staff could access this information). It thus became a responsibility for teachers to access the learning platform and find information rather than waiting for SMT to distribute this information in print. From then on, the senior management team pinpointed individuals who are more ICT confident or have IT skills/background to provide support to other staff, rolling out skills. The senior management team allowed for time for initial training for staff and devoted many staff

meetings on the learning platform where the e-learning coordinator and the teacher-champions could demonstrate its uses. Problems arising from using technologies are solved through ad hoc support by staff members, during conversations at break/lunch time. IT-literate teachers and senior management team members can provide help and solve immediate issues while a technician (shared with four other schools) can solve problems remotely as well as at school. The Issue log on the learning platform allows staff to report technical problems and the technician to access these out of school. This year the focus is on empowering teachers to develop their own areas but also on engaging parents. This focus on parental engagement through the learning platform was initiated by a recent Ofsted report that suggested that parents are communicated to well, but would like to have more engagement and participation.

The people appointed by the senior management team to lead the implementation of learning platform are enthusiastic about technology and have the knowledge to support other teachers. The e-learning coordinator works in this school two days a week and helps staff to realise their ideas, as well transferring suggestions to the strategic level and the developers for further development. Her role also includes finding out about software that could be useful for the schools, recommending it to the cluster; the cluster head-teachers make decisions of what to purchase at cluster level and at school level based on evaluation of the software by the hands-on support team (e-learning coordinator, teachers, headteachers from cluster schools). She is also responsible for implementing the Self-review framework to inform the e-learning vision of the school.

A teacher-champion offers support to other teachers to use the learning platform and technology more generally, focusing on pedagogy and the creative curriculum. Although she has been working in this school for only 16 months, she had experience with using the same learning platform in a previous school and she has been playing an important role in the development of the platform, through close communication with the developer. As the Deputy Head confirms, this teacher was appointed because she is knowledgeable, motivated and instils confidence in staff.

Teacher-champions provide support at lunch-time/break time and during staff meetings. The motivation for these teachers comes from their enthusiasm about technology and their belief that this can have a benefit for learning. Some release time from teaching was given but no strategic action was taken to roll out to all staff the use of the learning platform. Therefore, there appear to be some staff who use the learning platform extensively and others who are just starting. The teacher-champions take up the burden:

*“I think sometimes that’s a difficulty when you’ve been seen as the champion, or the expert or whatever that you sort of get to do it and...”* [Teacher-champion]

The ICT team, consisting of teacher–champions and the e-learning coordinator, is a driving force in the school for the development of the learning platform. The team sets goals for each year; for example, last year e-safety policy and target setting were in focus. The interactions within the team, between staff and e-learning coordinator are important for keeping the motivation of teacher–champions in implementing the learning platform and supporting other staff members in doing so.

*“My point is that when you’ve got someone that has enthusiasm you need to have access to a translator that doesn’t mean that they have to be physically in the school but I personally believe that there needs to be a point of contact, a custodian, with an overarching perspective...otherwise I don’t think that [the teacher champion] could maintain her level of motivation so long...” [E-learning coordinator]*

*“I think what would be great is if every school could have someone like [the e-learning coordinator] ...I absolutely think it’s a very important part of the success, it’s been an important part of my success and I am very motivated and willing to, you know, skill myself up if I don’t know things ...” [Teacher–champion]*

## **Curriculum and teaching**

Teachers use the software provided within the learning platform to plan and deliver their lessons. An advantage of having this software on learning platform is that teachers can access it remotely.

In the Staff area teachers receive messages and information on the learning platform, communicating at different levels (senior management team, learners, parents). Some teachers have been using various tools on the learning platform, wikis, blogs and discussion forums to enhance their teaching.

Teachers also have collaborative spaces on the learning platform (Interest spaces, Discussions/instructional pages) for sharing resources within their school and with the cluster schools.

The learning platform had implications on teachers’ work, as it contributed to raising expectations for teachers through enabling ‘anytime anywhere’ access for staff, learners and families.

*“It has work-place implications because the role of the teacher is changing and I think – you know I made the joke two, three years ago that I used to sit with my laptop in bed on Sunday morning and answering children’s discussions – and I think the hours of learning are blurring a little bit and I think in some ways*

*that's bad for teachers because we are expected to do more, I suppose more hours."* [Teacher]

Teaching assistants have access to general information (mostly targeted to teachers) on the learning platform.

*"The main use that teaching assistants have is for, at home, to get on to look at... we used to have a playground rota they used to put on there, and we do a [phonics] group and they would tell us our groups on there. And we get alerts at home...every day...and it saves us having to go especially onto the portal to look to see if anyone's put anything up...yes, I would like more training on how to get and find things on there ..."* [Teaching Assistant]

The learning platform has also enabled the work of a peripatetic teacher, who works in three of the cluster schools, as she can access information and planning for all three schools on the learning platform.

*"A peripatetic teacher for maths and ... she is employed across those three schools and we actually couldn't have employed her in that way as efficiently if we hadn't got the learning platform, because she is able to access the planning for all three schools, and we have a particular triad area ...we couldn't have got the value-added efficiency out of her."* [E-learning coordinator]

## **Learning and learners**

On the Learning Space, learners can find hyperlinks to websites, their homework, content they have created (such as wikis), and they can also see other information concerning their attendance, targets and results such as SATs. The learning platform also has an area where both learners and staff can upload documents. There are Mark books that link to uploading work that teachers can use to comment/correct learners' work.

The learning platform provides a secure area for learners to practise their communication and presentation skills; for example, when using the discussion areas they learn to comment appropriately and to use reasoning/justification. The messages can be private, which learners find helps them ask the teacher questions that they wouldn't have asked in class. In turn, they can also receive individual messages from the teacher, which they find useful for clarifying or getting help.

Podcasting has been used to record and showcase learners' work on the learning platform; for example, learners were recorded reading environmental poems and their drawings were scanned and published on the learning platform. In addition, learners can upload photos on the learning platform and share them with their class.



*“If you go on holiday somewhere if you have like some really, really nice pictures you could put them on there and then [the teacher] could just like flick through them in class and...” [Year 4 learner]*

Target setting has been one of the most successful practices developed in relation to the learning platform in this school, and had positive outcomes, such as refining practice and improving attainment, because it enables learners and teachers to focus on specific targets, and to review them more frequently.

*“Well, if our teacher thinks we’ve achieved them then she can put a tick, or like a half tick, if we’ve partially achieved them, so then we know whether we have achieved them or not. And then we’ve got a different screen now...it will tell you how many you’ve got in progress, how many you have achieved, and how many you still need to achieve later on. Yes, that’s quite good, so you can have a look, and if you’ve got none then you don’t need to open the page. If you’ve got something, you can click on them and find out what they are.” [Learner]*

Immediacy has been added to the communication between learners and teachers as they can exchange messages at any time. This appears to be motivating for learners and saving them time and helps avoid them doing their work wrongly. In addition, this enables learners to explain how they did their work to the teacher:

*“You can write messages back to her [the teacher], like saying, I found this tricky, or I found it really easy, and stuff about the work.” [Learner]*

*“And like, some of us don’t do working out, we do it all in our head, but you can actually send a message to the teacher saying how you did it, and if you had trouble doing it.” [Learner]*

The learning platform is also a way of teaching various ICT skills which learners appreciate:

*“If you, did you notice from the discussions an awful lot of our children tend to use like font size Ouch and background Oobah, ...so again, I’ve given them some kind of tips here, and I’ve said, either a font size two or three is fine, and I’ve given them some kind of tips...” [E-learning coordinator]*

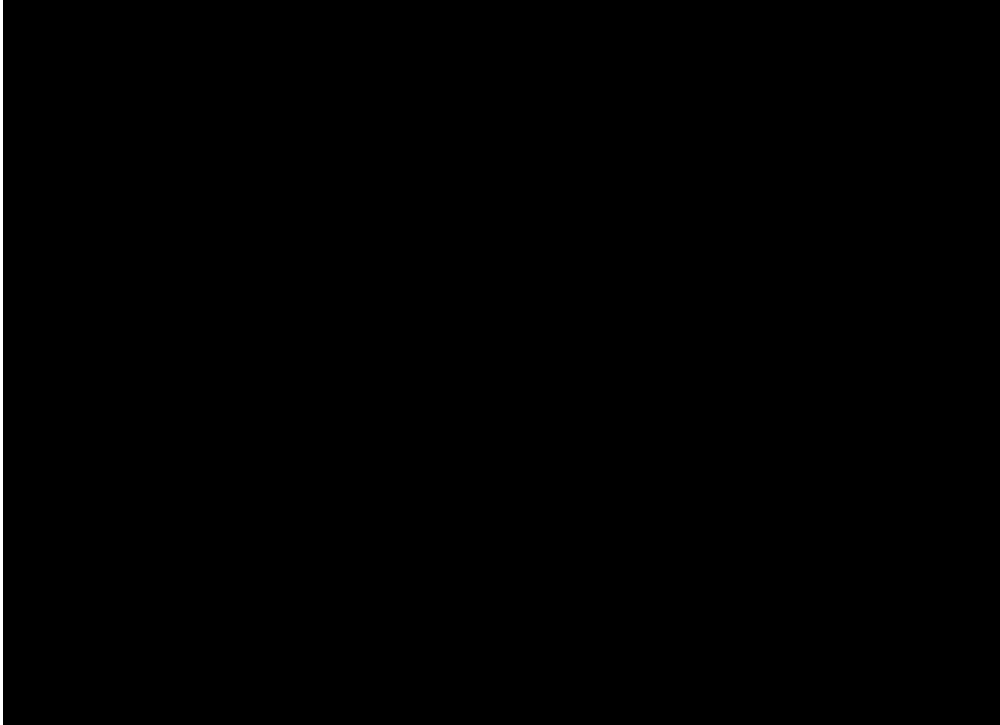
*“And also, I’ve learnt how to hand in homework, because you just attach it and then hand it in, and it’s much more easier, so I’ve learnt everything on the portal, really.” [Learner]*

