Collaborate more

# Clunbury: **Parental Engagement** Case Study

Microsoft

## fast facts

Clunbury C.E.School Shropshire

### SCHOOL

Clunbury Church of England School is a small primary and nursery school in the village of Clunbury in Shropshire. It holds a number of national awards, including the British Educational Communications Technology Agency ICT Excellence Award and the Best Primary School, awarded in 2007. The school has 65 pupils organised in two classes and a nursery. Like most small schools, classes are separated by Key Stages (1 and 2 respectively) rather than age.

Clunbury Primary has a core of pupils from the village but the majority travel to school from a wide surrounding area. Head Teacher at Clunbury, Andrew Davis, and his colleagues and governors, have been determined that the school's relative isolation should not put its children at a disadvantage. In an interview for Teachers' TV, Davis says: "Recently, I was in a large secondary school in London, and they had the ballet in school one day, opera in the following day, and so on. We don't have access to the ballet, but we have access to the Internet—and through ICT we can give our children the same opportunities and experiences as children in a city or town." Part of that outward-looking philosophy leads the school to have online links with other schools across the world, but more immediately it's used to enrich and extend an already close working relationship with parents.

ICT Excellence Awards 2007
Best whole school Primary: WINNER

## Overcoming Rural Isolation

At the 2001 Census, the Parish of Clunbury had a population of 478. The rural setting, also brings some challenges. As well as the need to keep children in touch with the wider world, there's an issue that's much closer to home for parental engagement. Very few parents take their children to school. Eight out of 10 pupils travel in by coach on their own, which limits the opportunities for parents to have regular contact with the school. Add to that the demanding lives lived by many families in a rural agricultural area and the result is that some parents only get into school once or twice a year for a parents' evening.

Given the fact that Davis and his colleagues passionately believe in the importance of parental engagement in furthering the learning of their children, this presents a real barrier that could adversely affect pupil progress.

Davis is also a strong advocate of the value of ICT for children's learning, and these two passions together have made sure that the parent-school-child triangle at Clunbury is at least as strong and productive as that in more urban schools.

## Learning-Led Engagement

Parental engagement at Clunbury is led by the students. Clunbury students are used to collaborative working in school, through peer review of each others' work, so working with their parents in the same way is a natural development. Children routinely post their work on the school's Learning Gateway so that they can share it with their peers and parents. Davis feels this is an efficient way for students to take their work home and generate interest in student work and in the school's values and approach to learning.

Davis says: "Rather than parents having to ask, 'What have you done at school?' The children can show them their work and parents get an understanding of what the children are doing. It makes parents a real part of the wider school community."

Key Stage 2 Teacher Helen Spreadborough describes how a parent and child, working at home researching the Romans found a site for making Roman mosaics online. "The parent e-mailed in to tell us about it, the student shared it on the Gateway, and his classmates took up the idea and started using it too," she says.

That level of participation is increasingly common. "We went on a school visit to a Sikh temple in Wolverhampton. A parent came with us, took photographs and worked with the children on a presentation," says Davis.

"The children can show them their work and parents get an understanding of what the children are doing. It makes parents a real part of the wider school community."

**Andrew Davies, Head Teacher, Clunbury**

## Working Towards the Learning Gateway

The way in which Davis communicates with parents and the rest of the school has changed over his five years as head teacher. What started off as a paper-based newsletter is now a blog on the school Web site.

These methods of communicating with parents are now being fully developed on the Learning Gateway—children's podcasts, Clunbury radio station, and space for children to share their work and complete peer assessments. The Gateway also includes a separate parents' section for sharing ideas and feeding back to the school. Spreadborough says: "The blog works fantastically well, and the Learning Gateway has built on that."

## Clunbury Learning Gateway

The school now has its own Learning Gateway, a part of the local authority's Shropshire Learning Gateway (SLG), which is built on SharePoint. Although the SLG is available to all Shropshire schools, each school's Gateway is separate and fully customised with its own graphics and structure. The experience gained with the Clunbury School blog, together with Davis's ICT expertise means that Clunbury staff, children, and parents are already making extensive use of their Gateway and are customising it to make it their own. Sections include Learning at Home, Internet Safety, Radio Clunbury, SATS Revision, Termly Themes (term-by-term topic titles, such as The Egyptians) Writing (a list of writing genres, with children's work), and Forest School. At the time of writing this had children's Microsoft Office PowerPoint presentations on their own models of Celtic Round Houses. There's also parental access to teachers' plans, and forums to address concerns about their children's use of the Internet. There's advice on e-safety, with links to other helpful sources on the same subject.

"Every half term we post a list of learning objectives and activities," says Davis. "Staff are sharing long-term plans with parents, who are fully aware of what their children are doing. They don't have to ask us what's going to happen—they know how to find the information."

Although the school blog provided opportunities for children to show their work online to parents, the Gateway enhances that capability quite dramatically. For example, the parents of Year 1 children are able to see the class dancing in the gym. This helps parents understand how today's Key Stage 1 children approach what the parents will remember as PE or music and movement. Davis is expanding that technique even further, with videos showing approaches to maths teaching, for example, and of children discussing the way they learn.

## Engaging Parents with the Gateway

Year 6 pupil Lucy Morgan explains how parents become engaged with their children's learning. "When Mum and Dad ask you what you've done in the day you can say 'I'll show you, this is what I've done today.'"

Lucy does, however, still call on her parents for help. "If I'm working with Publisher or PowerPoint and I find something and I say, 'I've looked up this and I don't understand,' Mum and Dad will read it to me and they understand it more."

Jacquie, a parent of two children, points out that although the Gateway is in a sense remote from the classroom, when it comes to seeing children's work, it can actually be better than a visit. She says: "My daughter is proud to show me work and it's work I wouldn't normally see, because you can't come into school and start looking in books."



Jacquie has considerably improved her own ICT skills, both by learning from her children and by learning alongside them at the school computer club. "I consider myself fairly knowledgeable, but I didn't know about blogging and podcasting, for example, and I've learned a lot about that," she says.

Davis started the after-school computer club in 2007. "Our parents have been on a bit of a learning curve. Six years ago, the majority of them would have dabbled on computers, but now they're far more involved in their children's learning and are developing ICT skills. So we started the computer club to work with them and make them aware of the software that we use in school. Some of the software we use isn't available for the home, so we've made it available on the Gateway, and purchased additional licences so parents can use it at home."

The school has also sought the opinions of parents about what to include on the Gateway. Davis says: "We value parental responses. We conduct surveys once or twice a year and we have a very supportive Friends of the School organisation. We also have a survey on the Gateway asking what features they'd like to see there. One parent has suggested an online school shop, for example."

## Online Reporting

For Davis, giving parents access to student work and teacher planning through the Gateway is at the heart of online reporting. Access to performance and attendance data currently held on the school's management information system (MIS) won't be a requirement for primary schools until 2012, and Shropshire council will provide the tools to make the necessary links to MIS data, as it's already done for secondary schools. It's a development that Davis welcomes, and he looks forward to when it will be possible for a parent to track a child's learning from nursery, to sixth form and beyond, and feel fully involved with everything the child's doing.

# Impact

## On Student Learning

The Gateway is new so it's too early to quantify the effect of parental engagement through the Learning Gateway on students' results. However, Davis is enthusiastic because it's helping to achieve his vision of a collaborative, inclusive triangle of learning—parent, child, and school. "The Gateway is transforming the way we work even more," he says.

He points to the way that children are developing the confidence not only to lead their own learning, and to review each others' work, but to go out and represent the school across the county. "Our ICT skills are known across the county. Our children have opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise. We're giving children fantastic opportunities to demonstrate their skills," he says.

"When Mum and Dad ask you what you've done in the day you can say 'I'll show you'."

**Lucy Morgan, Pupil, Clunbury**

"Our children have opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise. We're giving children fantastic opportunities to demonstrate their skills."

Andrew Davies, Head Teacher, Clunbury

Impact on Primary to Secondary Transition

Davis believes that Clunbury's approach to ICT and parental engagement is helping to prepare children for the work they'll be doing in secondary school. "Whatever ICT comes their way at secondary school, they can cope with it," he says.

### On Teacher Workload

The Gateway actually eases staff workload at Clunbury. Teachers who had been working on computers at home and then bringing memory sticks into school now have the same workspace in both places. The ability to share planning and resources makes the system convenient and easy to use.

### On Parental Engagement

Like most village schools, Clunbury has a long history of being regarded with affection by the community. "Parents have always had a positive feel for this school ever since it was built in the 19th century. It's part of a small community. Now, ICT has opened the doors to make people feel more involved," says Davis.

## Key Messages

- ICT has a particular role to play in overcoming some of the limitations placed on children in small and isolated rural schools.
- A school blog is an effective "rehearsal" of some of the features of a Learning Gateway, preparing a school in advance for when the Gateway arrives.
- A Parent Gateway can be more immediate and comprehensive than personal contact.
- Parental engagement is best when it's learner-led.
- Parents may not need lessons in basic ICT, but appreciate being familiarised with the school's software.
- Children take the lead in helping parents use the Gateway.
- Parents and children will have good ideas about the work they're doing. The means should be there for these ideas to be accepted, shared, and celebrated.

For more information, please visit:

**http://www.microsoft.com/uk/education/**

**http://uk.partnersinlearningnetwork.com/**

© 2010 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. This document is for informational purposes only. MICROSOFT MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, IN THIS SUMMARY. Microsoft, SharePoint, Bing, Windows, and Windows Server are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The names of actual companies and products mentioned herein may be the trademarks of their respective owners.

Microsoft