

HANDHELD DEVICES

CAN TECHNOLOGY RAISE STANDARDS IN SCHOOLS?

As headteacher at Victoria Park Academy, the answer for Andrew Morrish is, in essence, "Yes, given the right conditions." In 2007, the school was taken out of special measures and Outstanding by 2011.



Victoria Park Primary Academy, West Midlands, has a large number of pupils for whom English is an additional language, and has a high percentage of pupils on free school meals. In 2007, the school was taken out of special measures and in 2011 was judged to be Outstanding.

You can see the improved results, but what numbers won't tell you is the buzz of excitement that pervades the school. This is, in part, due to the introduction of the 1:1 device scheme. The pupils love using their tablet devices and the teachers, parents and governors regard them as crucial to the school's success.

NEW APPROACHES

Before the school adopted 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 and put into place several approaches to support and enhance the pupils' learning.

These included the introduction of Enrichment Coaches. One of these coaches is Vicky, a qualified teacher, and her job is to liaise with 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.

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 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 behind national expectations, compared to 0.8 for the rest of its cohorts.

Other innovations introduced by the school include peer-assisted

learning groups, a new curriculum that involves real-world experiences and enterprise activities, structured learning activities through a TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) wheel and teacher intervention.

SHAPE THE FUTURE

So why did the school decide to go down the 1:1 route via Shape the Future? Headteacher Andrew Morrish recalls: "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 was the software suite installed on each device, and the companies involved: RM Education and Microsoft. It's not like these are tinpot companies. Given the involvement of both Microsoft and RM, plus the software bundle, and not to mention the discounted price of the devices themselves, I'd have had to be crazy to not give it serious consideration."

DEMONSTRATING THE BENEFITS

Everything the school does is interlinked: the 1:1 devices, the tools on them, role

play (such as pretending to be Victorians), the emphasis on speaking and listening, school trips and peer-assisted learning. Ofsted itself 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."

There can be no doubt that the 1:1 programme has been a vital component in the school's success in helping its children make astounding progress. 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.

And what of the children? It's clear that Shape the Future has been transformational. The pupils share their discoveries about websites or using the software. The children have proved so proficient at using the software, whether to organise their work or to make a video, that teachers tend to allow the pupils to decide which is the most appropriate application to use for a particular assignment.

The children talk articulately about their work with the device. One of them said that she was enjoying improved scores in both literacy and maths. Another said 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.

WORTH EVERY PENNY

But is cost an issue? According to Ruth, a parent governor representing the governing body, embarking on the Shape the Future scheme was the best thing the school has done. Andrew Morrish points out that having the devices can even save the school money, but 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."

FURTHER INFORMATION

To see the full case study on Victoria Park Academy, visit www.rm.com/casestudies

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