**Shireland Collegiate Academy. March 2011.**

**An innovative inner city Academy working with a highly diverse, challenging yet stimulating community recovers over a one year period from a major setback in its progress. Creative and full-hearted commitment to ICT, with SharePoint at its heart and a dedicated eLearning team able to ensure its effectiveness, plays a key role in this story.**

**Background.**

Shireland Collegiate Academy is an 11 – 18 comprehensive school serving a highly diverse and disadvantaged community in the West Midlands borough of Sandwell. In January 2010 the Academy was judged by Ofsted to be, “Failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.”

Given that in 2006, after a long period of steady improvement, Ofsted had found Shireland to be “Outstanding” the judgment was a body blow for executive principal Sir Mark Grundy, his team and the whole school community.

The reasons for the decline are outside the brief of this study. What, though, is very relevant is the fact that the Shireland senior team moved quickly to address the identified failings with an action plan. **At the heart of a multi-faceted programme was to be the innovative, creative and effective use of ICT, led by the school’s e-learning team and centred on the SharePoint-based Shireland Learning Gateway**

A year of determined action by the whole school community, followed,with the Executive Principal pulling together the core teams – eLearning, the Senior Leadership Team at Shireland and all of the key middle leaders. Throughout 2010, they focussed – separately and together -- on areas of weakness, and ultimately achieved results that far exceeded expectations. Already by the middle of the year, HMI showed the school to be well on track for leaving special measures. The real reward for effort, though, reaped by the whole school community, came with a formal inspection in December 2010 which judged the school once again to be “Outstanding”.

**ICT at Shireland**.

In a 2008Microsoft Innovative Schools Case Study of Shireland, Sir Mark Grundy describes ICT as “a catalyst for change” and “a Trojan horse” bringing creativity, personalization, better communication, a more flexible and responsive style of pedagogy, greater learner engagement and motivation.

Now, three years on, Sir Mark believes that all of those benefits have been more deeply embedded in all aspects of life in and beyond the classrooms at Shireland.

**The eLearning Team.**

Nothing better demonstrates the seriousness of Shireland’s commitment to ICT in support of learning than the surely unique seven-strong eLearning team that supports and encourages learning through technology at both Shireland end George Salter. The main focus is on the Shireland Learning Gateway, built and maintained by the team, whose members provide training and guidance to staff, helping them to find the best solutions, as well as creating online learning resources for the Gateway.

The team is led by **Kirsty Tonks**, an experienced teacher who is strategic lead for e-Learning across both academies and manager of the school-based company Shireland Learning. Other team members demonstrate the available range of expertise –

**Ryan Guest**, Deputy , is the day to day link between the team and the teaching staff.

**Sahib Sohal** leads on the training of staff and students, providing workshops as well as individual advice.

**Ashley Robinson** is lead e-Learning developer and web designer, responsible for the very user friendly and popular websites tailored for staff and students. Working with him is e-Learning Developer –

**Alistair Scruton**, who has a flair for computer graphics and web design.

**Emily Hughes** is an e-Learning developer specializing in e-safety, working to educate staff, students and families in this area.

**Ian Armstrong** is an e-Learning developer who, as a recent past student has a close insight into how students learn. He has developed a series of educational Playstation games which are highly popular in Key Stage 3 at support the thematic curriculum delivered here.

**The Learning Gateway.**

The Shireland Learning Gateway is a custom built SharePoint-based learning platform. Created in 2004, in SharePoint 2003 and now, in SharePoint 2007, it’s grown steadily in a responsive way to serve the specific needs of the school.

More recently particularly since late 2009, driven by the immediate need for rapid and sustainable across-the-board improvement, and led by a highly effective e-Learning team, the Shireland Learning Gateway has taken massive forward leaps in both reach and impact. Its various portals and sites now touch every aspect of teaching and learning, bringing together staff, students and parents in a true collaborative learning community.

Sir Mark says. “The Gateway, in a real sense is our school.”

**Achieving consistency**

One of the most striking features of the January 2010 Ofsted report was that it found very wide variation of standards across the school.

(“The quality of the different aspects of the academy’s work varies from the outstanding to the inadequate.”)

The aim, then, has been to achieve consistency, bringing all parts of Shireland’s work – particularly in the core business of learning and teaching -- up to the standard of the best. There’s a clear role for the Gateway here, in promoting collaboration, student tracking, resources and exemplification in a transparent and accessible environment.

**A rich virtual environment.**

The Shireland Learning Gateway builds on the almost limitless possibilities of SharePoint by providing portals and sites to cover every aspect of school life and school improvement. There are student, staff and family portals, and sites which share resources and expertise across subjects and areas such as assessment and a very special site that not only celebrates the school’s religious diversity but harnesses it for learning and student engagement.

The emphasis always is on making sure all members of the school – staff, students, families – are clear about what needs to be done, using the fact that SharePoint can be transparent to a chosen audience and also closely focussed where necessary. To this end, the many portals and sites share three core characteristics – explanation, collaboration and exemplification. The family portal, for example doesn’t just provide access to data, it explains and demonstrates, with examples, what the levels and assessments mean. The exemplification site has scanned samples of work of various levels and grades from across the curriculum for staff, students and parents to see. The Assessment for Learning Site is a forum for explaining and sharing good practice, again with examples.