*“You learn how to download pictures, and do the wikis that we’re doing in our classroom. We’re learning how to, like, copy and paste stuff, like via the portal, because we can, like, do stuff, and upload our work, and stuff. So we’ve learnt how to do that, and we’ve learnt how to do lots of, like video things on there,*

*like linked to the portal, because we can do it on there and it's like a safe resource."* [Learner]

*"I mean, it's, it's funny because a lot of the homework that [my child] had got, she's using Google and various other search engines to do her research and that helps them understand search engine technology and just how the way the web works."* [Parent]

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*Creating the wiki (Year 6)*

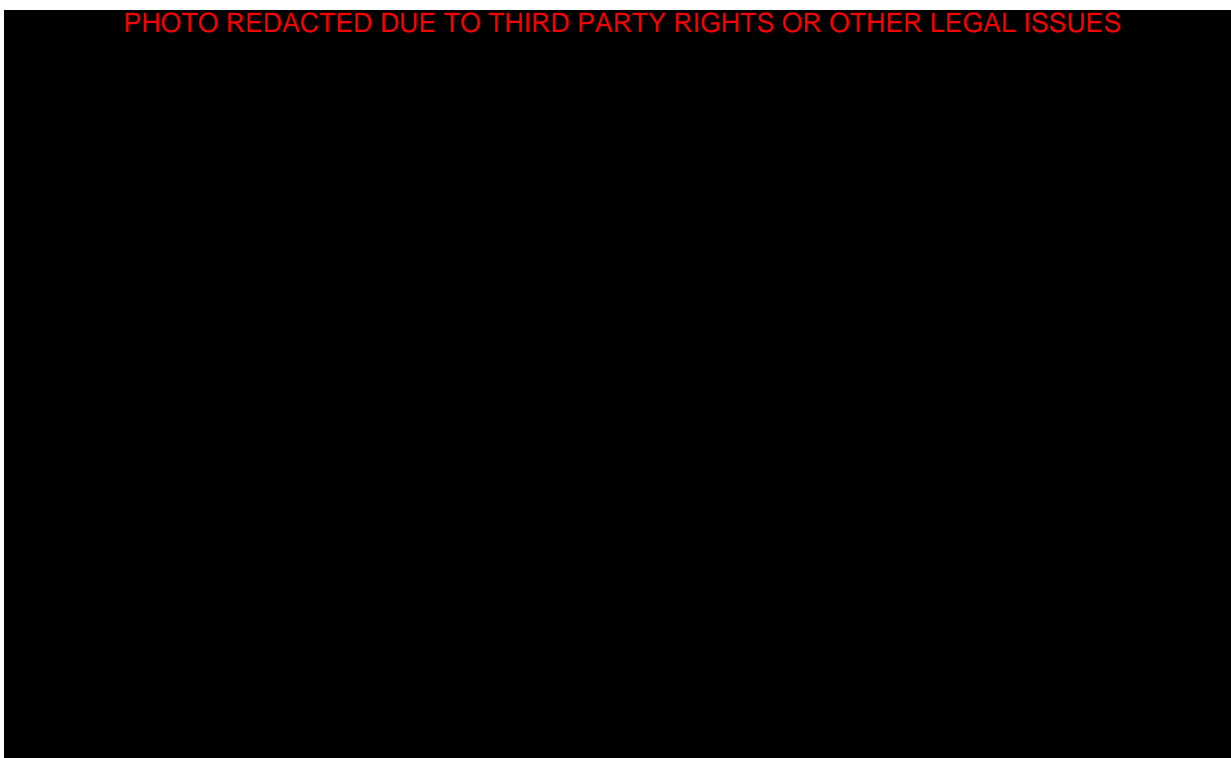
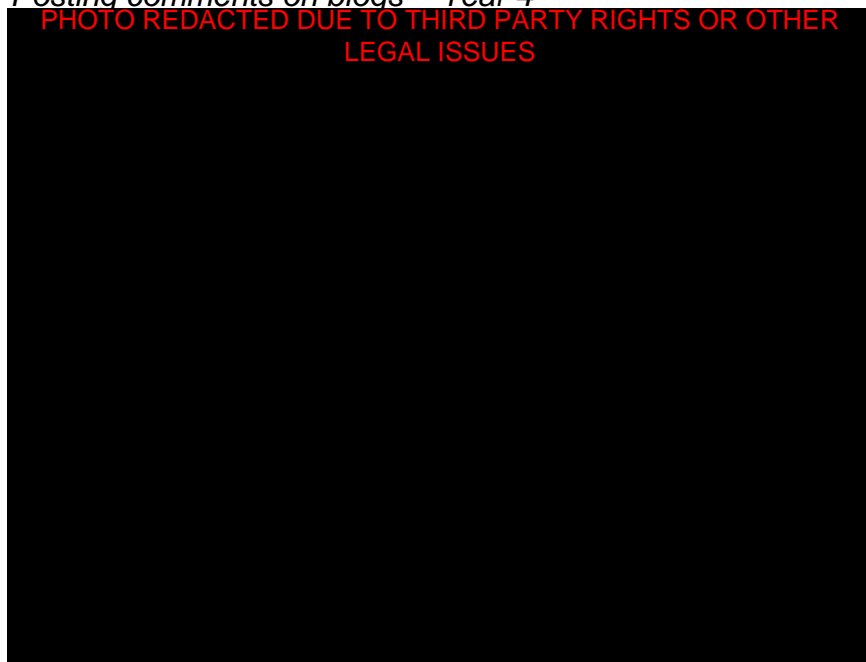
Learners feel they have ownership of the learning platform space although some of them raise the issue of teachers' access to learners' accounts:

