



**Independent Evaluation of the Implementation
of the Learning Platform *LP+* across Schools**

***Summary of Early Implementation Outcomes in
Wolverhampton Local Authority***

Summary report authored by:

Don Passey
Senior Research Fellow
Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University

Background and status of this summary

This is a summary of key findings from the independent evaluation study exploring impacts of the learning platform (LP+) implemented across schools in Wolverhampton Local Authority (LA). A full report detailing the evaluation approach and its findings will be published shortly. Any references to results should be considered in the light of the much greater detail contained within the full report, as this summary does not, due to its brevity, offer the same level of contextual background or analysis that is available within the report itself.

Acknowledgements

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The schools:

Bilston C.E. Primary School
Edward the Elder Primary School
Goldthorn Park Primary School
Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School
Lanesfield Primary School
Long Knowle Primary School
Manor Primary School
Merridale Primary School
Northwood Park Primary School
Penn Fields Special School
Penn Hall Special School
St. Alban's C.E. Primary School
St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School
St. Bartholomew's C.E. Primary School
St. Edmund's Catholic School
St. Jude's C.E. Primary School
St. Luke's C.E. Primary School
St. Michael's C.E. Primary School
St. Thomas' C.E. Primary School
Tettenhall Wood Special School
Trinity C.E. Primary School
Wilkinson Primary School
Wood End Primary School

The LA personnel:

Dave Whyley
Gavin Hawkins
James McFarland
Jill Purcell

Disclaimer

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that all details in this summary are accurate, inaccuracies can occur, and if these are present, then the reader should recognise that these are entirely the responsibility of the author.

Evidence for the study

- Evidence for the study in Wolverhampton LA was collected across a one-year period, and perspectives were gained from LA consultants, head teachers, lead teachers, and pupils.
- A grid, designed to provide details of features implemented by each school, was completed by LA consultants for all schools involved on two occasions, in November 2008 and in June 2009.
- Discussions were held with key personnel in 22 schools, chosen by LA consultants to represent a range of stages of implementation reached.
- Observations were possible in some of those schools in a number of classrooms.
- Discussions were held with 5 key personnel in the LA on a number of occasions.
- Reviews were undertaken of relevant documents produced by the LA consultants.
- Presentations of websites and uses of LP+ were seen in some schools and in the LA.

The stage reached by schools involved in June 2009

- By June 2009, there were 72 LA schools involved in implementation. These were grouped into 6 cohorts, according to the age range within the school, and according to the month in the year that the school wished to embark on implementation.
- By June 2009, 84% of primary schools had a learning platform in place, compared to the 40% nationally reported by Becta.
- Of the 72 LA schools involved by June 2009, LA consultants judged 37 of them to be ‘very well on’ or ‘well on’ in terms of development.
- In 52 schools, all teachers used the LP+ learning platform.
- At that time there were 6,030 pupil users, and increasingly these users were in Years N and R (felt by some commentators to be pupils at an age when they might not benefit or be able to use a learning platform effectively).
- At that time, 6 schools provided parental access to certain types of resources through the learning platform (either a parental front page, or to resources on a class site, or to their children’s work).

Implementation outcomes

- Implementation through a phased approach enabled experiences gained by those who embarked on early implementation to be shared with others.
- The appointments of an LA educational consultant and an LA technical consultant were crucial to success, it is clear that teachers have often highly valued their support, and that their continued involvement will be vital as the implementation moves forward.
- For some schools, it took up to a year for them to develop their thinking and practice, so that they could reasonably start to implement features and uses of the learning platform.
- For some teachers and head teachers, features of LP+ differed from the features of learning platforms that they had used previously, and although they had to get used to different operations, procedures and features, LP+ was seen as being usable, and having features that could offer benefits and advantages, so that there was no need for the running of alternative or parallel platforms or facilities.

Management outcomes

- Some schools involved in early implementation cohorts established LP+ as a central core functioning unit, offering important benefits at management, learning, teaching and parental link levels.
- This central position resulted from the learning platform providing both inward facing functions (supporting managers and teachers in their in-school practices), as well as outward facing functionality (supporting pupils with access and out-of-school provision, as well as links and involvement for parents).
- Some schools, which had existing web sites, resource repositories on servers, or parallel uses of platforms, needed to take decisions about the rationalisation of websites and platforms, so that they could move towards a ‘one-stop shop’.

