This document was archived in December 2016 because it is no longer current

Using modern technology to improve English: Alwoodley Primary School

URN: 107912
Local authority: Leeds
Date published: 16 January 2013
Reference: 130019

Brief description

This case study focuses on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve teaching and learning in English. It shows how a range of ICT resources has been used successfully to encourage young children to experiment confidently with different approaches to communication, to understand how language changes to meet specific demands and to appreciate the importance of reviewing and improving early drafts.

Overview – the school's message

'We have always focused on learning gains for pupils, using varied teaching styles to meet their learning needs and only use ICT where we believe that it will enhance pupils' learning.

We make a clear distinction between teaching "of" and "with" ICT, using ICT in English with a clear focus on how it will promote learning. For example, Year 4 pupils made leaflets about Whitby. The children were able to use ICT to research a place many had not previously visited and to use ICT to continuously edit and improve their leaflet. They were using skills learnt in ICT lessons to improve their writing and target their audience more effectively.

We collect data on children not making appropriate progress then look at individuals' backgrounds, including home resources, activities and emotional issues. Half-termly meetings rigorously follow up and track these children. Using effective targeted ICT to support these children through the provision of home mini-laptops, home licences for parents and carers, and specific software aimed at areas of weakness has had a positive impact on standards and parental engagement.

Our staff feel confident that ICT is well resourced and technically reliable because we have invested in high quality hardware, software and human support.'

Jane Langley, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

The Ofsted report, *English at the crossroads* reflected on the wide and increasing gap between the best schools and the rest in their use of ICT in English. The most recent triennial report, *Moving English Forward*, argued for a curriculum in English that engages with the world outside school and makes use of modern technology to enhance the credibility, relevance and challenge of the subject in pupils' eyes. Subject inspections confirm that ICT still plays a limited part in the teaching and learning of English in too many schools.

English at Alwoodley Primary School was inspected in February 2011 and was judged to be outstanding. This case study shows how ICT contributes to higher standards and more effective teaching in English at this school.

On a normal Wednesday morning, the following uses of ICT are noted by a visiting inspector in different classrooms:

- Children in the Reception class programme a 'floor robot' to collect letters as they practise their phonic sounds and use these to form words. Some children are filming each other for a film about life in the Reception class to show to the new children who will be starting in September.

- Year 1 pupils film each other, playing, answering questions, and taking photos of the 'small worlds' models created by other pupils.

- Year 2 pupils watch a film about climate change and use a software package to make their own film. They are using digital technology to record ideas and create their own story.

- Year 3 pupils create their own animated calligrams. They have used a program game about settings and adventures as a stimulus for writing.

- Year 4 pupils research different websites as part of a topic on Black History. They are producing a leaflet about Whitby and explain why it is beneficial to use a computer rather than handwritten methods.

- Year 5 pupils compare film, internet and poem versions of the story of Hercules. The teacher models a high-quality poem about emotions and the children create their own version before redrafting, using a computer program.

- Year 6 pupils use the visualiser to share, improve and edit their own writing. Peer-assessment, self-assessment and editing work are clearly common and valuable practises for these pupils.

Clearly, something unusual is going on here. ICT is closely integrated into all lessons as a way of helping pupils to develop their work in English across reading, writing, speaking and listening. How has this happened and what is its impact?

Effective leadership

As always, this innovative curriculum owes a great deal to the visionary leadership of the headteacher. Jane Langley has been a lead teacher for ICT in the past and worked closely with BECTA. She has provided training for other schools and Alwoodley frequently hosts visits from teachers keen to find out how they can improve their own use of ICT. However, Jane is clear that the emphasis on ICT is primarily about effective learning. She says that her question to staff is always: 'Can we do this better without using ICT?' She also understands the pitfalls of using ICT extensively and one of her early appointments was of a full-time Learning Support Manager for ICT so that there is always someone available to support teachers and keep everything updated and working. As a result, staff are confident to use and experiment with ICT because it is well-resourced and technically reliable. The school's resources for ICT are extensive and include a suite of 30 computers, supported by mini-laptops for use in classrooms and at home. Year 6 pupils also have access to 30 Apple Macs to 'extend their creativity and provide extra challenge'.

Improvements to learning

As the examples listed above show, teachers and pupils use a wide range of ICT to promote English skills in all classes. Phonics programs help to develop early reading, and spelling programs are used throughout the school; the instant feedback on success is regarded as especially welcome to pupils. The range of reading available is extended by schemes that integrate texts that appeal to boys through graphics, games and animation. There is an especially strong emphasis on the use of ICT to develop speaking and listening. Cameras are used from the Reception upwards to encourage and develop the spoken word. Younger pupils film discussions and role plays, and regularly interview other pupils about their work. Older pupils study moving image texts and create their own. For example, pupils read a picture book and the images are scanned and studied by pupils who then add sounds and words to create a different type of text.

