

Redcar Community College:

Winner: Northern Grid Overall Excellence Award 2010

A school where ICT is not only embedded in all facets of school life from administration tasks to creative teaching, but where the outputs from ICT are manifestly delivering improvements in standards of attainment and excellence throughout the school. Led by an inspiring and visionary senior staff, Redcar Community College presents an ideal of what a 21st Century learning environment can become. Rapid improvements in student behaviour, attendance and exam performance are attributable to the application of ICT at every stage of school life. The judges were impressed by every aspect of IT in the school from attendance monitoring to portal development to the applied use of ICT in performing arts.

This is how the judges of the Northern Grid ICT in Excellence Awards described Redcar Community College. The school won the Overall Excellence Award in 2010 which recognises the school as being one of the best at using ICT to support teaching and learning in the North East of England.

<http://www.northerngrid.org/awards2010>

Northern Grid and Redcar and Cleveland Local Authority, who nominated the school for the regional award, believe that the school's success should be shared more widely.

Background

Redcar Community College is a Specialist Visual and Performing Arts Centre in Redcar and Cleveland, with 729 students. ICT is embedded in the school and is an accepted part of all aspects of school life. It is used to improve attainment, achievement, motivation, behaviour, attitudes and creativity. Staff throughout the school talk about the importance of ICT with many saying they couldn't do their job without it.

What did they achieve and how did they do it?

1. The ability to plan strategically and develop creative solutions

The school provides *strong leadership and support* for the use of ICT across all aspects of school life. Their understanding of how new technologies can empower the learner means they are able to identify where ICT can support the school and *avoid using technology just for the sake of it*. The focus is always on *improving the experiences and opportunities of the students*.

The ICT department is seen as a bastion of *good practice* and other departments come to them for advice and support. However, ICT is not the sole responsibility this department, *everyone is involved*. ICT is *not imposed* on staff, they are encouraged to use it and *success stories are shared* across the school allowing all staff to see the benefits it can bring. *Pupils are often used as experts* and are involved in training staff.

Members of staff have access to *excellent CPD opportunities* allowing them to learn from other schools and organisations and from research. Increasingly other schools are visiting Redcar Community College to see their achievements and learn from their experience.

2. Developing a strong network of support

“teaching and learning is the driver”

Dale Hopper, Network Manager

Technical support within a school can be an undervalued resource but not at Redcar Community College. The college has invested in a *strong technical support team*, who have led and supported projects across the school and local authority, they are crucial to the success of the school’s approach.

The three technical staff support the network of 530+ machines. There is a lot of fire fighting but the team prefer to *work proactively*. They recognise that the technology is there to support teaching and learning and try to *ensure that students and teachers have access to the resources they need*. Technicians spend time in classrooms during lessons so they can see the needs and challenges first hand.

Technology needs to be *updated regularly* and the team has already identified future needs as part of Building Schools for the Future. Now BSF has been scrapped it will be *difficult to find funding* for improvements and it will be a challenge is to ensure standards are maintained at current levels.

The technical team always manage to find time to give that bit extra and their *enthusiasm and hard work* is a key strength in the school. They work hard to find solutions, with teaching and learning, not technology, being the basis of decisions.

3. Using technologies to support school systems

“ICT systems have had a massive impact”

Peter Liphthorpe, Academic Progress Coordinator

The work of the school is underpinned by extremely *sophisticated and effective systems*. All members of staff have access to a range of tools that make the management of learning, planning and reporting more efficient. These include:

- online notice boards for sharing information
- calendars which allow events to be planned quickly and easily
- a booking system for resources and rooms
- a request support system allowing teachers to get the support they need quickly e.g. to deal with pupil behaviour or medical emergencies
- the ability to log the need for technical support
- shared resources for supply staff or students wanting to work independently
- SIMs for recording and tracking attendance, behaviour and attainment and for using this data to identify when curriculum or pastoral support is needed.

Systems are set up for teachers to use. They generate reports to share with parents and provide *information to be shared* with academic staff, pastoral leaders and senior management. The data means staff can predict targets and staff can work with students to help *improve their results*.

Members of staff are learning all of the time and finding new applications that can be used. There could be a danger of producing data for data's sake but all of the systems in place are relevant and beneficial. The school's focus is on the *positive impact the system has on students* not on the ICT.

"I couldn't do any of my job without ICT"

Jacquie Hutchinson, Learning Resource Centre / Work Based Learning

Working with students on work experience is much easier with ICT systems in place. The technology allows easy sharing of data, information and resources as well as easy communication with students. Links between schools are strengthened and the college is now advising Redcar and Cleveland Local Authority on rolling out systems to all schools.