Of this multiplicity of portals and sites, there are three key ones, the Lesson Planning Bank perhaps best demonstrate the Gateway’s role at the heart of learning. The Lesson Planning Bank and the Subject Sites together exemplify the determined drive to harness ICT in improving teaching and learning. The Celebrating Faiths site illustrates the Academy’s awareness of the value of its richly diverse community, and of the importance of family and community engagement in learning.

**Lesson Planning Bank**,

The bank has developed from a requirement for teachers to make a proportion of their lesson plans (originally every lesson, now about one in three) available on the Gateway. They’re prepared using an interactive template and uploaded to the lesson bank, a process that helps all teachers to plan as well as the best. Staff now have a tagged and transparent library of exemplar lessons that promotes constant improvement as teachers see good planning modelled across the curriculum. Monitoring and support by heads of department and senior leaders is improved and teachers feel that their commitment to planning is being recognised. As a result, together with associated CPD, quality of planning has dramatically increased, bringing about greater consistency in teaching and more effective learning.

**Subject Sites.**

School improvement has to be rooted in effective middle leadership, and this was an area that Ofsted, in January 2010, found to be under-developed and inconsistent. Again, the Gateway plays its part here by providing a range of subject sites, each of which is a meeting place for the department head and colleagues, providing assessment data, deadlines, RAG rated key performance indicators, deadlines, documents, details of meetings.

Sir Mark Grundy says, “There’s national emphasis on middle leadership development but the tools for doing the job are often missing. The Subject Sites provide those tools.”

Here, too, the impact is seen in the form of consistency across subjects as middle leaders support and learn from each other.

**Celebrating Faiths.**

The Shireland Academy community has many children who stay away from school on special days of religious observance, such as Eid in the Muslim calendar. Some students and families regretted that this particular kind of absence was spoiling good attendance records – one child commented that because of it he could never manage 100percent. The eLearning team tackled this by setting up a Gateway site with faith-based tasks for a student to complete away from school during a day of religious observance. Kirsty Tonks and Mandeep Atwal, one of the Religious Education staff at the school worked on identifying key tasks. Work is substantial, and staff-monitored. Satisfactory completion earns an attendance mark. It’s been a great success, not only making a real impact on recorded attendance, but gaining approval and respect from the community.

**Impact.**

The Report of the December 2010 Inspection refers to previous weaknesses and unsatisfactory outcomes, and continues -

“ All these inadequacies have been eradicated and the shortcomings addressed so effectively that most are now notable strengths.”

It’s never easy to isolate individual drivers of school improvement. That said there’s no doubt in the minds of anyone at Shireland Collegiate Academy that ICT in general, the Shireland Learning Gateway in particular, and the work of the eLearning team are at the heart of what the Report calls “This remarkably rapid turnaround.”

 The sheer volume of traffic on the Gateway supports this. Year 7 and 8 students, for example, consistently register over 2000 hits every day on their Portal, which is central to the innovative competency based KS3 curriculum. All of the staff sites – assessment, exemplification, planning, subjects – are in constant daily use and undoubtedly play a significant part in the continuing upward curve in the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Support from families, always crucial to student engagement, is encouraged by a constantly updated family portal, where the hard work of a dedicated team has broadened its use to include 250 families.

**Measuring the Impact.**

Assistant Principal George Faux, whose use of Excel and Pivot to track and highlight the school’s progress is essential to further development, produces striking summary figures covering broadly the period between the two inspections. They include --

Attendance, at 90.1% in 2009, now 94.2%, has moved in Ofsted terms from “Inadequate” to “Outstanding”.

Quality of observed lessons in January 2010 was judged at 44% Good or better, 13% inadequate. In December 2010 this had become 90% Good or better, 0% inadequate. Again, this was a move from Inadequate to Outstanding.

Attainment (GCSE 5A\* to C) In July 2009 was 60% overall, 34% with English and Maths. The predicted figures for July 2010 are 85% and 44%, the best in the Academy’s history.

Behaviour, inadequate in January 2010 was judged Good in December 2010.

Fixed term exclusions over the year have reduced from 22 to 11, and internal exclusions reduced by 42%.

Perhaps most remarkable that eight inspection categories that moved within a year directly from Category 4 “Inadequate” to Category 1 “Outstanding” These are

Overall Provision

Capacity to Improve

Quality of Learning and Progress

Attendance

The Quality of Teaching

The Use of Assessment

Care Guidance and Support

Leadership and Management

**Conclusion. Drivers of Improvement.**

What’s very striking at Shireland is that the way that ICT is embedded at every level. Sir Mark is himself comfortable with ICT, having been a pioneer in the field himself. At the same time other senior staff – Deputy Principals Dave Irish and Manny Kelay, and Assistant Principal George Faux – all demonstrate a sense that ICT is seamlessly embedded in their areas of responsibility, in no sense an added ingredient. Add Kirsty Tonks to this cast of leaders and you end up with a very powerful ICT-literate leadership team that’s in every sense fit for 21st century purpose. And their tool of choice is SharePoint.

Sir Mark Grundy says

 “If we didn’t have a gateway to hang everything on we simply would not have made the progress that we did. Our use of technology underpins everything and extends the depth and breadth of improvement.”

Neither is this a short-lived Ofsted-directed burst. The Learning Gateway, is now embedded at the heart of learning at Shireland, and the Academy’s School Improvement Partner reports, in February 2011, that upward progress continues.