



A Virtual Staffroom

Focus on **Learning platforms**

Primary/whole school

Top tips from Bethune Park Primary School

- Identify a particular way that the learning platform can benefit your school
- Drip-feed aspects of the functionality to create familiarity
- Don't underestimate the power of simple, fun ideas to kick-start involvement
- Make the learning platform a daily part of school life for staff
- Commit to keeping the content refreshed, up to date and relevant
- Plan a phased handover from paper to paperless communication

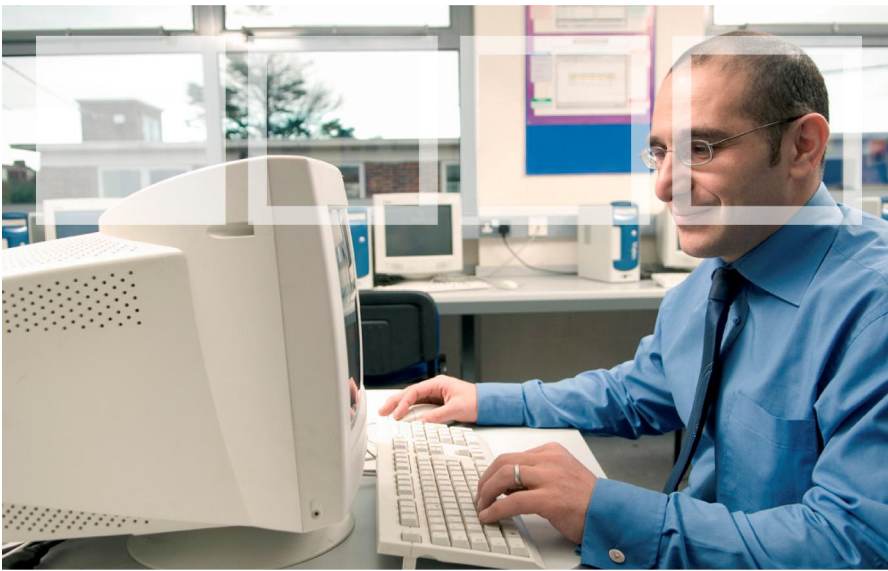
Bethune Park Primary is proud of its ability to create a stimulating and caring environment where the individual needs and abilities of pupils are taken into account. Following a presentation by their Local Authority, Bethune Park seized the opportunity to get involved in a learning platform pilot project.

Initially two teachers used the system with their pupils to place notices, calendars, web links and learning tasks onto the pupils' desktops. The response was very positive from all parties and favourable comment was received from Ofsted. During the pilot project, the school experimented with various aspects of the learning platform and saw that it could offer the school a 'smarter way of working', so the decision was taken to initiate a 'Virtual Staffroom'.

Sue Wright, headteacher at Bethune Park, explains; "My objective was to remove the need for sending briefing minutes and paper notes round the school. Firstly we provided all staff with a user account and set up a calendar, staff notices, a weekly bulletin and the user's email property which were all placed on the desktop and 'fixed' into position to prevent accidental removal. Having introduced the functionality at a staff meeting, I then asked them to login every day to check for notices."

"To encourage use of the platform I decided that injecting a little humour into proceedings would help," continues Sue. "So, one Sunday evening, I placed a note entitled 'Chocolate' in the Virtual Staffroom. Staff who clicked on this read that, if they sent a pupil to my office that morning, they would receive a chocolate roll – I find that food works here!"

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“Staff comment on how useful it is to logon to the platform to see if there’s anything coming up during the following week, and part-time staff find it invaluable.”

*Sue Wright, headteacher,
Bethune Park Primary*

“It was a promising start when I logged on later that evening to find an email from a part-time teacher pleading for hers to be kept in the fridge until she reported in for work. A few days later, a notice went up with ‘Email’ as the subject. This time, to get their chocolate roll, they had to send me an email. My plan to embed the desktop was working, but costing me a fortune in cake!”

However, these two simple and fun tasks had proved to be a quick, effective way of getting staff involved in use of the learning platform. Creating a routine of regular use is important, as Sue explains; “I try to ensure that the Weekly Bulletin - a property only editable by the leadership team and Admin Staff - is always available by Sunday evening. Many staff comment on how useful it is to logon to the desktop to see if there is anything coming up for the following week and part-time staff find it invaluable as they know what’s going on before they arrive at school mid-week. On a more light-hearted note we now also use the recently created staff forum for our ‘Fat Club’ – possibly a requirement resulting from all the chocolate I gave out to encourage use in the first place!”

For staff to feel comfortable with communicating and seeking information via the platform, Bethune Park found it important to provide both time and support. “Before fully migrating to the learning platform, we decided to have a half term period during which paper communication and the learning platform were run simultaneously. At the end of this half term we were very pleasantly surprised at how trouble-free the move to paperless staff communication was. The learning platform has truly transformed the way we work as a school. We did drip-feed elements of its functionality at first and this gave us time to get used to the system – for us it has worked really well and we see great potential for the future,” concludes Sue.



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