



Case studies

Prince Albert Junior and Infant School, Birmingham, UK

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This is one of 25 case studies produced for STEPS, the Study of the impact of technology in primary schools, to illustrate the impact of ICT, on schools, teachers and learners, and to highlight barriers and enablers to its effective use in the school. Further information can be found at <http://steps.eun.org>.



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1. CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Prince Albert is a large inner city primary school in Aston, Birmingham: a socially deprived area populated by a range of different ethnic groups. In a 2006 government survey, Aston was identified as a 'significant divide' community because of its low levels of home computer ownership (15 per cent of homes compared with the national average of 89 per cent). Almost all of the 729 pupils aged 3 to 11 come from Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average.



2. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

Parental engagement is a major strength of the school. A prime example is the school's involvement in the Aston Pride Computers in the Home project.

The school manages a scheme, operating since 2006, to provide computers in the home on behalf of eight schools in the Aston district of Birmingham, charging parents €11 a month by bank transfer for a laptop, educational content, technical support and internet access. The project aims to address digital divide issues and reduce disadvantage, develop family ICT skills, and use the child as 'the educator of the community'. The project involves 365 children aged 6 to 10, and their families. The wireless network cloud for the district uses transmitters on the school roof, pubs, tower blocks, and other buildings. The school has been awarded a Becta Best Whole School Award and a special award for community engagement.

There are many large families with six children or more, and the extended family is the norm – grandparents often act as child minders while parents are out at work, and it is often the grandparents who get involved when the children use the computer. On average, 7.6 people use each home computer. Parents typically use it for accounts, online shopping and to access school data about their child's progress. Children use the computer at home for completing homework assignments; it is also useful when they are away from school through illness. Home computers have the same software installed as the school, and internet access



is provided through the Birmingham Grid for Learning (BGfL). Access is quite strongly filtered (although it has now been relaxed a little, to enable the use of messaging services such as MSN), and parents can vary settings within overall parameters. By 2011, it is expected that half of the homes in Aston will be connected to the internet (2,500 homes).

The school has been using BGfLplus as its learning platform for the last six years, but is now developing its use of Moodle. Online activities are popular, and particularly those in which children compete live against peers in other schools in other countries, such as Mathletics. Pupils choose their own difficulty level, but are advised by teachers when necessary. Honeycomb enables children to collaborate with other schools, adding stickers, photos and audio comments to other children's work. Education City provides personalised mathematics activities for pupils, so that if they have difficulties with graphs for example, the system generates remedial activities. It includes a tracking system which logs the time of day, score and duration spent on the activity.

Email is provided through the BGfL and is filtered. Children have their own email address (which is not their full name) and use them to send messages and attach pictures to teachers in connection with project work. Teachers have a separate email address for children to use and they cc every message to children to an archive file (safety@princealbert...).

Homework for the whole class is set on Friday to be completed by Wednesday. Children work over the weekend to complete assignments, and parents sign a sheet to confirm that the work has been done. It is not unusual for parents to make their children do the work again: children do far more than they are set, and continue to use the system during holidays.

The school runs a six week 'course' for parents after they drop their children at school. This is not presented as training, but as a way for parents to help their children make progress in their education. Children make presentations to parents during these sessions.

In the school itself there is a least one ICT expert in each year group. Every teacher has a laptop, and both the staff and governors have remote access to the school's ICT resources. Responsibility for purchasing resources has now transferred from the ICT team to the respective subject leader. Planning is done online and there is an online portal to allow all resources, files and work to be shared.

3. IMPACT, BARRIERS AND ENABLERS

3.1 SCHOOL

ICT DEVELOPMENT PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY, ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES AND ATTITUDES

- **Impacts**
 - The project involves 365 children and their families.

- The governing body now use email for all communications, such as the circulation of agendas, minutes and policies.
- **Barriers**
 - Teaching unions advise that teachers should not send emails to children.
- **Enablers**
 - The headteacher, senior management team and governing body all have a common vision and willingness to use some of the school budget to support the development of ICT.
 - There is a governor champion of the scheme and one of them actually visits homes to encourage and support families.
 - There is continuous external evaluation by the University of Lancaster, monitoring the links between ICT engagement and the children's attainment in core skills, and numeracy and literacy in particular.
 - There is alignment of effort in creating a learning partnership between the home, the school, the local authority, Birmingham City University and Aston Pride New Deal for communities: "You need all the people in the equation to play ball".
 - "Many government projects enabled this one, you can't separate them out, but e-government is one." E-government is impossible without e-ready citizens. It is part of the New Deal for the Community and Aston Pride schemes funded by the government.