Year 6 pupils constructed a film around the theme of gargoyles. The development of ICT skills to promote English, including the use of cameras, is carefully planned from year to year. For example, younger Key Stage 2 pupils are introduced to emailing while pupils in Years 5 and 6 move on to blogs and reviews of search engines.

Another example of the use of ICT in English comes from the extensive development of the virtual learning environment (VLE). This has been developed primarily as a two-way communication system with parents and carers and pupils, used mainly to extend home learning. Each year group has an area where they can access the current week's spellings and upload individual homework. Every year group also has its own VLE 'room' which includes varied literacy activities and work closely linked to the class learning. This enables parents and carers to access their children's work and keep an eye on homework tasks. There are many whole-school 'rooms' which have discussion boards on up-to-date current events and activities such as the Olympic Games. Teachers believe that these discussion boards motivate children

to read and write more. The school pays for home licences for selected educational websites to extend home learning opportunities. Parents and carers say that they are grateful for the recommended quality software which links to pupils' school work.

The school has also invested in over 120 portable mini-laptop computers, which are used both in school and to extend home learning. These are set up with strict e-safety features and specific programs. Their use is targeted at particular classes which need to improve standards in English. They are also available for identified pupils over holiday periods. The school is able to monitor how they are used at home, how long and for what, and shares this information with the pupils themselves by using a parental control e-safety program. This increases pupils' motivation to complete homework and the quantity and quality of their use of the laptops has increased as a result. The laptops are also used for individual, group or whole-class tasks in school and are linked to the whole-school network.

The school's website has many practical applications in English. It provides links to the typing programs so that pupils can do extra work at home. It is regularly updated and extremely well used by families. The section for parents and carers includes 'Help Your Child with Spelling' and 'Ideas to Support your Child's Reading'. There are also links on the website to *Radio Alwoodley* and opportunities for podcasting. Here, pupils have recorded poetry, interviewed each other and uploaded their work. Other children and parents enjoy listening to these recordings. There is also access to *Radio Waves*, a Leeds-based project which is similar to an online newspaper where children interview others, write articles, have debates, and record photos and videos. There are also a range of popular online links including a children's newspaper, which is also available in hard copy. The school has a licence so that staff can share these articles on their classroom's interactive whiteboard. Recent news articles are regularly used in English lessons.

Extra-curricular activities involving ICT have recently targeted gifted and talented and children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The school holds weekly Saturday morning classes for parents and carers, and grandparents to learn with their child. It initially targeted children who were considered to lack parental support at home. Over the weeks, the adult and child interaction improved markedly. The family could also take home the mini-laptops for the week to practise the skills learnt. This was then monitored by teachers to target individual support more effectively.

Better achievement

The school's Key Stage 2 results confirm the impact of ICT in the English curriculum on boys and especially on their attainment in writing. 96% of all pupils achieved or exceeded expected progress in writing last year compared with the national average of 83%. One interesting feature of the school's approach to writing is that it teaches keyboard skills explicitly using a number of specific commercial programs. Jane Langley believes that this particularly helps weaker writers, boosting their self-esteem, enabling them to express their ideas, and edit and check spelling more easily. The technology also enables pupils to edit and re-draft more systematically than is usually seen in schools. Older pupils are knowledgeable about the process of redrafting and do it well.

What has been the impact of all this activity on pupils' standards? 92% of pupils achieved Level 4 or more in 2011 in English with 34% at Level 5; both figures are better than the national average. In 2012, 89% of boys and 92% of girls achieved Level 4, and 36% of boys and 54% of girls achieved Level 5 - both well above the national average. Some 93% made

expected progress in English, compared with a national average of 89%.There is a particularly positive picture in writing and the achievement of boys.

The school's background

Alwoodley Primary School in Leeds is a large two-form entry school for pupils aged 3 to 11, with around 500 pupils currently on roll. The school has a very diverse pupil population. The immediate area of the school comprises both sought-after residential housing and a local authority housing estate. 31% of the pupils come from households that are judged to be in the 10% most deprived in England. The proportion of pupils judged to be eligible for free schools meals is broadly in line with national average but rising. Half the pupils are from a range of minority ethnic groups and over one quarter speaks English as an Additional Language.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch here.

To view other good practice examples, go to:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice