

School use of learning platforms and associated technologies

Case Study: Primary School 1

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Primary School 1

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

1. The school and the school community

This is a community primary school (an infant and a junior school recently amalgamated) with around 600 learners from 3 to 11 years old and over 100 staff members (full time and part-time), spread across two sites. In such a large school, management and communication are difficult and the learning platform was introduced as a way of enabling a community atmosphere to develop.

The majority of the learners come from minority ethnic backgrounds and there are many who have English as an Additional Language (EAL). The school has been facing many challenges, including under-achievement, low attendance and some children with learning difficulties. Children come from families with difficult backgrounds (as refugees or in deprived circumstances) but there is a keenness for education.

“... Our children ... the majority are first generation immigrants, and they know education is the right way... Our parents work extremely hard ... For these parents it's very expensive to buy a computer, but still they want their children to be doing the work ...” [Headteacher]

Generally, parents are satisfied with the school because they consider education for their children very important. The learners are disciplined, polite and friendly and citizenship values such as respecting others are well integrated into the school ethos.

Multiculturalism is promoted in the school and second languages of learners are being celebrated through activities, some of which involve the use of the learning platform. Various projects take place that are related to the use of learning platform, include collaborations with other schools and links with universities. There is also a programme for gifted and talented children. Ofsted reports identify the need to raise standards in English, mathematics and science. The school is currently implementing the PYP (Primary Years' Programme of the International Baccalaureate) for the first year.

The school IT infrastructure has moved during the last couple of years from 15 computers in the ICT room and one computer in each class, to 32 computers in the IT suite, a smaller room with eight computers that learners can use during lunchtime, and a larger number of computers in classrooms, to provide all children the

opportunity to use ICT. There is wireless access throughout the school and interactive whiteboards in the classrooms. The school also won an innovation bid to get half-funding for digital video cameras and every year group now has their own. The school was awarded an ICT facility award for making outstanding progress in the provision of a first-class environment for the teaching of ICT and related subjects.

Having had experience in her previous school, of using ICT for staff professional development and communication between the school and international links, the headteacher considers ICT as essential tool for learning:

“ICT, a computer, a laptop, is like the old-fashioned chalk, a pen. It is a tool, it is an essential tool for learning. Now we have got a new generation of children, who are surrounded by interactive, visual stimulus, and for us to ask them to sit quietly for one hour and learn something that is non-engaging, not interesting is selling them short, so with technology we are engaging the children...”

[Headteacher]

The head’s determination to integrate ICT in the school processes played a crucial role in the development of the learning platform. She considers ICT competence very important for staff and learners:

“From the day I entered, ICT incompetence was not part of our vocabulary. If you didn’t know, you’d be given time to learn it...” [Headteacher]

The headteacher also appointed a new ICT coordinator who could understand the senior leaders’ vision. The change towards using ICT and the learning platform fitted in with the broader cultural change that the head initiated when she came into the school. The separation of the year groups (early years/Key Stage 2) in different buildings was reflected in the pedagogy and the culture of the teaching staff in each of the two sites. This was a challenge the senior management team had to face, in order to unite the disparate groups and the use of the learning platform was integrated with this effort:

“There was also a philosophical divide because there were early years practitioners who worked in a very, very different way – the leadership of the two schools, historically, had been very different. The cultural differences between a sort of holistic, child-centred approach in the early years, and a quite didactic top-down model in Key Stage 2, was quite marked. And the staff tended to talk and reflect and socialise within their pedagogic group, so that intensified it” [Deputy Head]

The cultural change in the school involved everybody and focused on the children and their education:

“...before it was acceptable not to know, you know. Then the new culture came in ... So we all became learners, and when I say learners, it's from me right up to our nursery children. We're all learners, we learn.” [Headteacher]

One of the initiatives implemented was the enrichment programme, as a way of motivating learners and increasing attendance, which is a major problem for this school. Attendance has been improved as a result of new ways employed to engage children in their learning, including ICT and home visits when children are absent.

“... Usually the attendance on Fridays was very poor, because it fed into a Saturday and Sunday. Since our enrichment our attendance on Fridays is about 99.9 per cent, because children are looking forward to their enrichment programme, and there's no way they are going to be ill.” [Headteacher]

“The attendance has shot up on a Friday. ... Very rare for a child to miss enrichment because they get really up for it. They love it.” [Chair of governors]

As a result of the strategic leadership and the focus on engaging children using various ways, including ICT, teachers have also been more engaged and enthusiastic about their work, according to the headteacher:

“The ICT tools have given a new lease of life to the teachers, and then the teachers have learnt how the children are working. There's like, enthusiasm. It's not more of the same thing, teachers are learning more, they are exploring websites, they are evaluating their own teaching.” [Headteacher]

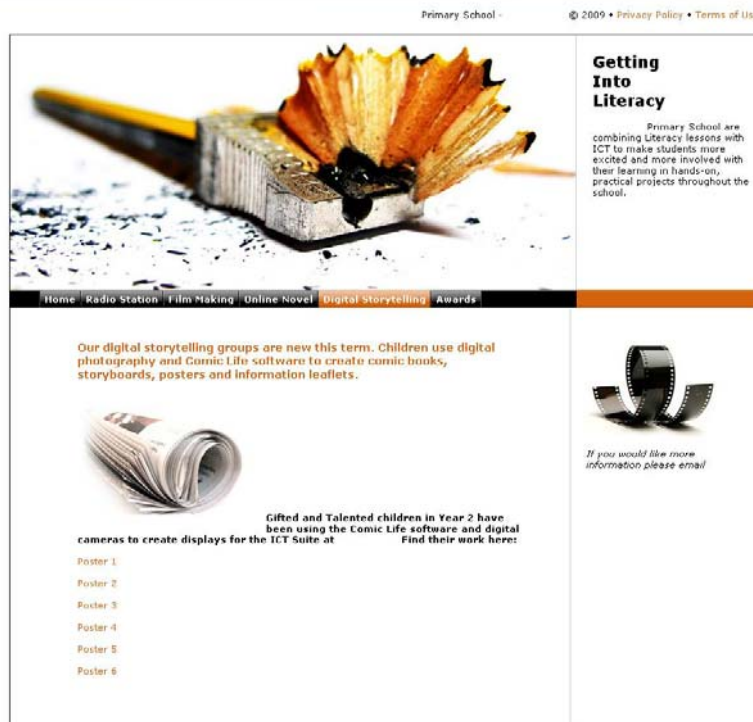
Similarly, employing ICT to make education more inclusive has been achieved through bringing parents in the school and training them in basic ICT skills and allowing learners with special needs to learn in a different way.