*"Well, if you're on your own name then you feel like it actually belongs to you, because you know that you're on your account and no one else is on it. So I do feel sometimes when I'm on my account that it feels like my thing."* [Learner]

An idea that has been implemented to make the learning platform space more personalised for learners was the use of avatars (Vme) that were introduced after a pilot had taken place that gathered children's' ideas. The Vmes were seen as a way of dealing with e-safety; rather than using photos, the children could use avatars. The children in the school talk with enthusiasm about their avatars, which they can customise according to their mood, their hobbies and interests or their perception of themselves.

*"Yes, if you've got Vme people look at it and they can see like if you had like a horse it could show that you like horses and what you like."* [Year 4 learner]

*Posting comments on blogs – Year 4*



*Sharing learners' work*

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*The wiki*

### **Parents and families**

Parents can access information about their child and therefore communication between school and home has improved since the learning platform has been in use. This has also been achieved through the use of the school website, where information is updated. The school still sends information on paper.

Parents can see results in graphs and charts that are imported to the learning platform from the Management Information System, including attendance data which is presented in a more visual way through progress graphs. The school doesn't use the MIS to track data on behaviour. Children are aware of their parents having access to attendance/result/homework data.

*“Well, my parent, my mum, she checked my attendance. She can check anything that's on yours, so, say, if I was late one time, and she just wanted to see if I was late one time, and if I was in on time, then she could go on there and check if I was on time, or late.” [Learner]*

*“Some, like we have a portal, but also, our parents have the portal so they can check if we've sent our work. If, like, the teacher has any comments about us that they don't want to say in front of us, they can say to the parents ‘We are a*

*bit worried about your child not, like, sometimes not doing their homework', or 'Your child is getting some of the questions wrong'..." [Learner]*

The learning platform has made it easier for parents to get information, but some would like more:

*"It would be nice to be able to get more sort of consolidated information on targets. Certainly it would be nice to have consolidated information because, I mean, [my child] looking at secondary schools, we're having to hit all the different school websites to look at all the statistics and the reports, it would be good if we could just hit one site and you could actually see school... a school card with the schools... That would be, that would be good. But also for the primary schools looking... I mean, because people move into the area... if there's almost a league table, an online league table. I mean, yes, there are in the County Council site and stuff like that and the government sites, but it's not that easy to find." [Parent]*

Even though the school tried to reach out to parents, there was little participation until now and many parents don't seem to take advantage of the potential of the platform.

*"A lot of parents, even though we did parents' meetings, a lot of parents don't actually realise how much information there is at their fingertips for their child..." [Teacher]*

Although the issue of not having home access to the internet is addressed by opening the school for parents, it is lack of computer skills that is a barrier for many parents to access the learning platform.

*"We've opened up the internet access at the school, usage at the school for parents and there was virtually no take-up on it." [Parent–governor]*

The governors' portal is not used to its full potential (for example, to post questions or do preparatory work before meetings), because of lack of time and because other priorities are in place. Communication between governors is still done on paper.

### 3. Benefits of using the learning platform

Findings from the case study are described below.

#### Continuity and consistency of learning

The learning platform has made visible the content and objectives of children's learning through the sharing of planning on the learning platform, through the targeting system and other shared areas. As a result, children's education has become more consistent, because teaching assistants and supply teachers, for example are able to access the planning, resources and other information on the learning platform and support or prepare and deliver the lesson.

In addition, the learning platform has enabled re-usability of work in an easy manner for both learners and teachers. Teachers can adapt their planning (and importantly, they can edit documents online without having to download them onto their computer) and can re-use it, so they do not consider that uploading it on the learning platform is adding to their workload. The use of podcasting, video and discussions on the learning platform allows learners to revisit their work, reflect on it and evaluate it.

*"Then we went on to evaluate them [children's recorded poems], so I did a discussion so the children clicked on other people's, listened to them and then evaluated them."* [Teacher]

Similarly, the targeting system on the learning platform enables learners and staff to keep a focus on their learning and teaching.

