

Select Committee on Children's Services – 25th March 2009

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) Update

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on the work that DGfL is engaged in which helps achieve the five outcomes of Every Child Matters and raise standards
2. Briefing on DGfL

The ability to use Information Communications Technology (ICT) is a key skill and access to ICT is known to help raise standards of achievement. The DCSF publication "Harnessing Technology – Transforming Learning and Children's Services" identifies the key roll that ICT has to play in transforming teaching, personalising learning, making information more accessible and administration more efficient. "Next Generation Learning 2008 – 14" moves on from there, identifying the need for schools to be sustainable by 2020, emphasising the key role parent's play and their need to access recent and relevant information about their child. It also emphasises the need to safeguard learners online and ensure the data we hold on staff and learners is safe and secure. Technology has a key roll to play in the delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan. The purpose of this report is to brief elected members in Dudley about the progress being made by DGfL and Dudley schools to help achieve success in these areas. Key decisions are taken through the DGFL Steering group, members include:- 10 primary, 3 secondary and 1 special school headteachers, 2 assistant directors, senior colleagues from other divisions and senior members of our managed service provider – Research Machines plc (RM). We also consult regularly with pupils on a formal and less formal basis when in classrooms supporting learning.

3. Achievements

The original 10-year Private Funding Initiative (PFI) contract finished in January 2009, governors in all DGfL schools plus Oldswinford Hospital School have signed to extend the contract for two more years. Only Kingswinford is not part of the fully managed ICT service although they do subscribe to services such as broadband and Learning Platform.

4. Pupil Computer ratios in primary (1:5.54), secondary (1:2.84) and special schools (1:1.80) have continued to rise and are well above national figures (School Census Jan 2009). The two-year extension includes a major refresh of hardware, software etc and most schools are adding significantly to this provision; many schools are providing access to affordable personal learning devices such as Asus Eee PC.
5. The Annual National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Attitudinal survey (June 2008) shows teachers have access to computers most of the time, they have gained confidence using a range of ICT applications and now find it useful for most school activities. Results from pupils indicate that over 94% of our children use a computer at home, access in school varies from 93% to 100% depending on their key stage.
6. Over 40000 pupils and students saw a presentation of ESCape, an e-safety production, developed in partnership with Dudley Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) and Saltmine theatre group. We have also developed ICE (Internet Channel for Education) which provides quick accesses to appropriate internet resources without the dangers of search engines such as Google. This is available on all our networks and increasingly pupils and parents are using it at home. Schools also have access to a wide range of e-safety tools, policies, advice and guidance. Keeping staff and pupils safe on-line is a key priority.
7. Through DGfL schools have met the Governments e-strategy expectations for 2008; all pupils and school staff have access to a personalised on- line learning space and e-portfolio. We have already achieved the 2010 requirement to have integrated learning and management systems, and are well placed to achieve the requirement for secondary schools to report on-line to parents by 2010 (primary are expected to do so by 2012). The DGfL portal /Learning Platform provides secure access to pupils, school staff, parents and other appropriate colleagues.
8. ICT has been recognised as a strength of the Borough since before the PFI contact, this position was re-enforced by the LA Ofsted in 2000 and 2002. The Audit Commission School Survey – Autumn 2007 placed the quality of support to improve the effectiveness and reliability of ICT systems in the top 5 services provided to schools. It was the only area of the 82 surveyed placed in quartile 1 nationally.
9. Dudley schools have a national reputation for excellence in ICT; this is recognised by Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), Partnership for Schools (PfS). As a result increasing numbers of Local Authorities are

interested in the work we are doing in our schools. Recent visits have included colleagues from Derbyshire, Warwickshire, East Riding and Northern Ireland. The 29 schools that have achieved BECTA ICTMark, including Sycamore Centre Pupil Referral Unit, exemplify this quality and commitment. ICTMark schools are more likely to be rated as outstanding by Ofsted.

10. Working in partnership is an important part of DGfL, we are currently working with 14-19 colleagues to help deliver their agenda, Head of Virtual School to provide access for our looked after pupils and those in foster care, early years colleagues to integrate provision in schools with children's centres attached Black Country Challenge in the development of learning resources to help primary mathematics achievement and secondary revision and a range of other colleagues across the Council.
11. Using Computers for Pupils (CfP) Funding from DCSF we were able to provide 440 disadvantaged secondary pupils, all secondary Looked After Children and 16 Gypsy Roma Traveller students with a laptop computer and 3G connection to the internet so they are able to continue their learning at home. As a consequence of implementing this successfully we have recently received £219,000 to provide home access to ICT for Targeted Groups. These groups will include year 5 and 6 Looked after Children, Pupils in danger of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), Young Offenders, Teenage Parents and Care Leavers
12. The current refresh programme will replace over 8000 computers, 500 plus servers and a range of other hardware. The computers will be replaced with Ecoquiet low energy models that use 2/3rds less energy and emit less heat, thus providing an estimated £400000 saving on school energy bills over the next five years. All computers and servers will have an initial wipe of data before they leave the school, this will be followed by a comprehensive programme where computers will be wiped 3 times and servers 7 times. We are also working closely with RM to ensure that all hardware is disposed of according to WEEE regulations in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. Data and Information Security are also key priorities
13. Planning and Co-ordination of DGfL

This is overseen by the DGfL client team and sits across two divisions of the Directorate – Resources and School Effectiveness.

The next steps will be to:

- continue working with schools to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant and provide staff with access to training and support

- embed the learning platform and help schools achieve true personalisation and meet the targets set out in Harnessing Technology
- work with other partners to ensure all our learners have access to appropriate technology which meets their individual needs
- complete the current hardware refresh programme on time
- investigate options to continue to provide a managed service to all schools after Jan 2011 within Primary Capital Programme and Building Schools for the Future.

Finance

14. The annual cost of the DGfL service is approximately £5m per annum. In addition to this the major infrastructure refresh one off cost will be £6.9m. This is funded from a combination of PFI credits, Schools Delegated budgets, Grant Funding and Children's Services revenue budget.

Law

15. The Council may establish and maintain schools under the Education and Children Acts and do anything incidental thereto, conducive thereto, or which facilitates the discharge of this function under section 111 of the Local government Act 1972. This would include the power to enter into contracts with external providers, subject to the agreement of governors, for the provision of ITC hardware and software services for schools.

Equality Impact

16. Allocations are all based on pupil numbers thus providing equality of entitlement across all schools. Where numbers are small such as Pupil Referral Units (PRU) additional support is made available. The consistency of service also enables pupils to move between schools and across key stages with ease. Individual schools offer specialist provision to meet the individual needs of their pupils.

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the committee note the report and support the development of this work.



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