“We have a child who is ...autistic and ICT is his way in, often playing with ICT, you know even if it's just going on the computer and playing games... and often if he is finding it difficult to be in class because he is having a bad day, he will be taken to use the computer or ICT suite for that ...” [ICT coordinator]

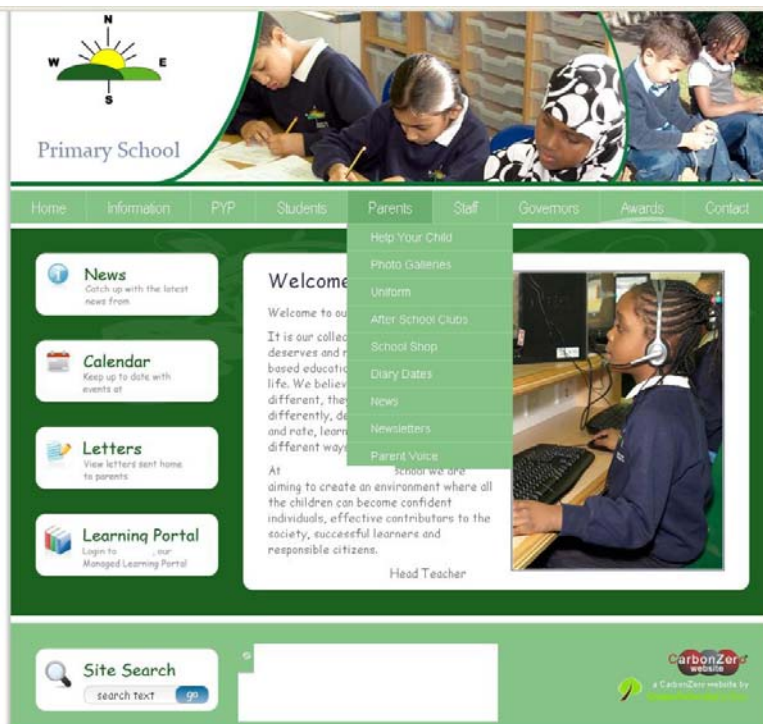
2. How the learning platform is used

General observations

The learning platform is being used for the third year now in the school as the main curriculum and school management platform, while administration uses SIMS. Registration is still done on paper and then entered into electronic databases by the ICT coordinator. Currently, the school has also two websites, one for communication with parents, with information on term dates, diary dates, and events, which is updated by an ICT LSA and maintained by the ICT coordinator, and the other is used for showcasing learners' best work related to ICT and literacy. The school also initiated the use of a radio station with podcasting prepared at the school and as part of an LA podcasting initiative. Work by learners (adverts created as part of literacy topic by Year 5, nursery rhymes, and stories read by reception teachers, for example) is hosted on the LA's podcast site, which is aimed at bilingual parents/learners.



Getting into literacy website – showcasing learners' work



School website – main page

Management and administration

The use of the learning platform has supported management of the school, in making communication of information and communication between staff easier and faster. Notices about visitors coming into school, covering for absences, timetables etc. are now communicated to all staff simultaneously on the learning platform, along with the school diary.

“The other thing that really caused us a lot of hassle was the diary. If you can imagine, we have 22 classes, 30 teachers, we have 60 support staff, and the Deputy used to set one day to write the school diary, and if on that day you didn’t come, the whole diary would be obsolete. And every Friday we would have 100 sheets of this diary on the table, which by Monday were obsolete.”
[Headteacher]

The learning platform is also used in school management processes such as tracking and monitoring data.

“Before, every team member was accountable to their team leader. Now you’re accountable to everyone, because everything is transparent, everything is online. On a Sunday I can sit down, press the button, and see what goes on in every classroom.” [Headteacher]

Before implementing the current learning platform, the school was using an LA system, which was considered complicated to use (long email addresses being just a small example). The opportunity arose to adopt the current learning platform when an LA ICT advisor informed the school that the authority was looking for a primary school to pilot its use. Being a large school made it a desirable setting for trialling the platform, while the head was keen to initiate a virtual staffroom through which to communicate with all the staff, but implement her vision of using ICT to engage children in learning. The head, deputy head and the then ICT coordinator had previously participated in a course on strategic issues for IT, during which they were able to visit other schools and identify things they could implement in their school context too.

Once the platform became available to the school, the SMT and the current ICT coordinator spent time planning its use and finding ways of convincing other stakeholders of its potential, in order to get them on board. They shared a common vision for the school, which they communicated to staff early on.

“So we had to persuade all of our stakeholders, and a lot of our most proactive governors are parents, we had to persuade all these stakeholders that really things would get better if we used the managed learning environment successfully.” [Deputy Head]

Initially there were two days of in-house training by the learning platform provider for a few members of the team. A significant period of time was devoted to customising the platform before introducing it to the rest of the staff. The aim was to prepare a platform that would be as user-friendly as possible.

“From then we got a bit stuck for a few months because ... what they provided – they’ve obviously worked on feedback since – but is very, very, blank and bare because they have so many different tools; they like schools to choose which one they’re going to use. So, when you first look at it, it’s quite daunting.” [ICT coordinator]

One strategy was to move traditional ways of doing things to the platform instead:

“I stopped the whiteboard in the staffroom from being used. I said it was obsolete. Everyone has to access their, you know, staff notice board” [Headteacher]

The early content of the platform mainly concerned communication between staff (a diary and virtual message board, for example) and curriculum support through general Entrance Halls for year groups, as well as a generic literacy room, a maths room and a news room with useful links (Junior Wikipedia, Smart rules etc.) that was

created by the ICT coordinator. Transferring traditional processes to the platform was a way of persuading everyone to use it:

“And so, you know, the more and more we do online, you know, the more and more they'll have to log on. So if we say, you know, when a period of bad weather is forecast your first port of call will be the website, rather than your first port of call being local radio – that's part of the weaning process.” [Deputy Head]

Another planned change later on was to transfer responsibility for managing the tracking of learners' data from the deputy head to teachers, through a shared forum on the platform, which according to the deputy head was *“a huge thing strategically, hugely significant because it took the onus away from one person”*.