#### Development of a learning community

Learners and staff have more opportunities to get to know each other, through the use of the learning platform, and the avatars, the blogs, and discussions and generally through the sharing of the same space and activities on the platform. This contributes to developing a feeling of belonging to a learning community (either at school or at class level):

*"From the blog post that I have seen in Year 5, and in Year 6... people express their opinions ... I think the children have learned more about their classmates and they've had a bit more patience and understanding with some of them at times, because some people that are quiet in class, they've actually expressed themselves better on the blog."* [E-learning coordinator]

*"...The fact that we all have it, something that we all do, it kind of brings you together as a class."* [Teacher]

## Sharing a centralised space

The platform allows users to back up things, keeping them in an orderly way, giving them rigour and accessing them in one space. It is used as a repository ‘pulling all strings together’. Documents and policies can be found on the learning platform and it’s a central resource for planning.

*“Having all documents in one place; if I want a policy, I want to say ‘I am going on a school trip, what’s the procedure?’, like when I first started here, you know rather than me going to see [the Deputy Head] until she gets all the documents and shows them to me and explain to me, you know I can go on the portal.”*  
[Teacher]

*“It just makes your life much easier because I am not chasing around teachers for planning if they are on there [the learning platform] I can see them I can pick them, I can print them and highlight pieces I want...”* [Teacher]

*“The Head would come say ‘I want that document’, the Maths coordinator would come to me and say ‘Can I have a copy of that document?’, a colleague from another year group might come and ask me for that document and by the time the fourth person has asked me, you are actually a bit sick printing it off again, you know. Why can’t they talk to each other? Well, of course they can’t because they all want it for different reasons – it’s all there!”* [Teacher]

## Communication between learners and staff

Learners can now have access to their teachers and school work at any time and out of school.

*“I think some of the, some of the stuff that was good, it was for homework during school holidays. If she’s got questions or queries on it, she can actually put them back to her teacher, whereas in the past, without things like that, she doesn’t know... there’s a bit, a bit of grief because she’s not sure if she’s doing it correct, she hasn’t quite understood it, but that flexibility gives the interaction. I think it’s a real good benefit for them. I would say [my child] probably wasted more time on homework, on traditional homework that she’s done and because she didn’t understand it correctly, she’s then redone it, because we’ve read it and gone, ‘Well, that’s completely wrong’. Well, now, she looks at it, reads it, if she doesn’t understand it, she can then just quickly message the teacher. She then gets an answer back to clarify her situation and then she progresses on it. Yes... she saves time.”* [Parent]

In addition, the learning platform allows learners to send private emails/messages to their teachers:

*“And it’s also good to use the message board, because if something is a bit personal, like you don’t want anyone else knowing, because sometimes when you ask the teacher there’s people listening ... So if you send a message then you know that it’s just her listening, because no one else is reading it because no one else can log on as her, because she’s got her own password, and that, so it’s just her looking at it.” [Learner]*

*“Yes, and if you have something you don’t want to tell the class and you just want to tell [the teacher] you can put it on the portal ...” [Year 4 learner]*

Communication is extended to social relationships:

*“And there’s [the teacher] she used to be our old teacher ...and she went away and she said before she left, she said, ‘I’ll put some news...’ and she put on some pictures of her baby and she put some writing about what he can do and things and it was just nice to see...” [Year 4 learner]*

### **Independent teaching and learning**

Learners have choice of when/how to access information or work on/with the learning platform:

*“It’s got lots of resources that they pick and choose from to research whatever they are doing, that means, rather than asking me, they do it themselves, they also access their targets, they know where they are. We are trying to make them independent with their targets... they know the places they can go to, and they can go when they want.” [Teacher]*

*“If you want to do it you just get on and do it, but you can actually do stuff, when it’s not homework you can do things when you want to. And it’s quite good because you’re not kind of, being, like poked going, ‘Oh, come on, you have to do this’ and it’s annoying sometimes.” [Learner]*

Remote access to the learning platform allows teachers to do their planning at home:

*“Definitely it’s enhanced work–life balance because you are not sitting there worried about anything, when you’ve done a piece of planning or assessment you would click a button, it’s done! You don’t have to think, ‘I’ve got to get all my folders and put it all together and hand that in...’” [Teacher]*

For learners and staff who cannot be at school, materials and information can be found on the learning platform:

*“There’s a boy in Year 4 that is off sick now...I get the impression that it’s more than a day, but the parent phoned the school to confirm the password of the child, which we actually had to go through ...to make sure it was the right*



*parent ... because the child is off sick, the mother wanted them to complete the work, so that they had to do some form of a quiz... and I think [there's] an element of independence there... the child will be prepared for the next lesson."*  
[E-learning coordinator]

## **Inclusive education**

The learning platform has given voice to, and space for, learners with special learning needs to become more engaged in learning and develop relations with other learners.

