

Schools Achieving Success Interactive Learning

SEEVEAZ: South East England Virtual Education Action Zone

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Jenny Burgess, Headteacher of Katherine Semar Junior School in Saffron Walden

Raising standards through creative learning

The way children learn today has undoubtedly been transformed by information and communications technology. The educational experience now bears a style of teaching where technology is the tool that brings learning alive. Young minds are fascinated by interactive learning methods, and react positively to multimedia lessons presented in a stimulating and entertaining way.

Quick to recognise the advantages of ICT in the classroom, the South East England Virtual Education Action Zone (SEEVEAZ) has equipped all of its 800 teachers with Toshiba Satellite notebooks. This move stems from the Zone’s aim of establishing world class standards in teaching, learning and leadership.

Co-operating and collaborating

Mr Albin Wallace, ICT Project Manager for SEEVEAZ, explains why this autonomous group – an eclectic mix of 19 primary and secondary state schools located around the Thames Estuary in Bromley and Essex – decided to invest in notebook technology. “We wanted to advance teacher capabilities for improved school performance. The notebooks are a mechanism for enhancing the quality of teaching in a consistent and accountable way.”

“This technology has also helped cultivate a collaborative and open working culture throughout the Zone. Researching topics

on the Internet, sharing centrally managed online curriculum resources, as well as different learning styles are just some of the ways teachers are working together for the benefit of the pupils,” adds Mr Wallace.

Introducing technology to the early learners

A common dilemma faced by many infant and primary schools is deciding the best time to introduce computers to youngsters, even though they are still developing early learning skills such as handwriting. Jenny Burgess, Headteacher of Katherine Semar Junior School in Saffron Walden, explains their attitude to this familiar debate:

“Traditional teaching techniques will always play a fundamental role when it comes to perfecting basic skills. However, there are many opportunities where technology can help simplify learning. For example, our Year 6 Geography lessons regularly involve pupils using teachers’ notebooks to send emails to other students around the world. This ‘real-life’ interaction helps children understand more about the world, including different time zones, languages, countries and cultures.”

Ms Mary Williams, teacher for Key Stage 1 pupils at Katherine Semar School, is astonished at the capacity for technology these youngsters have. “Even pupils in Year 2 have already conquered these computers to the extent of being able to photograph project work using a digital camera, attaching these images to emails before sending them to pupils at a school in Tasmania.”



Case Study

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Staff room for 800 teachers? Virtually!

When asked how individual notebook access has helped teachers within SEEVEAZ, Ms Williams responds: “Every teacher within the Zone can access and input to the ‘virtual staff room’, where ideas, discussions and policies are exchanged and best practices shared. This technology has opened up extraordinary communications links, making a real and positive difference to our working day.”

This school has also benefited from a noticeable reduction in the teacher’s administrative load, as lesson planning and information resources are more easily available. Electronic, common-formatted documents have been created for pupil tracking, which include end of year reports and individual educational plans required for special needs pupils. Consequently, a professional image is generated for the school, & there is less duplication of effort. Meanwhile, strategic issues such as Performance Management Objectives are electronically linked to OFSTED, ensuring the school maintains its focus.

In the coming months, accessibility to information will become even easier for teachers as SEEVEAZ is planning to introduce wireless networks for each school. This will enable teachers to use their notebooks anywhere on the school grounds, without the need for cables or electricity.

Teaching the teachers

As the quest for improving pupil learning across the educational spectrum continues, SEEVEAZ has introduced a bi-annual capability and skills audit that provides a snapshot of every teacher’s ICT ability, how it affects the school and ultimately the Zone. To date, over 70,000 pieces of data have been accumulated, providing a valuable benchmark for monitoring progress.

Since the introduction of the notebooks 18 months ago, the number of SEEVEAZ teachers passing ‘Stage 3 – Advanced Level’ of the audit has excelled from 8% to 50%. Such headway exemplifies how teachers have embraced the technology, as Mr Wallace explains: “The key to creating sustained ecological change from an ICT system is through the improvement of teacher capabilities. It is essential to boost IT skills and develop practical methods of implementation in all subject areas. Throughout our Zone, pupils are benefiting from a higher standard of teaching than ever before.”



For further information on this success story and Toshiba’s range of technology, please contact Toshiba on 01932 822814 or e-mail educationPCs@toshiba.co.uk

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