Although there was some resistance by staff (including teaching assistants and support staff) at the beginning, the SMT did not leave much space for negotiation. Slowly they got all the staff and learners on board using the platform, by enabling general areas on the learning platform and providing continuous training.

“The entrance halls are just a way for us to get everybody on at the same time and make it look non-threatening really, to make it something that everyone's always been on board with. All the training has always included everyone.” [ICT coordinator]

A champion – an IT-confident person – from each year group was pinpointed by the ICT coordinator and asked if he/she was willing to help others. However, the ICT coordinator clarified that no extra training was offered or official appointment made of a group of champions, to avoid creating an elitist group and alienating people. Then teachers were given time to enable all their learners to log in on the learning platform. Motivated by the learners' excitement with the learning platform, teachers were instructed on how to create their own virtual classrooms and start populating these areas. Other skills, such as embedding videos and using RSS feeds, were introduced to teachers through in-school training sessions in successive stages. Using the learning platform was also a way of increasing accountability and transparency across the school, through teachers submitting their planning on the learning platform, and taking ownership of tracking their learners' data.

The staff were given time during staff meetings to produce content for the platform and they have received ongoing training in uploading pictures, using animation etc. The approach followed by the ICT coordinator relates to keeping up the enthusiasm and excitement about the learning platform and providing support and time to teachers (for example, replacing teachers in classrooms so that they can use or create content for the learning platform).

“Another strategy I’ve used is to try and weigh up everything. Everything that I’m asking them to do, I try and implement something that will give them something back. So every time I have a staff meeting that involves them having to go off and set something up that I’ve asked them to do on [the learning platform], I try and put some background hours into making something, some resources on the [the learning platform] for them that they can then use, or give them time where I can to take their children and do it with them.” [ICT coordinator]

During staff meetings, teachers also have the opportunity to share with others resources or tools they have found and have used in their teaching.

“...If people had discovered some wonderful tool, they shared it at the beginning of a staff meeting – so it was always a celebration, a show and tell session... well, basically in two minutes people could show what they might spend Sunday afternoon preparing.” [Deputy Headteacher]

In terms of tracking learners’ progress, teachers are now responsible for tracking their learners’ data on the system, and using it to inform their teaching. They upload their planning and collaboratively write reports for learners as documents can be edited online.

“Oh, they’re always on the [learning platform]... All the school reports, all the planning, all get done through the [learning platform]. I think, if the [learning platform] went down, the whole place would grind to a halt, in the staffroom, sometimes!” [Chair of governors]

Governors were informed along the way, approving the costs and supporting implementation:

“We all thought it was a wonderful idea, then the costings came through, to see how much it was going to cost the school. And then you have to balance up how good it would be for the school against the costings, and we agreed it would be wonderful, and that’s what started with the new regeneration, with the computer suite and all the laptops around, and the computers in the school.” [Chair of governors]

To engage parents in using the platform, the ICT coordinator runs training sessions in ICT skills for parents at the school.

A turning point in this journey of implementing the learning platform was the snowfall days when the school was closed. Many parents and staff logged on the platform then to read the news about the school and since then bigger numbers of log-ins to the platform have been tracked.

“I think a real coup for us was the snowy day that we had in February or January... Since that day I think a lot of people have, you know, logged on more than they would otherwise, and certainly some of the more reticent members of staff routinely either come into the staff room and go straight on the learning platform, or they check the learning platform before they leave the house in the morning, and that's quite significant.” [Deputy Head]

Curriculum and teaching

Teachers use the learning platform to access information (in the diary or on the message board) and to upload resources linked to their lessons for learners to access both at home and at school. In the classroom, teachers use the learning platform to guide the learners throughout the lesson, having differentiated activities for different groups of learners. Access to enriched resources such as a video or podcast is now often included in lessons.

In the classroom, learners access resources on the learning platform individually or the teacher accesses the learning platform on the IWB. The use of the learning platform has been embedded in teachers' everyday practice:

Multiculturalism is promoted at school in many ways, and currently a work in progress in this area is the development of a story-room in the platform where parents and children with a second language will record story-telling or reading in their second language to share these on the learning platform.

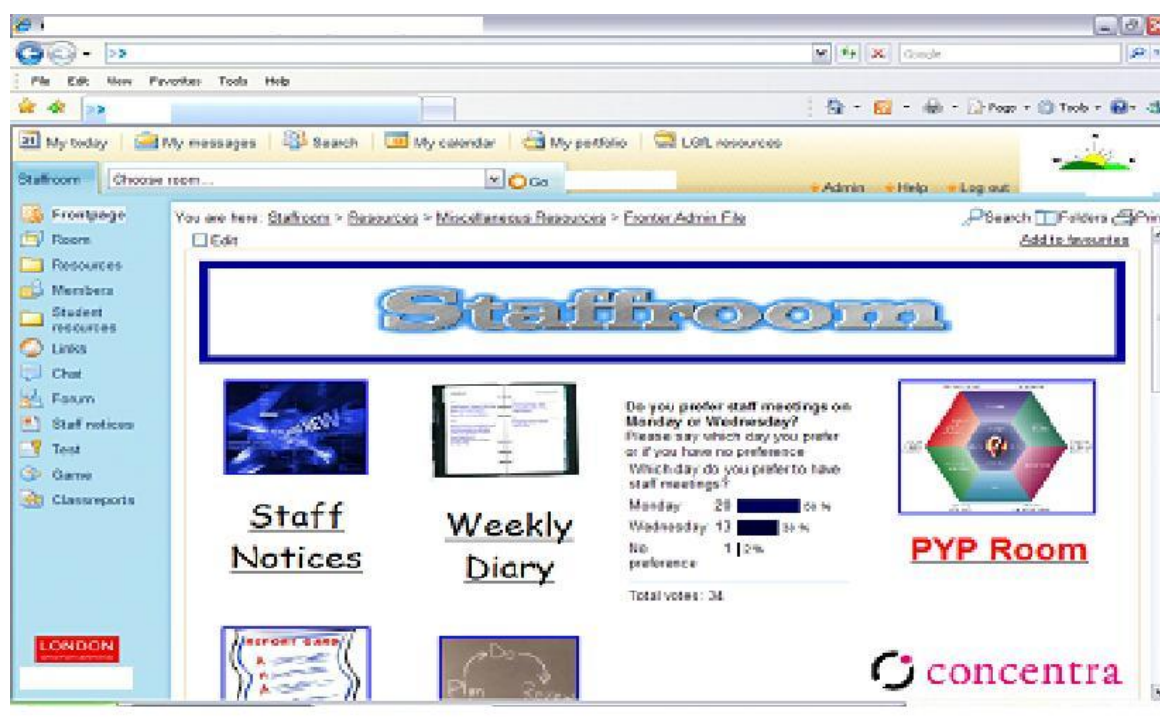
“We're going to ask children who have a second language, and in English – so as many languages as we can – basically have stories read so that people can click on and have a story in Punjabi, in Mandarin, in French. And also we're going to try and get parents involved in it, as well, to come in and record themselves reading and not just reading stories but telling stories, as well, you know, sort of, native storytelling. So, it's going to be a whole storytelling room.” [ICT coordinator]

Citizenship is also promoted through the learning platform:

“As the [learning platform] is now so embedded in the school, it's another place where we just have to carry on that civic duty that we have to bring up good citizens, you know. ... One of the biggest values that we aim for is respect. So, anything that's disrespectful to anyone, be it in class or on [the learning platform] or in the playground or even if we hear they've been disrespecting their Mum at home or anything, it's dealt with. So, [the learning platform] is just another extension of that, but it's part of the whole school philosophy.” [ICT coordinator]

Teaching assistants are currently being trained in ICT skills and in using the platform. The ICT coordinator has created a room for teaching assistants on the platform, where they can create content, forums, exchange private messages (stickies) and upload files.

Specialist teachers have their own rooms (Art/PE etc.) on the platform, where they upload activities for learners as well as their planning. The music teacher, for example, uses the learning platform to upload song lyrics in preparation of the lesson.



The virtual staffroom

Learning and learners

Learners use the platform widely both at school and at home, although home access to computers and the internet is an issue for the school. Main uses include uploading/downloading work, communicating with other learners (exchanging messages), accessing resources and playing games through the links that are on the learning platform. During lesson time, the laptops are used for online guided reading, phonic sessions and literacy/maths games. In ICT lessons learners learn ICT skills, including touch typing.

At home, learners can check and send messages, play online games and edit the work they have saved at school.

“I go on... I check all my messages and if someone’s replied to me today or the day before, I’ll just talk to them, and then I’ll play, I’ll look if I saved anything from school and work on that.” [Year 5 learner]

Using the learning platform for communication started with one class initially and was then taken up by other teachers. Communication is about the school work or about learners’ interests.

The learning platform is also used for showcasing learners’ work – the first page of the platform for example, hosts a novel that learners have written and illustrated. Nursery learners podcast their rhymes. In forums, teachers post questions that learners answer, for example, about what they have been learning. Reminders posted by both teachers and learners contribute to organising school work and learning.

“Sometimes when you’re, like going on trips, and they put a reminder on to remind you to take your packed lunch, and bring a good coat and some shoes for walking.” [Year 5 learner]

“And we have a calendar on it, up there. If you click on the calendar you can write reminders on it.... Like you can put days where you’re studying, or days where you’re going out. So like it has all the times.” [Year 5 learner]

The learning platform also hosts videos of learners’ plays such as celebrations of Divali. The ICT coordinator described learners’ motivation to produce work that is showcased on the learning platform or the two school websites:

“They know now that their work is always showcased if they do this work. And they’re getting so used to us putting in for awards ... so they were used to, sort of, people coming in and asking them.” [ICT coordinator]

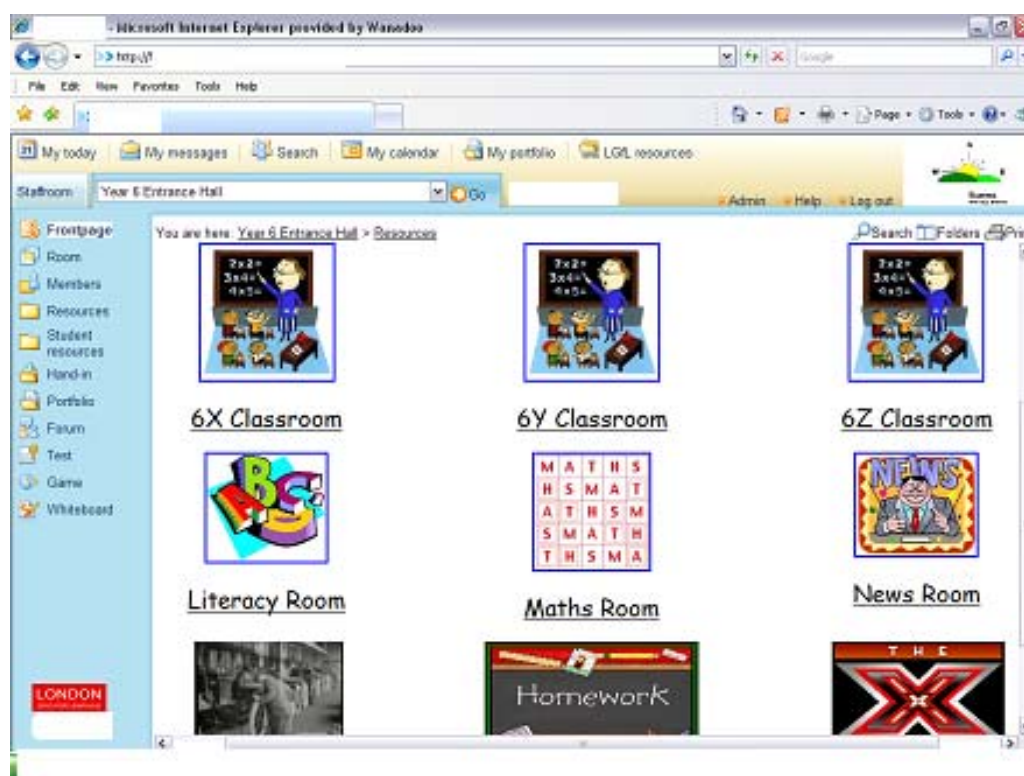
The ICT coordinator manages groups of gifted and talented learners on the learning platform, including an ICT gifted and talented group. The learners of this group had worked on writing a novel during an after-school club the year before, in collaboration with another school. The two schools used the learning platform to exchange feedback on the novel chapters through forums.

“They love it and also nearly all of that group got Level 5 in literacy in their writing and SATs, which is the highest we’ve had for a long time, I think. And it was attributed to the confidence they had, based on doing that novel.... it was the real team work and collaboration that brought them, you know, much, much closer together. And you just saw them grow as a group ... They were really excited to come to club every week and, you know, they just came with fantastic ideas and the vocabulary they were coming out with was just outstanding...” [ICT coordinator]

Other examples of work completed or showcased on the learning platform include Year 6 learners' activity of creating newspaper articles (on eco-systems and deforestation, for example) in Word, which were then uploaded on the platform and edited as an ongoing work. Year 6 also learn how to create their own web pages on the platform, which they can use in the future to present their unit of enquiry and editable work. Year 2 learners have been using digital storytelling software to create posters which are presented on the school website. Year 5 recently visited the Royal Albert Hall and learners created reports on the trip using video cameras. The film is being edited and will be hosted on the literacy and ICT website.

The School Council has been recently given their own space on the learning platform, and they have some ideas of how they could use it for hosting a 'worry box', making announcements, voting and having more games available.

"Some people copy their friends [when voting], and so if they do it at home they won't copy their friends and it'll be better..." [School Council member]



Year 6 Entrance Hall

Parents and families

The biggest obstacles to enabling parents and families in this school to use the platform are lack of access to a computer and the internet and lack of time. Communication through the learning platform enhances already established communication between parents and the school.

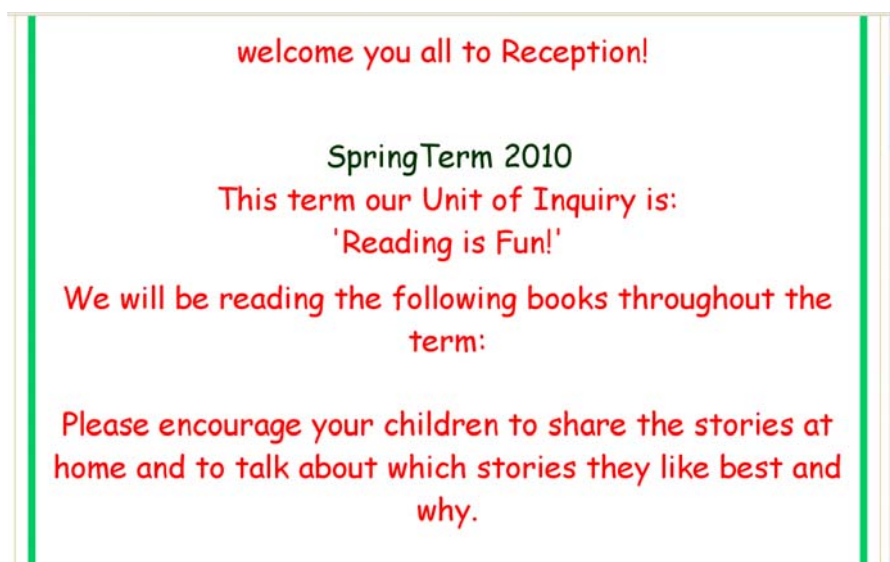
“Definitely, everything’s there, yes. The parents have got access to so much more information just through the computer now that would have taken them... they’d have had to come in, request things, and it’d have to be photocopied. But now a lot of our policies and the rules and different things, they’re all on there for the parents to access straight away... Well, it’s quicker.” [Chair of governors]

Learners mention showing their parents the work they have done on the learning platform. A parent describes feeling confident about the learning platform as a safe environment that children can use, monitored by teachers:

“There is no need to be concerned because whatever messages are sent by the children the teachers can look what messages have been sent...the teacher can go home and can go into [the learning platform] and they can go on to it and check what the children are writing and that so it’s safe...” [Parent]

Governors have their own space, to exchange messages, do research about the school, to update the calendar, post reports and use email. The school offers training in basic computer skills for parents, as a first step towards helping them to use the platform. Parents are trained in internet browsing, using Word, and later on they will cover digital photography and making slideshows and folders.

“Now we have parents coming into school because they want to learn what their children are learning. So, it’s lovely. They come in and use the computers and access all sorts. So we are really lucky.” [Chair of governors]



Reception class first page – communication for parents

3. Benefits from using the learning platform

Findings from the case study are described below.

Many of the benefits of using the learning platform identified in this school are related to the intended changes the headteacher had initiated to improve school management/communication and learners' engagement in learning.

Taking ownership of learning

Learners are now taking more ownership of their learning, being able to organise their work and to revisit and edit their work at their own time and outside school:

"You can choose to do it at school or at home." [Year 6 learner]

"If we do it online, if we do work, we can go to 'our work' and then upload it onto file on [the learning platform], if you go home and you want to improve it, you just go on [the learning platform] and we can edit it." [Year 6 learner]

Learning through practice

Quizzes and games support learners' learning through immediate feedback and practice, as this parent observed:

"It gives them an idea of what they know and what they don't know. If they get it wrong they can go back and find the answer." [Parent]

Motivation for learning

Learners have fun while learning, by playing games or using other tools on the learning platform, which they feel is a safe environment.