*"One of our autistic boys, who would not have necessarily stood up in front of the class and told you about things, he uploaded so much stuff, because it was a medium he felt extremely comfortable with and so his peers, who wouldn't necessarily have the patience to wait for [this child] to tell them all about it, were able to see his strengths. So yes, that was really, really good wasn't it?"*  
[Deputy Head]

*"I think even the very low ability ones get a lot out of it, and really do take to it, don't they? Because they seem to be able to get on and find things and even they can, you know, download pictures and all sorts of things, which when you see them writing and things like that, you wouldn't think they'd be so good. But I think, because it comes up so it looks nice, it's presented well, I think that gives a bit of a boost, doesn't it?"* [Teaching Assistant]

In addition, teaching assistants can access updated information about things happening in the school. In the past, this used to be hard to get because of staff working part time in the school.

*"There are approximately 60 of the staff and although I can get round to the teachers and give them messages, I couldn't necessarily access teaching assistants, especially if some are part time. So the teaching assistants now feel very much more included in staff information... it's a nice bonus."* [Deputy Head]

## **Motivation to learn**

The use of various tools and software through the learning platform engages, motivates and enthuses learners and in turn, teachers consider this as a reason for using the learning platform.

*"I couldn't live without it because like it makes it more fun."* [Year 4 learner]

## Immediacy of feedback

The traditional way of marking work has been altered with the use of the learning platform, since learners can receive immediate feedback either through the system itself (for example, through games), or through the teachers who can comment on learners' work in out-of-school hours.

*"I think it [the learning platform] helps with all their spelling because it comes up straight away, doesn't it, that you've made an error with your spelling or something like that, so then they can... they've got to find the correction and things like that – so I think that is good for them. Whereas, if they do a piece of work in their books, the teacher takes it away and puts the right word, but they wouldn't take any notice of that, would they?"* [Teaching Assistant]

*"Because it gets to the teacher quicker, and say, you were doing your homework on Friday and it had to be in on Monday, and if you had a problem, like accessing it, or something, you can just send a message, or something."* [Learner]

*"Being able to send messages to the teacher means that you don't have to wait, and you can let her know what's happening, so you don't have to go into the class the next day and say, 'I haven't done my homework, sorry'."* [Learner]

## Collaboration between schools

The learning platform was the tool that allowed for and promoted the sought-after collaboration between the school and other networks on various levels: the triad, the cluster, the learning platform community. It bestows the feeling of a wide learning community. The heads of the 19 cluster schools share an interest space on the learning platform that enables them to exchange thoughts on policies and ideas for implementation. Staff members share the workload and can develop links through working on the same focuses. The shared area of the cluster on the platform can be accessed by all stakeholders, learners and parents included. Learners from different cluster schools have worked for example, on a never-ending story, as part of the current focus of the cluster on writing.

*"On the cluster level we've got that never-ending story wiki ... we've done it across the participating schools in the cluster, so the beauty about that is we've done it vertical – it's gone from KS1 and KS2 they've done a creative writing piece on a never-ending story, six [schools] have chosen to participate..."* [E-learning coordinator]

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*Never-ending story wiki for the rural cluster*

### **Enhanced communication between school and home**

The communication between the school and parents/families has been improved as a result of the school communicating information through the website and the learning platform:

*“In some respects, it gives more, gives you more information, so it makes the relationship better with the school.” [Parent]*

*“It has, yes. I mean, with the bad weather and stuff like that. It was, information was being posted on the website whether school was open or not. So that’s, yes, that’s why I say it’s giving a reason to use the equipment, to drive people to it and that’s, that’s a classic.” [Parent]*

### **Improved attainment – supporting learners through targeting**

Setting targets and making these available on the learning platform means that learners, staff and parents/families can access them and review them at any time. Learners take ownership of the targets and try to achieve them and in turn, parents support learners in this process. The senior management team can also see the targets for each child on the learning platform and this has enabled them to identify in an easier way the learners that need support. Links with SATs can also be made in a more practical way. Learners can discuss their targets (having them on their tags makes it easier for them to remember) but having them on the portal is useful

because they can show them to parents and they can see teachers' comments on these. Parents can see the targets and encourage/support learners to work on them:

*“And my mum says... she says... I look up my targets at home and see what they are and she says, ‘What’s your target?’ And I say, whatever it is, and this time I’ve got a bit I have to use more characters in a story and she says, ‘Well that’s really good, because you can challenge yourself to do that’...” [Year 4, Learner]*

For teachers, the targeting system has enabled them to keep a focus in their teaching, to adapt their teaching and be able to share and be consistent in their work with support staff and others who are involved in learning.

