



Victoria Park
Primary Academy

Can technology raise standards in schools?

The answer for Andrew Morrish, Headteacher at Victoria Park Academy in the West Midlands, is, in essence, "Yes, given the right conditions."

Situated in the West Midlands, Victoria Park has a large number of pupils for whom English is an additional language, and a high percentage of pupils on Free School Meals. In 2007, the school was taken out of Special Measures by Ofsted and four years later in 2011, was judged to be Outstanding.



The first choice for education

You can see below what the numbers look like in terms of improved results, but what they won't tell you is the buzz of excitement that pervades the school. The pupils love using the tablet devices, and the adults involved – teachers, parents and governors – regard them as crucial to the school's remarkable success.

More of that later, but an important, perhaps surprising, statement by Morrish is:

"There is no way I'd have embarked on this scheme when the school was first in special measures. The important thing then was to go back to basics, making sure good teaching and learning was in place, and restoring everyone's self-esteem."

By the time the school did adopt the 1:1 initiative made possible by the RM Education and Microsoft Shape the Future scheme, it had tried out a number of different ideas (pupil voting systems was one), and put into place several approaches to support and enhance the pupils' learning. Morrish believes this is key:

"Context is important: you have to have a history of trying things out."

Thus the school has introduced a range of approaches. One is to create a new type of role known as an Enrichment Coach. Vicky, one of the Coaches and a qualified teacher, tells us that her job is to liaise with classroom teachers to see which pupils are in danger of falling behind, by studying the assessment data. Then a programme of early intervention kicks in, taking into account the child's preferred learning styles, to make sure progress continues to be made. Indeed, part of the school's Pupil Premium funding has been used to pay for a senior teacher to provide daily intervention sessions for disadvantaged pupils using devices and OneNote to close the attainment gap in English and maths. It works: the school's 2013 tracking shows that this group are just 0.16 Average Points Score (APS) behind national expectations (25.5) compared with 0.8 for the rest of cohort.

Other innovations introduced by the school include peer-assisted learning groups (PALs), a new curriculum that involves real-world experiences and enterprise activities (the school works closely with the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO)), structured learning activities through a TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) wheel and teacher intervention.

Victoria Park is also about to pilot the use of RM Books. The aim here is to encourage the children to use their devices to read, and thereby help to develop their literacy skills. This shouldn't be too difficult. As one pupil said:

"I prefer reading books on the computer to paper ones."

Although the 1:1 devices were purchased for Years 5 and 6, devices such as netbooks and desktop computers are available lower down in the school. Natasha Try, ICT Leader, says that although a 1:1 scheme isn't running in Years 2, 3 and 4, there are sufficient devices available for classroom use to make the ratio almost 1:1. So why did the school decide to go down the 1:1 route via Shape the Future? Andrew Morrish again:

"We received a call from Shirelands Collegiate Academy, one of our main local secondary schools and judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. They invited us to take part in a pilot scheme. What convinced me were the software suite installed on each device, and the companies involved: RM Education and Microsoft."

"It's not like these are tin pot companies! Given the involvement of both Microsoft and RM, plus the software bundle, not to mention the discounted price of the devices themselves, I'd have had to be crazy to not give it serious consideration."

So has the scheme been worthwhile?

To cut to the chase, has it led to improved results?

As Kate Fowler, Deputy Headteacher, says,

"Everything the school does is interlinked: the 1:1 devices, the tools on them such as OneNote, role-play (such as pretending to be Victorians), the emphasis on speaking and listening, school trips and, last but not least, peer-assisted learning".