"A lot of the games on [the learning platform] are education-based...one of the games they've got to get the frog from one side of the river to the other, but they can only do it if the number add up to ... the children don't realise that they are doing maths, they are just getting this frog across, but actually learning their maths as well..." [Chair of governors]

Sharing/showcasing their work

Publishing their work on the platform, and being able to show this to their parents/families and seeing other people's work, motivates learners:

"You get to see how everyone is doing in their work and you can help them out." [Year 6 learner]

“When they are on the computer they go, ‘Mum, come and see what we’ve been doing’ so I can read through the topic, things like that, it’s all on there, you can see what they’ve been doing.” [Parent]

“The children love it, all the different things that go on, on there, and they can go into their virtual classroom, if they’ve got a piece of work that’s exceptional it might be posted...” [Chair of governors]

Advancing learners’ ICT skills

Beyond practical ICT skills such as uploading files on the platform, learners are also instructed about e-safety:

“I like the work on [the learning platform] because it can help our ICT skills and ...you can go on the internet to help us with our homework” [Year 6 learner]

“The children are so confident on the computers. ... It really has built their confidence.” [Chair of governors]

Greater access to resources/materials

Materials, resources and work are always accessible through the platform and learners are not worried about losing their work.

“I like it [homework] on [the learning platform] because if Miss ... gave us homework on the piece of paper, she put it on to [the learning platform], if we lose our homework we can do it on [the learning platform].” [Year 6 learner]

Learners can also work from home, taking their learning beyond the school space and hours:

“And at home I get... I remember my teacher’s information, what she said to me, and I edit my work much better.” [Year 5 learner]

“Yes, it’s great because the children can access it at home, as well. So if teachers have set work and it’s on [the learning platform], if the children forget to take things home, they can go onto [the learning platform] and do work. They can go onto [the learning platform] and show their parents what they’ve been doing.” [Chair of governors]

Better organisation of learners’ learning

The calendar and reminders enable learners to organise their learning and teachers to ensure that learners are informed about events, timetables etc.:

“Sometimes the teachers put, like, reminders on it [the learning platform] ...sometimes when you are, like, going on a trip and they put reminders to

remind you to take your packed lunch, coat and some shoes..." [Year 5 Learner]

"So you're not like, one day you might be confused, you're like, am I doing English or maths? So like, if you've got homework that you want to bring in, but you're not sure if you're doing maths or English...look on it [the learning platform]." [Year 5 learner]

Improved communication between learners and between staff and learners

The use of 'stickies', a messaging tool on the platform, has improved communication between staff and learners, especially learners who are more quiet or have a problem and would like more privacy in their communication with teachers, but also improving communication and social networking amongst learners.

"We have stickies on [the learning platform] which are private messages and there was one child in my class last year who when I started she was Year 5 and she barely speaks at all, and she would never say anything in front of the class, mostly she wouldn't even talk to me directly about anything, she wouldn't even come to talk to me privately but she started sending me a stickie every day just telling me how her day went. It started off because I was off sick for a day and she sent me a message just saying that they'd had a nice supply teacher and she hoped they would have her for tomorrow, so I replied and then every day she started sending me how her day had gone... So gradually she would come and whisper to me if something had happened and then as the year went on she would actually put her hand up and tell in front of everyone or if she had a question... she actually stood up and talked in front of the assembly really confidently... And she wrote me a card for summer saying how much her confidence had improved and she was really grateful." [ICT coordinator]

"If someone is bullying you at school, you can tell them [teachers] without the other person knowing." [Year 6 learner]

"It is, it's quite easy to talk to your teacher, at school, but ... sometimes you forget, and when you go home you're thinking, 'Oh no, I forgot'. And then you just remember that you have [the learning platform] and you go on it and then you're like, I can always talk to my teacher and ask them...sometimes it takes a while for the stickies to get there, but sometimes they come really quick and you get an answer really quick." [Year 5 learner]

Improved communication between governors

The learning platform has also enabled better communication between governors:

"Yes, it has, because some of our governors don't get into school as much as others, if they work... Obviously, you have community governors as well, which

is the LA officers, etc. So, then, they can log on wherever they are and leave a message, if they need to, for me, rather than having to phone the school or trying to get hold of me at home.” [Chair of governors]

Improved school and teaching management

School processes, including cover for absences and planning, have been enabled through the use of platform.

“Because it’s on [the learning platform], people going on first thing before their classes come in, they can see straight away that the PE teacher is not in, or the art teacher is not in, or there has been a change and they are getting the information instantly without...and it cuts down ... lot of the obvious stuff running forth and back...” [ICT coordinator]

The school is under constant observation and this was putting pressure on teachers to present their planning and reports. The platform has removed some of that pressure, as all the planning is updated (and under ongoing editing) by various individuals on the learning platform itself.

“We constantly have to have... we have more observations ...so the pressure on teachers was great, in the fact that people were constantly saying, ‘Right, in two days you’ve got to give us this planning; this tracking; you know, these reports.’ Because all of that now is done on [the learning platform], the teachers don’t even have to know that somebody’s looking at their planning and their reports and their tracking, because it’s just there ...because we have specialist teachers, it’s essential, really, that rather than people having to write there that they’re important and pass them to somebody else, anyone can dip into all the reports ... so, that saves work. And it saves having really strict deadlines early on for reports; it gives people more time to fill it in when it suits them.” [ICT coordinator]

“Now everything is on board, and it shows on what date you have uploaded your planning, your planning is open to the line manager who can look at your planning and say, ‘The differentiation, is it done?’. If it isn’t she signs you a quick note – ‘Remember [the student] is at level 2, these are the things you need to do’, the literacy coordinator looks at your planning and says ‘Oh, I can put you through this website and you can engage with your dyslexic children’.” [Headteacher]

Easier and more effective tracking of learners’ progress

Tracking of learners’ data has improved in that having the data and reflecting on it when preparing for teaching has an impact on the learning and targeting groups of learners.