*“I think that I would say this is the bit that makes a big difference to children’s attainment...for them definitely, because it focuses the children in on what they are meant to be learning and I also think that because it does that it focuses the teacher in on what they are meant to be teaching and I think when you are teaching creatively and holistically sometimes the targets get a bit woolly and a bit large and I think that when you target you have to hone the target in ... so if I spot that they are not using an apostrophe correctly and it’s a whole class sort of issue I will put apostrophes as the next week’s target, then I will plan my teaching to address that ....it allows everybody that deals with the child to know exactly what that child is meant to be doing ...directing the child in their learning...” [Teacher]*

*“And autonomy; taking responsibility of their learning because they now know it’s their target...and then that’s reiterated, ‘That’s what my focus is now, I am going to put it into the work’.” [E-learning coordinator]*

*“We used to have lists of targets ... and that would be in the front of their maths book and when a teacher saw the child had done that target, they would tick it and date it ... I found that quite unwieldy because sometimes there would be targets there that you weren’t teaching, sometimes you would be teaching something that wasn’t a target on there... I found that the teaching wasn’t precise enough to the target, whereas this way...it’s more functional.” [Teacher]*

#### 4. Challenges and solutions

The management of the learning platform is posing challenges to staff. For example, the discussion areas on the learning platform are used by learners to discuss general issues (shopping, X Factor, etc.) and as a result, discussion areas become extensive, and therefore it is a big task for teachers to monitor them, in order to prevent or spot inappropriate use of the area by learners. Teacher–champions have raised this issue to the developer but the school has also developed an agreement of use which the learners sign the first time they log into the learning platform. Mutual respect is also cultivated in year groups and as a result, learners generally use the discussion areas appropriately. Another challenge the users of the learning platform face is the storage limitations and the need to make decisions about archiving. This applies to the development of e-portfolios by learners, where they need to learn to make choices of what to include in these rather than keeping all their work and overcrowding the online space.

The speed of the wireless and network access in the school has been inconsistent.

The school also faces challenges related to software and hardware, as the hardware needs refreshment and the software needs updating, which is ‘a drain on the budget’ as described by staff. The continuous need for updating of the software creates compatibility issues with home access to the learning platform.

*“I have big fears about the home access initiative, because the amount of times that we have to update browser settings... we are asking a lot of parents to constantly being able to keep up with that amount of knowledge...”* [E-learning coordinator]

*“That’s why we chose it, because the truth is that this is only possible because we chose the system ...not all families can afford to keep up with versions of Office that this change of technology demands, so what we were trying to do is provide an educational file structure that can be accessed constantly online without having to download it.”* [E-learning coordinator]

For this reason, the school (and all other schools in the cluster) purchased software that enables parents and families to access software through the internet and the learning platform without having to download programs or update their software at home.

*“And, the online package, again it was another vision of our leadership within our cluster, that we do have, as all areas have, some families that don’t have Office versions and can’t afford to keep up to date with them, ... so we needed a common denominator, and [this software] provided us with a common denominator...we start with [this software] at very early stages in Foundation, so it’s an ingrained piece of software we have, and we just made it so that they*

*could have it when they're at home as well. Notice that it's on the cluster level, so that means all our 19 schools can access it...."* [E-learning coordinator]

Some teachers find the navigation of the interface of the learning platform hard, especially for some children of lower ability. A teacher, for example, suggested that the platform could have less text:

*"It could be a bit wordy for the lower abilities ... there are a lot of words and they click, they click and if they can't read very well that's hard."* [Teacher]

However, access to the portal for children at home is an issue that the school is not at the moment able to address:

*"I've had children saying to me, 'We've got access to the internet, the portal does work but I am not allowed on the computer cause it's my dad's'."* [Teacher]

*"...I think the problem is probably going to be people are, would be afraid that the children are going to break equipment if it's at home..."* [Parent]

Another challenge that the school now faces in relation to implementation of the learning platform is the lack of whole-school involvement and commitment. Although the teacher-champions are motivated and enthusiastic about the use of technology and the learning platform, they stressed the difficulty of having responsibility of their own classes, as well as supporting the development of the learning platform across the school. Teacher-champions feel at times that they do a lot but that not everybody in the school is committed, and therefore the potential of using the learning platform has not extended to the whole school.

*"I don't think at the moment we have the commitment of everybody and I think that it is hard on the people who are committed because your class are doing things and others aren't, and I find that very hard."* [Teacher-champion]

In terms of giving access to parents, an issue raised is the teachers' worry that parents will interfere with their work and will criticize them as a result of being able to see teachers' work on the learning platform and this was raised by parents too. Teachers feel that making everything more visible to parents could mean that they will have to educate parents as well as learners, making them aware of their goals and priorities.

*"I think one fear of teachers is that, the minute they give a parent log-in, then the parent will be online every second, looking at what the teacher's done or hasn't done."* [Teacher]

*“The perception is that parents don’t always understand the pressures and so I think teachers would be a bit worried. I mean, for instance, I’ve told you how many hours I did this weekend, and if I’ve forgotten something, or if a child didn’t get a target for some reason, you know, that’s going to be highly visible, isn’t it, if parents are looking. And so I think, what you’re doing, you are much more accountable than you were. But, you know, if it’s got these benefits, then I think we’re just going to have to work with that, really.” [Teacher]*

## 5. Drivers

The main drivers for implementation in the school have been the e-learning coordinator and the teacher–champions (ICT team) and the collaboration with other staff in the cluster schools. Also, the adaptability and interoperability of the learning platform were drivers for its development and use in the school (for example, users can edit documents online and save them directly on the platform without having to download them and then re-upload them). An advantage of this is that staff can use the skills they already have (with Microsoft/Outlook calendar) and they are not required to learn new skills to use the platform tools.