For this reason it is difficult to unravel it all and break it down into statements like "initiative X on its own has led to outcome Y". However, by the school's comprehensive tracking and attention to detail, Morrish is able to say, for example, that as a result of the use of 1:1 devices in class (e.g. netbooks) to complement Building Learning Power (BLP), thinking tools and TASC wheels, in 2011 and 2012 the two whole levels progress in English of Free School Meal (FSM) pupils increased to 5 points above non-FSM pupils (97% FSM/92% non-FSM). Ofsted themselves commented that:

"Information and communication technology is also used very well to enrich learning, including enabling pupils to video or record their work, or to present their work to others"

Despite the challenge of identifying precisely the effects that can be directly attributed to the 1:1 programme, there can be no doubt that it has been a vital component in the school's success in helping its children make astounding progress. Why? Because it has enabled the pupils to learn when and where they want to and, crucially, has helped to engage the children's parents and siblings in their education.

Take Ravinder's parents, for example. They attended workshops for parents which the school organised – including one in which the pupils showed parents how to stay safe on the internet and designed posters to illustrate this! Her dad has even tried Kodu, Microsoft's free games-creation program, for himself.

The numbers: a summary

- Victoria Park Academy progressed from Special Measures in 2007 to Outstanding in 2011.
- Attainment more than doubled from 39% in 2006 English/Maths combined to 86% in 2012 (against a predicted RoL score of 65%).
- As a result of 'Shape the Future' and 1:1 devices in Y6, plus netbooks throughout the school, the attainment gap for 2012 continues to close and is only 0.16 for disadvantaged pupils based on an expected Y6 APS of 25.5 in February 2013 according to school's own tracking. Pupils are confident and assured learners able to use the Microsoft Learning Suite in innovative ways to enhance their learning.
- In 2012, 100% of pupils achieved at least expected progress in maths at KS2, and all but one pupil in English. In 2013, the school expects it to be 100% in both English and maths.

They have become much more involved in Ravinder's school work now that they can spend time with her looking at what she has done on her tablet.

Ruth, a parent Governor, has had a similar experience:

"I can interact with my daughter more because I can now understand it. I have had to go on a course!"

She too has been involved in the parental workshops.

But what of the children? It's quite clear that Shape the Future has been transformational. On a purely pragmatic level, the tablets, with their touch-screen interface, are ideal for EAL children for whom the keyboard may be meaningless. However, because the devices can be used either as a mini-laptop or a tablet, pupils are not tied to only one mode of working.

Both parents and teachers say the children are much more confident now. For example, Ruth says that her daughter's maths has improved so much thanks to using the tablet that her self-confidence has had a real boost. Matt Wynne, a teacher at the school, says that pupils are much more confident now. Not only do they not have to worry about losing their work, because it is saved online, but even less able pupils can do high-calibre work involving, say, taking photos with their tablet and then writing a sentence or two about them.

The children are definitely very enthusiastic about the scheme, with one declaring:

"In Year 5 I used to stay in bed for an extra ten minutes, but now I want to come to school straight away."

The pupils share their discoveries about websites or using the software, with both their friends and their teachers. In one class, the "ICT guru" is a pupil who, generally speaking, is a low-attainer, showing that the device helps to bring out children's hidden talents. Indeed, because the children have proved so proficient at using the software, whether to organise their work or making a video, teachers tend to allow the pupils to decide for themselves which is the most appropriate application to use for a particular assignment.

Here's just one example of how the children made use of their tablets. One of the projects they undertook, as part of their termly social enterprise learning challenge, involved learning all about how the Victorians made and then sold soap. The children used OneNote to make notes on the different techniques for selling and marketing soap, and to do research on how it was made.

A key point to remember is that the devices have given many of the children opportunities they would not have had otherwise. For example, some either had no access whatsoever to a computer at home, or had to share the family computer with eight or more other people. Indeed, the biggest single impact of the scheme has been on home learning, with pupils being able to do research and problem-solving around a topic before they even come to the lesson. This in itself has encouraged the children to develop independent learning skills. (Being able to work at home is also a great advantage when children are off sick for any length of time, of course).

Because of this, another, perhaps unforeseen outcome, has been that lessons now have a much faster pace than they used to.

