



Innovative school builds on excellence, delivering 24 hour access to students, parents and governors

Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom
Industry: Education

Customer Profile

Coopers Technology College is one of the leading specialist Technology Colleges in the UK, teaching 1650 students. It combines innovative uses of information and communication technology (ICT) with flexible teaching and learning methods.

Business Situation

The college wanted a seamless ICT system which could streamline the college's different systems and technologies.

Solution

Working with Microsoft Gold Partner, Teksys, Coopers rolled out a Learning Gateway framework with Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 at the heart of the solution.

Benefits

- Students can access learning resources anytime, anywhere
- Teachers gain from improved communication and administration
- Administration and reporting becomes more streamlined
- Families more engaged with schools

“You can see work posted back at all times of the day, every day, because students can access college resources anytime, anywhere”

Robert Dilley, Principal, Coopers Technology College

Coopers Technology College has a mission to deliver a culture of education that prepares young people to face the challenges of the 21st century. This is achieved by addressing students' diverse learning styles, needs and interests through innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. The College created a Learning Gateway to integrate and streamline its different systems and technologies. Teachers, parents and governors have benefited from improved communication through dedicated web portals. Coopers has been able to offer more flexible opportunities for student learning, by opening up access to resources beyond college hours to support more flexible learning and cater for different learning styles.

Situation

Coopers Technology College is a specialist co-educational college in the London Borough of Bromley, providing secondary education to 1,650 students. In its OFSTED quality report the school inspectorate praised Coopers for its commitment to innovation and clarity of vision for the future, high standards and quality of teaching, excellent leadership and very efficient management.

The college has more than 500 computers connected to a broadband network and uses a system of 'pathways' to ensure each student can take the most appropriate educational route for them – based on individual aptitudes, abilities, interests, experiences and preferred learning styles.

At Coopers, ICT is at the heart of teaching, learning and administration. Robert Dilley, Principal of Coopers says “ICT is more important to us than central heating and the roof – we can bring in new heaters, or move children to other classrooms, but the school relies on ICT to keep it going. We've been using technology here since I joined in 1989 and it's now at the heart of what we do.”

Like all schools, Coopers is committed to achieving targets to meet standards for both government and individuals. This includes meeting requirements laid out in the Children Act 2004, which provides the legal underpinning for Every Child Matters – the programme ensuring children are equipped to deal with today's complex society. Five outcomes are specified: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.

Coopers uses ICT and its pathways approach to ensure these requirements are met. Sue Wood, E-Learning Manager, says “We have been using a virtual learning environment (VLE) to support teaching for five years. We wanted to extend our e-learning portal to provide a resource for administrators, parents and governors and build on teacher motivation through improving available resources and support.”

TEKSYS

Microsoft Infrastructure Optimisation

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Teachers use a range of learning materials and electronic resources from a variety of sources – e-learning portals bring these together giving a single point of access with key day-to-day school information.

Administrators use ICT to collate and process all assessment and attendance data. The college wanted to integrate the different applications to increase efficiency and ease of use for the staff responsible for maintaining these records. Parents need to be kept informed of their children's progress and Coopers was very keen to make student reports available via the Internet and ensure that parents and governors could easily engage with the college using ICT.

The overall aim was to create a seamless ICT system integrating and streamlining the college's different systems and technologies, including e-mail, management information systems (MIS), VLE, reports, student records, assessment data and intranet resources.

Students can benefit from collaborative learning environments: Coopers wanted to use ICT to offer this and more flexible opportunities for learning by opening access to resources beyond college hours in order to support more flexible learning and cater for different learning styles.

Solution

The college is part of the London Grid for Learning (LGfL), a collaborative initiative run by the 33 London Local Education Authorities to provide broadband connectivity, managed services and online content to the education community throughout the region. This includes a managed e-learning portal and digitalbrain, plus Open Source VLE. However, Coopers felt this did not offer the right solution for its needs since it came shipped with pre-configured content and offered a more prescriptive approach that did not support the college's long-term plans.

Wood and Dilley began a process to identify a solutions provider and decided to work with Microsoft Gold Partner Teksys, who proposed a Learning Gateway

framework with Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 at the heart of the solution. This would give Coopers a single sign-on education portal, with a personalised view of information and services for stakeholders, integrating document management, e-mail, VLE, and MIS. It would help the college offer a truly connected learning community bringing together pupils, staff, parents, other schools and the wider community.

Following an initial consultation period, implementation took place during the college summer break to minimise the impact of disruptive integration work. The servers were installed in June and linked into the existing college network. The portal structure design started in July, along with the creation of e-mail accounts and the Learning Gateway. Phase one of the system became available to staff just before the start of the new term, on 1 September. The Learning Gateway was officially launched to staff the following January and to students (through introducing them to different aspects of SharePoint during their assemblies) four months later.

“The Coopers Learning Gateway has SharePoint Portal Server at its heart,” says Wood. “We call it our learning platform – an umbrella that puts each component of ICT together, including Microsoft Class Server 4 as our VLE.” The Learning Gateway can be accessed from any Internet connection, supporting the ‘24 Hour School’ system Wood envisaged with student, parent, staff and governor web portals.

Students can access coursework and syllabuses from home. Subject sites for Key Stages 3-5 have been created and are at different phases of development across all curriculum areas. Discussion boards, surveys, learning resources and student resources are all key features of student subject pages. A student development group is currently working on a new design for the student site.

“Parents can now access half-termly academic and effort progress grades, as well as an end of year written report,”

Sue Wood, E-Learning Manager,
Coopers Technology college

For More Information

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All staff communication is now electronic through the Learning Gateway. Weekly paper bulletins have been replaced by announcement boards and e-mail. Staff are also making use of Outlook Web Access for their email. “Parents can now access half-termly academic and effort progress grades, as well as an end of year written report,” says Wood. “Eventually, we wish to offer parents access to all academic and attendance data in real-time, make it easy for them to e-mail teachers directly and develop parental knowledge of curriculum studies.” Administrators will benefit from MIS (SIMS.net) integration with Learning Gateway, using Web parts that have been developed by SIMS in collaboration with Microsoft.

Benefits

The solution has given Coopers a Learning Gateway framework which benefits everyone. All resources are created electronically and located easily, communication is more efficient and streamlined. Staff, parents and governors are better informed and students are more motivated by greater collaboration opportunities.

Improved staff communication and visibility

School leaders benefit from more effective monitoring or planning and progress across curriculum areas, encouraging team working and a stronger ethos among staff.

Teachers gain from improved communication and administration across a large campus. “In a large college, better communication helps improve motivation, which reflects in consistently high level of teaching, helping us maintain standards,” says Dilley.

Students collaborate more and work more effectively

Learners are more engaged, through the use of a greater variety of learning forums and greater potential for collaborative learning and feedback. “The Learning Gateway has helped us maintain student performance,” says Dilley “This in turn will help us to build upon our OFSTED rating”.

Already, qualitative improvements are being identified as a result of the solution. “We have noticed boys in particular have become more organised and work more effectively than they would do otherwise,” says Wood. “You can see work posted back at all times of the day, every day, because students can access the school anytime, anywhere.”

Forging a closer relationship between the college, parents and governors

Parents have greater communication with the college and an increased sense of involvement in college life through direct access to student progress and college information.

“They can view key data online and e-mail us with any questions. That’s how parents work in the real world,” says Dilley. Governors benefit from improved communication, dissemination and archiving of minutes and policies. This helps improve the quality of governance and contribute to maintaining high standards.

Extending the gateway

As a leading ICT innovator in education, Coopers is keen to build upon its success. The next steps include a redesign of the student portal areas. This is being done in collaboration with the students. A survey has already been completed by 70 percent of the students, and will be used to inform the new-look Learning Gateway.