RESOURCING

- **Impacts**
 - All children aged 6 and 7 have access to a computer and broadband.
 - There are 12-15 laptops in every class, 50 laptops per school year, interactive whiteboards in every teaching area and a wireless network in the school.
- **Barriers**
 - Pupils have difficulty remembering different passwords and identities at home and school.

- There is an issue with licensing educational software for home use. Community licences were negotiated enabling software to be installed, but not provided on CD-ROM.
- **Enablers**
 - The school has to enable high levels of ICT use in school and at home for the system to work.
 - There has been planning for all pupils to have a computer with broadband access wherever they live.
 - There needs to be a suitable school infrastructure to support laptops and software, with high levels of technical support.
 - It is important to have someone to lead the scheme in each school taking part, and to have half a day each week to support it. This is not a role for the ICT co-ordinator.
 - The internet is an enabler: “It’s the internet access that’s valuable – email, tracking learning progress.” The headteacher is convinced that ‘online is the way to go’ so that children can log on at home, school, in a library and so on. Being online enables teachers to share ideas and resources inside and outside school.
 - The fact that most content is purchased on a renewable annual subscription basis is an incentive to developers to maintain the quality of their products.
 - Software is purchased on a subscription basis so each year governors are asked to approve funding for renewals. Governor vision is therefore important, as is advocacy by teachers to persuade them to maintain the investment.



THE CURRICULUM AND ICT

- **Impacts**
 - Children are motivated to extend their own learning far more than before.
 - Learning is more personalised.
- **Enablers**
 - Homework tasks using the home computer are set weekly, so that children have clear educational reasons to work with ICT at home.
 - Pupils can use the same software and learning content at home as at school, allowing them to continue their learning.

ASSESSMENT OF ICT AND ICT FOR ASSESSMENT

- **Impacts**
 - Children do weekly homework via the internet which they now understand can be tracked.
 - Pupils have become accustomed to receiving sophisticated feedback on their performance when using online learning materials.
- **Enablers**
 - Some of the learning resources used include automatic assessment and progress tracking.

ORGANISATION OF SUPPORT

- **Enablers**
 - The school has very good in-house technical support, a technician employed by the school.
 - There is a helpline and technical support to ensure home computers are kept up and running.

3.2 TEACHERS

THE PEDAGOGICAL ROLE OF ICT TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND TEACHING

- **Enablers**
 - All teachers in the school go to the BETT educational show in London every year.
 - The ICT subject co-ordinator works two days a week in the school, and is also a part-time post-graduate course tutor for initial teacher education at Birmingham City University.

PARTICIPATION, MOTIVATION, CONFIDENCE AND PERFORMANCE

- **Impacts**
 - Teachers are positive and willing to take the challenges on board with support and guidance throughout the year.
- **Enablers**
 - There is a lead teacher for the project within each setting.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and proactive, and possess some ICT skills. They are given support, training and extra time to embed ICT into the curriculum and involve parents.

3.3 LEARNERS

ICT SKILLS

- **Impacts**
 - Children have high-level ICT skills and are both competent and confident users of ICT.
 - Pupils of 6 and 7 years old can now do tasks that 8 and 9 year olds used to find difficult. For example, many have hotmail accounts.
 - There has been an increase in parental involvement.
 - There has been an increase in online homework, with some now made available via the learning platform.

MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATION AND CONFIDENCE

- **Impacts**
 - Motivation is higher. Pupils are motivated by, and engage well, with ICT. There is a noticeable growth in confidence in certain children thanks to involvement in a home access project.
 - Parents are enthusiastic about having a computer in the home.
 - Parents are more involved with children's homework, making comments and supporting home-based learning.
 - Parents attend training and workshops, accessing ICT through resources in their native language, and using computers for their own needs at home.
- **Barriers**
 - Some parents were concerned about e-safety issues, worried about their own lack of own skills, and about children breaking computers.



- **Enablers**

- The scheme has raised the awareness of parents and has gained their confidence. It has enabled the school to build good relationships with parents.
- Parents and children sign an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and the school runs regular e-safety sessions. The basic rule is to 'use ICT in home as in school'.
- Parents would not attend training if presented as something for them, but participate if it is perceived as helping their child.
- staff and parents to monitor achievement and share outcomes.

4. REFERENCES

- **Sources:**

- Interviews with staff and pupils at the school.

- **Further information:**

- Computers in the Home project (www.digitalbirmingham.co.uk).
- School website (www.princealbert.bham.sch.uk).
- Becta ICT Excellence Awards 2007 - Best whole school (primary, joint winner) (<http://awards.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=34595>).