Leading the initiative

- The roles of setting up a vision and setting up reasonable expectations (often by suggesting actions for teachers and then pupils in regular small steps), were important in terms of leading to positive and ongoing development.
- Schools varied in their approaches to structuring certain aspects of the site, especially with regard to structuring documents and access to documents.
- In some cases schools used folder systems to structure access, while in others they used detailed titling and filters to bring together the documents required for any specific topic, subject or need.
- In any case, understanding what facilities were available (such as filtering), and how these could support needs, were important in terms of allowing options and possibilities to be taken forward by lead teachers.

Cost effectiveness and benefits

- Certain schools identified ways in which the learning platform were leading within short periods of time to cost benefits and economies.
- Taking examples of these from across a range of schools, it was possible to produce a theoretical calculation of the levels of cost benefit that could be accrued if a school used the learning platform in all the ways observed.
- In a two-class entry primary school, if learning platform access to letters and newsletters replaced the sending of hard black and white photocopies home through pupils, then a cost saving of some £33,475.20 could be accrued in a year.
- This figure is made up not only of savings associated with photocopying, but more importantly, with savings of teacher and head teacher time when needing to resolve issues and requests from parents when documents do not get home.
- In some of these cases, discussions can lead to stress for all parties, and the saving of these stressful situations have in themselves been found to be beneficial.
- For savings associated with similar communications to staff, the total for the same school situation could be £75.00 per year, and the saving for communications to governors could be £45.00 per year.
- For teachers completing weekly and yearly subject plans, greater ease of access to the resources can be hugely time saving, and could save up to £16,524.00 in teacher time across the school within a year.
- Similarly, for a head teacher reviewing a subject or topic across the school, the saving could be of the order of £100.00 per year.
- For multi-agency reviews details need to be collected currently from diverse sources, but using a learning platform some schools are now placing these details so that they can be easily collated, and if such an effort is involved for one pupil in each year group for a two-form entry primary school, then the cost saving could be £1,125.00 per year.
- Using the integrated website within the learning platform, rather than using another website that has to be paid for, could save in the region of £2,500.00.
- If all of these scenarios were fully implemented, then there is in total a cost saving of £53,844.20.
- There are additional costs associated with using the learning platform, which go above and beyond those that would normally exist, and these are concerned with refreshing the resources each half term, which might involve teachers, classroom assistants, or a designated support worker a time involvement meaning an outlay in cost in the order of £15,120.
- Overall, however, the cost economies associated with all the scenarios would be in the order of £38,724.20, with economies coming from photocopying costs, time costs of staff, stress of staff and parents, and costs to subscribe to separate website provision.

Learning and teaching benefits

The evaluation identified a number of important learning benefits arising, as well as benefits concerned with communication and links, between pupils and with parents. The remainder of the sections in this summary identify some of those key areas of benefit.

Supporting reluctant writers

- In one primary school pupils, especially older pupils, go onto the site at home.
- Some children complete homework and send in homework through the learning platforms.
- Teachers say some of these pupils, those who can be identified as reluctant writers and reluctant communicators, would not have completed it if it had been given to them in more traditional forms.
- It is felt that the reluctant writers and communicators engage with work on the learning platform because of certain features offered by the medium, such as ‘anonymity of communication’.
- Teachers feel that pupils with a learning platform can choose where to communicate (outside a classroom where there is greater anonymity possible), that they have freedom of what to communicate about, and that they may share feelings about their work and approaches with family members.
- A lead co-ordinator in the primary school found that the facilities supported perhaps 6 out of 30 pupils in a class in this way.
- They tended to be boys – and when they are reluctant writers, they are also often found to be reluctant communicators.
- Finding that these pupils were engaging with uses of the learning platform, the teacher also gave them more responsibility – they were given responsibilities in terms of taking and handling pictures, for uploading, and for handling aspects of the class website.

Using online discussions

- In one primary school, a teacher found that online discussions allowed pupils to more easily write an opinion, which could then be handled in different ways from those presented verbally within a classroom environment.
- The teacher found the online environment allowed the pupils to reason more easily when challenged, and to be less aggressive than they might be in face-to-face discussions, which would tend to be taken more personally.
- She found they could respond more easily to written material, and could accept written comments more objectively and less emotionally.
- She found that they could take time in reading, thinking, and then responding, and would have more time to think about a reference to include in their responses.
- She found the online discussion allowed some pupils to respond in their own way, rather than them feeling they needed to back down, as they might in a classroom discussion.

Supporting nursery age children

- In one primary school, the whole school has taken on use of the learning platform.
- In nursery classes, parents are identified as the people who will engage with LP+ (rather than their very young children), and it is the parents that are encouraged to involve their children in using resources.
- In classes with older children, the children themselves are involved directly in accessing and using resources on the learning platform.
- When awareness sessions for parents on LP+ are run at the school, it is found that proportionately more nursery parents take part.
- Pictures of activities that go on during the day are put onto LP+, and parents and children can see these at home, as they have such limited time to do so when they come to collect their children or bring them to the nursery class.
- The nursery class site is populated with words of songs, weblinks to songs so that parents can hear them (and maybe sign them with their children), and sets of words are provided that can be printed off.
- Children can find a song on the platform, and they can play it.
- Additionally, flashcards are put on the site, they can be printed off by parents, cut up, and used with their children at home.

Safe online communication

- In one primary school, teachers use LP+ to support a range of learning tasks, including use of email.
- Use of email and the learning platform was trialled in this school with a Year 6 class.
- Use was then further extended, to include both Years 2 and 6.
- Parents were made aware of the facilities available, and were encouraged to access LP+ with their children.
- It was found that email was used a lot by pupils, although many used MSN.
- Teachers, parents and pupils have welcomed the chance to move to use of the LP+ email system.
- Pupils say they like it more, and they feel it is safe.
- Before this practice was put in place, parents had to agree to certain protocols of use before their children could access the system at home.
- The school found that when they asked parents about this, they gained 100% commitment from them – the school had experienced less commitment from parents for other events they had made available.

Enhancing parental engagement

- In one primary school, every class has a class page to access at home.
- One teacher set up the system, found out about the technical issues, and shared experiences with other staff.
- Open Days were run for parents and carers (6 open sessions in total, involving a demonstration and hands-on access).
- The school also produced a booklet that went home – a summary guide, so that parents could easily access it to explain or remind them about how the system worked, and what it could do.
- Teachers update the class sites weekly.
- A select range of learning links about subjects and topics that are to be covered the following term are put onto these class sites, and they are changed on the site each term.
- This means that parents can access subject and topic links to be covered in school a term ahead of them happening in class.
- Parents and pupils also have access to homework a week ahead of its being set or required, so that parents and pupils can discuss and consider it to a greater extent.
- It has been found that the links to future topics and future homework maintains both pupil and parent interest in the site.
- Parents say they ‘love it’, it’s supportive, and it gives them ideas.

Imagery, video and parents

- In one primary school, class sites now have photographs of pupils on them; they give announcements, show details on calendars, provide opportunities for discussions, and ask for involvement in surveys.
- A Year 1 teacher creates some videos, of special events – she has created a video of a Nativity production and another on events on ‘Ireland Day’.
- These videos can then be shared via the learning platform with parents and others at home.
- The children do the recordings, which are then put into MS MovieMaker, and uploaded onto the site.
- The teacher creates the final form of the video and uploads it, which she finds easy to do (she says it takes her about one hour at home for each video she produces).
- The video provides opportunities for pupils to review the activities, to reflect on their experiences and to gain ideas that they did not see when it happened live (as their perspective on the activities could have been focused on entirely different locations or areas).
- The activity demonstrates involvement, ownership and engagement of pupils.
- The teacher says that pupils of different abilities and attitudes become involved, and that some become in writing and participating when they have been reluctant to be involved in those ways previously.

For queries about this summary report please contact:

Don Passey
Senior Research Fellow
Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University
Lancaster, LA1 4YL

Tel: 01524 592314
Email: d.passey@lancaster.ac.uk

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