4. Utilising new technologies to support learning

"improved monitoring systems have led to the highest number of pupils getting 5 A – Cs ever...it's individual learning, it's what it's all about"

Carole Sanders, Head of House / Academic Monitoring KS4

As a Performing Arts Specialist College new technologies are used to *promote and celebrate achievement*. The splendid digital art work of the school is celebrated through a stunning calendar.

An *innovative project linking ICT with dance* reflects the imaginative thinking of the college. As part of a cross departmental project with ICT and Dance a Breakdancer from the 'Bad Taste Cru' came to work with 14 Year 8 and Year 9 boys. The basis of this exciting project is the creation of a film using *Green Screen Technology* plus a documentary following the process which will be used as a teaching resource. The boys learnt the basics of break dancing and recreated a scene from the famous Breakdancing Film 'Beat Street'.

Staff from the Maths, English and ICT department work closely with other departments meaning skills taught in their departments are reinforced *across the curriculum*. *Licencing* is in place to allow software to be used across the school so exciting and engaging activities like comic strips and animations can support the more traditional uses of ICT.

Until a few years ago few students in KS 3 and 4 studied ICT. The school recognised the importance of ICT, seeing it as a fundamental skill needed in most jobs. The method of teaching ICT was reviewed with a shift of emphasis from use of standard applications to a *focus on using the ICT creatively and for a purpose*. They made it a required subject and support is provided through *video tutorials* and systems that allow access from home. In 2010 97% of students achieved grade A – C.

KS3 is taught over 2 years and the *annual plan for ICT is reviewed regularly*. Year 7 starts with key skills that will be needed during the year, including research, file management and eSafety. The year ends with a broad focus allowing pupils to engage creatively with ICT applications e.g. *Scratch, Flash* and *Mission Maker*. Year 8 builds on the work in year 7. Students do a lot of web design and engage with new software. Regular *competitions* add challenge and motivation, these are creative and often involve the use of *Photoshop*, Flash and Movie Maker. Entries to the competitions are displayed on the ICT display boards. Other displays are used to show how *ICT is used in different careers* and to show research into the latest technology.

Students in Key Stage 4 have access to *OCR nationals* and *GCSE* ICT and the school is encouraging more students to take the *BTEC Diploma*. The school is rightly proud of its achievement of getting *nearly 100% of pupils to achieve A – C grades at GCSE*. The ICT staff works extremely hard to support pupils to achieve their potential. It is a small department with only 2 members of staff who are dedicated to establishing good relationships with all pupils and supporting them to *meet their full potential*, this often means working with the students into July to take pupils to the next level. The school's success has been recognised and they are supporting other schools to do the same.

Functional Skills are a high priority and the ICT department works closely with other subjects to support the use of ICT wherever it is appropriate.

Other subject areas have taken part in projects including *photography* and *graphic design* in Art and *Stop Frame Animation* and use of *Comic Life* in MFL. Other departments may not know what applications are available for them to use and are supported to use alternatives e.g. *designing web pages* about the Tudors rather than producing PowerPoint presentations. This *use of ICT across the curriculum allows pupils to consolidate their knowledge*.

For 5 years Redcar Community College has been part of an *exchange project* that allows pupils to move between schools and take advantage of each school's strength. Other schools offer subjects including PE and Music, Redcar Community College takes students from other schools for ICT.

Use of ICT isn't limited to the school; they take advantage of *external experts* at the *CLC, Teesside University* and *guest speakers*, including *Northern Grid* inputs on eSafety, and *experts* e.g. professional film makers. Visits to the CLC allow new learning experiences to be introduced before becoming the focus of projects in school.

The school *intranet* is invaluable; if students miss a lesson they can find the information on the intranet, it tracks pupils and can be used for sharing examples of pupils' work. Video tutorials, assignment briefs and other support materials area available on the VLE and can be *accessed from anywhere*, this allows pupils to work at their own pace and revisit parts of the lesson they aren't comfortable with. It also supports *differentiation*. SIMs learning gateway tracks pupils and provides reports on behaviour and attendance. It also means that if pupils can't get to school, for example during the heavy snow in December 2010, teaching and learning doesn't need to stop.

The school has developed online solutions and successfully worked with the *Learning Platform* in helping the delivery of several subjects. The Head of ICT has led through his example and afforded opportunities to support all learners through materials which are available to all. The easy access by parents and students to appropriate data and resources is seen as a key feature in helping students' learning. The *Achievement for All Project* is giving the college an exciting challenge in engaging some of those hard to reach families through new technologies.