Pupils help each other with homework via the Skype app installed on their devices, organise revision notes for SATs using OneNote and make videos – sometimes with "off-message" results:

"We filmed the teacher and put a dinosaur next to him when we edited the video!"

Although that's a rather flippant remark, it nicely illustrates something that all visitors to the school would notice: the children

are able to talk very articulately about their work with the device. One of them told us, for example, that she was enjoying improved scores in both literacy and maths. Another was even able to tell us that she had leapt from a level 4a in maths to a 5b since the start of the year. Like the others, she not only knows what level she is on, but what her target level is.

Which brings us back to the thorny problem of tracking. In the school's 2011 inspection report, Ofsted observed that:

"Systems for tracking progress are robust, and challenging targets are set."

As mentioned earlier, close attention is paid to the children's progress to ensure that none fall by the wayside. That's, if you will, at the micro level. The macro approach is equally impressive, with a school development plan which sets out clearly-defined target outcomes and activities. These are monitored through a programme of lesson observations, listening to pupils, Governor evaluation visits and formal feedback to the Governing Body.

But is cost an issue? According to Ruth, representing the Governing Body, embarking on the Shape the Future scheme was the best thing the school has done. Morrish points out that having the devices can save money, for instance on support staff and photocopying. But, he says:

"Ultimately it depends on what a school considers a child's education is worth. A device costing £300 is less than £1 a day!"

As Vicky, one of the school's Enrichment Coaches puts it:

"All children should have access to these devices, regardless of how disadvantaged they are. This is 2013!"



"I can interact with my daughter more because I can now understand it"

Bringing affordable 1:1 computing to your school with Shape the Future

This is a programme in which Microsoft has partnered with RM Education to provide personal devices to pupils at a lower cost than they would normally be. The important thing to note, however, is that the devices provided have been configured specially for use in education. They come bundled with key software so that students can get up and running straight away, e.g. Microsoft Office.

Each device includes the Microsoft Learning Suite. This includes a wealth of software, including SongSmith and PhotoSynth, both of which the children have used in their projects. In addition, the devices have OneNote installed, a note-taking application which is great for organising your work.

You can find out more about Shape the Future here: <http://www.microsoft.com/shapethefuture>

And to find out what RM Education is offering under the scheme, please look here: <http://www.rm.com/shapethefuture>



EMPOWER THE CHILDREN
SHAPE
the **FUTURE**

Ingredients for success

The Victoria Park Academy experience suggests the following ought to be in place in order to help a school realise all the potential benefits of a 1:1 scheme based on the Shape the Future initiative:

- The school needs to have Headteacher and senior staff with a vision of what sort of institution it aspires to be, and what it wants for its pupils.
- It must have a body of staff who are enthusiastic and, indeed, passionate to make the vision a reality. The staff have to be willing to take it on.
- There needs to be a structure or framework into which a 1:1 programme fits. Simply having lots of devices is not enough: there needs to be support in the form of teachers and specialist intervention staff (the 'Enrichment Coaches' in Victoria Park's case). Also opportunities for the children to teach, learn from and collaborate with each other, and a curriculum which provides opportunities to use the devices in a meaningful and creative way by the children both individually and when working with others.
- The judicious, i.e. targeted, use of funds in order to make very precise adjustments in order to obtain the highest return in terms of rates of improvement.
- Getting parents actively involved with their children's learning.
- Forging good partnerships with other organisations. Victoria Park has partnered with RIO, Creative Alliance and, of course, RM Education and Microsoft for its 1:1 programme.
- Excellent technical support in the shape of a full-time school technician.
- Support for staff. At Victoria Park, for example, all teachers have been issued with devices for lesson preparation, presenting to their classes and getting to grips with the software available.
- The school should be a learning school, willing to try new things out and take a few risks.
- The time has to be right: the school needs to have the capacity in terms of skills and even emotions to take something like this on. Immediately following an Ofsted judgement of "Special Measures" is, perhaps, not ideal.

To find out more about Shape the Future call **08450 700 300**