Some staff members suggest that the role of the ICT team has pushed the development of the learning platform forward:

*“It’s good to have an ICT team because it makes it happen.”* [Teacher]

*“The ICT team in the school has to translate and act as a broker...and have to listen to the needs of the teachers because they are so busy...and if you can’t translate that to a benefit, why are you using it? ...You have to have a translator.”* [E-learning coordinator]

*“It’s great for the leadership to have a vision, but unless you’ve got a team that can bring that into fruition, you have a vision and you have no enabler.”* [E-learning coordinator]

Beyond their role within the school, the e-learning coordinator and one of the teacher–champions were involved directly in the development of the learning platform through their previous work in the Local Authority (as an e-learning officer at the Council and in schools respectively). They had the opportunity to build in their suggestions and develop a good relationship with the developer that still continues through their current role in the school. Learners, for example, participated in testing aspects of the learning platform to provide feedback to the developer. The partnership of the school with the manufacturing company through the e-learning coordinator and the teacher–champion drives the development of the learning platform in the school.

*“The supplier has to provide an environment that is suitable for all our cluster ... we fed back to [the provider] that it is not appropriate for primary ...so they will be able to switch that off...”* [E-learning coordinator]

Having the freedom to select tools and applications to tailor the environment to the school’s needs is important, according to the e-learning coordinator. For example, purchasing software that allows access to ready content or to tools for creating content has resulted in a purpose to teachers to use the learning platform, because this helps them with their teaching and planning.



Another driver for the learning platform has been the group of governors who have been promoting ICT in the school since its opening and have been ensuring that there is adequate funding for that.

*“Yes, I think because it’s quite a new school, we always, we’d always look to ICT as a way forward ... We make sure that there’s adequate funding for the laptops, the hardware, the server, the network... I am the ICT governor.”*

[Parent-governor]

## 6. Conditions for success

The presence of a group of people (the e-learning coordinator and teacher–champions) within the school who lead the use of the learning platform and support other staff has been crucial for the success of this school in developing their learning platform. The fact that the e-learning coordinator had teaching experience enables her to be a translator between the provider and school staff. Staff members suggest it is important to have someone who has the technical knowledge but also the pedagogical and curriculum knowledge to support them to realise their ideas and develop and use aspects of the learning platform according to their needs. Expectations that fit in with the school priorities and ethos were set clearly and staff were given a clear purpose for using the learning platform.

Engaging everyone in a shared journey, in a learning process and taking slow steps, trying to avoid adding workload for teachers, contributed to the success.

*“I think that really sums up: the senior leadership team need to decide what they’re expecting from the learning platform and how it’s going to be structured, because it’s like a blank piece of paper when you get it and I think you need to look at a lot of them, at other people’s, good ones and bad ones, and see, ‘Oh, you know yes, that would suit my school ethos, that wouldn’t suit my school ethos...’.” [Teacher]*

## 7. Lessons learnt and future plans

Although the senior management team members and the ICT team realised during the development of the learning platform that replacing old tools with the learning platform tools is more effective than duplicating work (for example, having an online calendar and a physical one), some communication is still done on paper, although the staff interviewed suggest this is because the school is at a transition stage at the moment.

The plan at staff level is to roll out skills in using learning areas on the learning platform. This is what teacher–champions aspire to: all school staff using the aspects of the learning platform that they have been using. In terms of specific activities, one of the teacher–champions plans to facilitate web conferencing and more generally online collaboration between schools within the triad and the cluster.

Collaboration between governing bodies across the three schools in the triad (partnership) through the learning platform is also in the plans for the near future, although the governors' portal is not used extensively currently.

One of the current areas in progress is the Foundation area on the portal. The school plans to give parents access to the portal with learners' accounts. The aim is for both the school and the parents to use media tools within the learning platform to record learners' progress in different learning areas. Each learner will have profile points (points to work towards in their learning such as to be able to dress themselves), which will enable parents and teachers to offer support to the child. In order to engage all parents, the school plans to introduce the Digital-Diary and Home-Diary from the first day that learners are enrolled in school. The idea comes from younger learners not being able to describe their school work to parents. In this way, parents can show to school what children do at home, and school will showcase the children's work to parents so that more consistency and continuity are achieved in their learning. This is expected to contribute to developing home–school links and saving teachers' time on sending notes and information to parents/guardians.

*“We are going to have pictures of things we do in class and the different topics that we are doing in class and the topic words, and the profile points ... they have different points that they can work towards such ‘can dress themselves’.”*  
[Foundation Teacher]

*“If the child was able to show that they can count to five on their fingers or if they did a nursery rhyme or if they could tie their shoe laces ... then they can actually do that, they can show that... or can take a photo of that, so as soon as they have uploaded that ... the teacher gets pinned, as soon as the family adds on the portal... and they can see this note being added.”* [E-learning coordinator]