The school's system is really comprehensive and tracks academic progress, changes in attitude, attendance and coursework. Print outs can be shared with students and used to identify any support needed. At parent evening's all the information is easily available and can be used to increase *parental engagement*. It is truly individual learning.

All year 11 students have a '*learning guide*', a member of staff that may not know the pupil. The monitoring system allows staff to get a good understanding of the student's needs.

At lunchtime all of the ICT rooms are fully used, one is available for students to work on course work or homework, the other two give pupils free access to the full range of applications. These lunch time clubs provide opportunities for pupils to be creative and work on stop frame animations, students can also take on different roles in the *TV studio*. Through funding from *Creative Partnerships* the schools has access to *Green Screen* technology and has worked with Teesside University to introduce this technology to the pupils.

5. Using new technologies to embrace family learning

The school has the *support of their parents* who recognise that the school does an excellent job with the students and are not threatened by the ICT.

The college has pioneered a project to provide laptops to families and used the stimulus of the *Computers for Pupils* funding to make a real difference to their community. The school recognised the importance of engaging parents when rolling out this project, parents went through a training programme before students received the laptops and this has led to a greater awareness of how ICT can support teaching and learning.

http://www.redcarcc.co.uk/index.php?Itemid=54&id=56&option=com_content&task=view

They have extended their learning within the community programme by offering a *range of courses* including computing.

http://www.redcarcc.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=69

The school's vision to embrace family learning is supported by the strong technical team.

6. Student voice

The *needs of the students are paramount* and they are encouraged to share their opinions. Regular online surveys give them a chance to influence different aspects of school life including how the curriculum is delivered. Noticeboards are used to publish results of the surveys and to explain what actions the school is taking as a result. The school has already listened to the students and changed the context of some projects to make them more engaging and relevant

Their *achievements are recognised and celebrated*. ICT systems mean teachers can record students' good behaviour, attitude and positive contributions to the school. These are rewarded through a treat and by displaying the achievement on display screens for all students to see. Successful students receive postcards sent to their home to celebrate and reward their achievements.

Students are given opportunities to work on real and important projects. Students from the school are currently working on presentations they will take to local primary schools. These will focus on what the primary pupils can expect when they move to the college and deal with issues including bullying and cyberbullying. The value of these projects is clearly evident when talking to the *mature, articulate and confident students*.

7. Supporting all students

"the systems help to support vulnerable students"

Mrs Allenden, Behaviour Support Assistant

Systems allow better *communication* between people within and beyond the school and are especially valuable when pupils move between schools. Being able to access relevant logs means staff can track where students are and *identify and support vulnerable students*.

"I don't think we could function without it"

Linda Downing, Pastoral Manager, Year 10

SIMs is invaluable and is now taken for granted. *Data is secure but can be shared* with all relevant staff so everyone knows all the relevant background information about the student, allowing continuity of care. Staff have access to all of the information they need allowing them to prepare for meetings with parents. Good technical support means users can concentrate of using the resource effectively.

“it is difficult to imagine life without ICT systems”

Sandra Molyneux, teaching assistant with responsibility for Remove

Information about students can be *recorded* easily and is instantly available. Behaviour logs are available to parents and relevant staff, meaning achievements can be celebrated and any worrying trends in behaviour identified and addressed.

ICT provides essential support for students with *Special Education Needs* through tools to support specific needs e.g. text to voice applications, support for spelling, or systems that promote independence.

8. Ensuring the safety of pupils and staff

“keeping students safe is essential”

Chris McCormack, Home School Officer

eSafety issues are well understood and part of the school’s curriculum, this is supported by the school’s technical support team and by inviting experts to work with students and staff.

It is essential to safeguard students and the staff needs to know where they are. Systems quickly identify any students that aren’t in school allowing parents to be contacted by phone or text messages. If there’s no answer they are automatically recalled saving time. Parents can be fined if students truant so evidence is essential.

What next?

“what we do isn’t special”

David Kennedy, Deputy Head

While staff don’t think what they do is special other schools clearly do as they have a steady stream of head teachers from other schools coming to find out more.

The school's experience of the *broadband* service they take from Northern Grid is very positive. The graphs of usage clearly show that the connection is well used. Everyone across the school uses it and the high usage can cause delays. The school is planning to upgrade from their 10 Mb connection to 100Mb.

With the current pressure on bandwidth access to bandwidth hungry resources does need to be monitored and controlled to ensure quality of service for all users.

The school appreciate the constant development of new technologies and always look ahead to see what else they can benefit from. They are planning to look at:

- Mobile technology
- Increased focus on Cyberbullying
- Plagiarism
- Controlled assessment
- Social networking
- CCTV
- Use of webcams