“On tracking the learners’ progress, this school was very good at giving tests to children so the teachers would spend hours marking the test paper and they would give the information to the headteacher and the head would sit there, doing a manual job uploading it and that was it...[Now] it is your children, you test them, you enter them, you track their progress, so by using [the learning platform], the program that we have got and it fed into our [the learning platform] program, every teacher from Nursery can go into everybody’s classroom, pick up a child and track their progress throughout the school...”
[Headteacher]

“These tools have impacted on the learning...if you’ve got these constant ways of reflecting on performance then you can go back and think ‘What was I doing wrong?’” [Deputy Head]

“Well, our SATs results have improved, because three times a year we track the progress. We talk to the children. Our EAL children, because we focus on them, by using the program we track their progress, and we realised that by getting the information very quickly we could put intervention programmes in place.” [Headteacher]

Tracking learners’ data on the platform and involving all teachers has released time for the deputy head to focus on the analysis of the data and to provide advice and support to teachers:

“We found that as soon as we rationalised the system and got it up centrally, on [the learning platform], we had this shared learning platform, that people were much more reflective on the data because they were inputting it and my energies were directed, not at inputting data, but actually at data analysis, and I could guide them asking questions about, you know, why people had or hadn’t met their targets. So that was a great enabler.” [Deputy Head]

The platform can also show data to observers who visit the school in a much easier and quicker way than before:

“Schools in challenging circumstances are constantly visited – many come in and they say to me, you know, ‘How is your Year 6 doing?’ Or you know, ‘Can you tell me what percentage of children in Year 4 are expected to get Level 4s, and when they’re in Year 6?’. Well, before I would have been scabbling around and I’d say, ‘Oh well, I think Jeremy’s having his break at 11 o’clock, I’ll speak to him then’. Or ‘I have got a folder in my room but I’m not sure if it’s updated’, and so on. And now I just say, ‘Yeah, if you’d like to come over to the computer I’ll show you the tracking’. Yeah, it’s transparent; it’s all about transparency.”
[Deputy Headteacher]

Tracking data allows teachers to reflect on this data and identify problems so that they can adapt their teaching:

“Our results were improved last year – we have improved at all levels and I think that that is about teacher autonomy, it’s about teachers reflecting on their data. ... So if 30 per cent of the children in your class have failed to make progress, and you are putting in the data, then you know, if you’re worth the wages we’re paying you then you’re going to go away and think, ‘Well, why aren’t they achieving?’” [Deputy Head]

Collaboration between staff – sharing resources

Staff share resources and practices more often through the platform.

“Now teachers can work smarter. You see, now you don’t need to chase around and waste time to look for the material, the material is there for you, and we are sharing good material. If you go in the staffroom you see, if you have gone and found a fantastic website on poetry, or a narrative, you share it with the others, and it saves you a good 45 minutes.” [Headteacher]

Enabling strategic leadership

Through the platform the SMT is able to communicate their vision and goals to staff. Better data tracking and monitoring means that the SMT can identify gaps and decide on actions. The leaders’ role of monitoring teaching has also been enabled, as a result of having teachers’ planning on the learning platform:

“I thought that this could actually be on [the learning platform], so that the success criteria are shared and they are incremental... the benefit is that you are working towards shared goals, and people know what that would look like because they have the level descriptors there...so we could actually look to a gap analysis in terms of teaching and learning... we can look where the gaps are and actually have whole school strategic goals based on this gap analysis.” [Deputy Head]

“From a leadership point of view, all the planning is on board. Teachers are taking ownership. One of the most odious tasks of a leader is to ensure that all the staff are meeting the deadlines, and before, everyone was blaming someone else. ‘Oh, I gave it to you’ or ‘No, you gave it to someone else’. Now everything is on board, and it shows on what date you have uploaded your planning...” [Headteacher]

Inclusive education

The use of ICT, and more specifically the platform, appeals to children with different learning styles and makes provision of opportunities for learning more equal for everyone.

“We have a child who’s very, very autistic who... ICT is his way in often, playing ICT, you know, even if it’s just going on the computer and playing games. But, he’s quite... he’s a very difficult one to have in class and often if he’s finding it difficult to be in class because he’s having a bad day, he’ll be taken to use the computer or ICT suite for that.” [ICT coordinator]

“We find often when we’re doing tests on [the learning platform] that children that find reading difficult, won’t ask for the questions to be read if they’re on [the learning platform], they’re much more likely to give it a go ... They’ll try and read the questions themselves and do it themselves. Whereas, if it was a paper test, they, you know, the ones that are just, kind of, ‘Oh, I can’t do this, I can’t read’ will be less likely to do that and give up. If it’s on [the learning platform] they’re more likely to give it a go and see what they can do.” [ICT coordinator]



Learners working independently in class

4. Challenges and solutions

In this deprived area, parents may not only lack access to a computer, but also a lack of ICT skills that prevents them from using the platform. The school started providing training for parents in basic ICT skills.

“We realise that although one-tenth of our parents are computer literate, nine-tenths aren’t, but there is the desire for them to learn. Two mornings a week [the ICT coordinator] is teaching the parents ICT skills.” [Headteacher]

“My dad doesn't know...And sometimes my mum gets confused.” [Year 5 learner]

The deputy headteacher mentioned how the given tools in the platform are sometimes not appropriately named and this poses a problem for them. She considers it thus important to communicate these issues with the provider:

“It's up to people like me, in a school leadership position, to share these problems with the people who are creating the system to see if there's a way around, because those test tools have huge potential but you must take away the stigma of the name.” [Deputy Head]

With young learners, finding out where the boundaries of e-safety lie can be hard when they are abstract. The ICT coordinator monitors the forums on the learning platform and in cases where children write inappropriate messages, the messages are removed and the coordinator discusses this with the learners.

5. Conditions for success

The SMT have been the major driver for implementation of the learning platform, by creating the vision, giving directions and being involved in the process. Presenting a united team is important, according to the deputy head:

“I think that we're strategically, you know... we present a very solid front and we share a vision and we share a belief and we can see the potential and we're moving at the same pace and we're both prepared to take risks...” [Deputy Head]

The headteacher's leadership style could be described as visionary and coaching, meaning that she sets goals and directions and she then enables staff to achieve these, by rewarding them and providing the resources they need.

The presence of an ICT coordinator has been a crucial factor for driving the development of the platform in the school. Her own enthusiasm and belief in the potential of the platform motivates her to support other staff members. She also had some previous experience of using a university portal, setting up a forum and a resource area in that.

“...I mean, that is down to [the ICT coordinator] and the children. ... She collates all the information and she keeps it all and it all gets compared to this time last year. That sort of thing, we don't get involved in...Not that hands-on, but, you know, we are very proud of her, really, even though we don't tell her that very often.” [Chair of governors]

The award the school received has motivated the SMT to do make further changes, utilising the platform. For example, the deputy head describes how she decided to share observation criteria on the platform rather than making an old-fashioned criteria table.

“I went away yesterday lunchtime with the idea that I was going to make some sort of chart for observing lessons for our new round of performance management. And I went downstairs, fired up by our award, I thought there's absolutely no reason why this shouldn't be an interactive tool. And so, instead of just redesigning a table – I thought that this could actually be on [the learning platform] so that the success criteria are shared and they're incremental so that people can see where they've got to go next and where they've come from. And they can share those criteria before an observation...Well, the benefit is that you're working towards shared goals and people know what it would look like.” [Deputy Head]

Enhancing teacher autonomy has been a major driver for using the platform. Teachers are all equally taking the lead in putting their planning on the learning platform and on tracking data of their learners.

“It's a cultural thing, isn't it? So you can change... if you give... you're radically changing a culture and the use of the tool is just one thing; it's one facet of that, but it is a change of culture. For example, you know, I've been teaching for a very long time and, you know, for 20 of the 23 years it was sort of 'Have your planning on the headteacher's desk by Monday morning'. But now you don't need to do that because you can put your planning up on [the learning platform] – that's a change of culture and that's about who's boss and that's about who is making... implementing the changes in the classroom.” [Deputy Head]

The headteacher's approach was 'leading from the front', being involved in making this cultural change (that also involved the learning platform) happen and even doing little practical things to enable teachers to use the platform.

“Then the teachers said, 'Well, it takes ten minutes for the computers to turn on, and we don't have time'. I said, 'Never mind, every morning I get to school at 6:30 in the morning, and I'll turn one of the computers in the staffroom on...’” [Headteacher]

The SMT saw the implementation of the learning platform as managing any other change. Sharing the vision and working all together is important.

“Well, I think it's managing any change and the rules... the rubric would be the same for managing any changes in a school. That you need to have visionary leadership and there needs to be a shared vision, so you can't have a headteacher or an ICT coordinator, or somebody, acting unilaterally. And once you've got the shared vision you need to talk about it so you don't keep it under wraps – you have a vision and you share it and you share it with all stakeholders – and I think it's vital.” [Deputy Head]

The Headteacher's determination and commitment to the vision were conditions for successful implementation:

“I assure you, absolutely determination, commitment, giving the resources... revisiting your vision, sharing your vision with the staff, and not wavering, being absolutely bloody-minded in what you want.” [Headteacher]

Provision of resources and support were important too:

“That is very important, so that all the teachers, all the staff, they have got their laptops, got their resources there. Having the expert like [the ICT coordinator] to support...” [Headteacher]

Small steps were taken in introducing aspects of the platform:

“...Really keeping them in on the game and what was happening, and drip dripping, you know, the use.” [Deputy Head]

“And we’re quite adamant that we’re only going to do each bit once so we can do it well, rather than sort of chucking everything at it and then backtracking.”
[ICT coordinator]

Other changes initiated by the Headteacher alongside the integration of the platform involved creative organisation:

“Teachers, when you have to sit in groups and plan, they were having their times at different odd times, and if a teacher wasn’t fitting [with the times] she wasn’t being part of the group. So I changed that. I said, ‘Okay, the money we have... we’ll put it into the enrichment programme. All the teachers get their PPA time at the same time, and Friday afternoon we offer 20 different activities to our children, and we get outside agencies involved. That way the children are experiencing Latin, and Chinese, and ballroom dancing, and football, and tennis, and the teachers have an opportunity to sit together and talk.”
[Headteacher]

Keeping the enthusiasm up about the platform has also been important:

“We tend to, at the moment, not be forcing too much in the sense that it’s going to create extra work for teachers. We’re trying to keep it rolling as an enthusiastic, exciting thing, so, we’re trying to avoid any forcing of things like homework online at the moment.” [ICT coordinator]

6. Lessons learnt and future plans

Lack of home access to computers and/or lack of ICT skills (especially parents) continue to be a challenge. The school is to look at possibilities of lending parents computers:

“We are hoping to be able to lend some of our older computers to pupils...so we’re looking into that, and, obviously, the cost implications.” [Chair of governors]

The headteacher plans to look at different ways of being able to provide computers to parents. More generally, the purchase of new equipment and the development of the learning platform were achieved without major changes in the financial planning:

“It was running a little bit cheaper than we thought it would... Yes, for the system, the different computers that were sourced. And, I think, we’re running well on track. There’s been no sort of major financial upsets, I think, through it. And, we’ve managed to update quite a lot of our computers and laptops and things.” [Chair of governors]

Other plans are to start doing online registration and the School Council have some ideas of how they would like to use the learning platform for voting, or putting news/announcements on the learning platform.

“I think it’s going to be better [using the learning platform for voting] because people get a better opportunity of choosing what they really want... everyone can access it if they have the internet...” [School Council member]

“You could video us, telling all the news, and it wouldn’t be a problem to read, so if we put a video or radio on [the learning platform] and tell them all the news, then they will know.” [School Council member]

The school platform provides the facility for development of e-portfolios and hand-in folders and the plan is that the e-portfolios will be accessed by parents, where they will be able to see their children’s results.

The deputy head, who is responsible for tracking and monitoring data, is currently looking at how she can develop a performance management area on platform which would enable gap analysis in teaching and learning that would inform the school strategies.

The last word belongs to the ICT coordinator:

“I don’t ever want people to see [the learning platform] as a burden. I think it is an amazing tool and is transforming the way that people can teach.”