



Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom
Industry: Education

Customer Profile

Hunters Hill Technology College is a residential specialist school in the West Midlands. It caters for children with behavioural problems and supports a network of schools across the region.

Education Rationale

Recent government legislation requires the school to work more closely with partner agencies and client schools, plus support more day pupils.

Solution

The school has implemented a Microsoft® Learning Gateway framework to improve communication and collaboration within the school, with parents, and between partner agencies.

Benefits

- Students given instant feedback.
- Parents and governors better informed.
- Partner agencies more closely linked.
- New revenue potential from hosting portals for client schools.

Specialist School Transforms Communication and Collaboration with New Framework

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Ken Lewis, Head Teacher

Hunters Hill Technology College is a specialist school for children with behavioural problems. Located in the West Midlands, England, it supports a network of client schools and works with a number of government agencies responsible for child care. The recent “Every Child Matters” government framework requires schools and partner agencies to work closely and support more pupils within the mainstream school system. The school worked with partners Teksys and implemented a Microsoft® Learning Gateway framework, transforming communication and collaboration among key stakeholders. It can now transfer key information safely and securely to learners, parents, client schools, governors, and other key agencies—satisfying the changes in legal requirements.

Situation

Hunters Hill Technology College is a residential specialist school for 100 boys and girls aged 11 to 16 with learning, emotional, and behavioural problems. The school is situated in a rural setting south of Birmingham in the West Midlands.

The school serves the entire Birmingham region and takes on learners referred from other schools in the area. Ken Lewis, Head Teacher at Hunters Hill, says: “We pride ourselves on getting children back into mainstream education. We need to ensure the right support structures are in place from the start.”

These structures require a great deal of work with many stakeholder groups. For instance, each family requires guidance on how to best manage their child, developing and building on success in the classroom. The team has to ensure that a Hunters Hill pupil, returning to mainstream education, enjoys the full confidence of the receiving school.

Recent government initiatives in the wake of the Children Act (2004) have resulted in profound changes at Hunters Hill. A good example is the “Every Child Matters: Change for Children” (ECM) initiative, led by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), launched in November 2004. It promotes special educational needs, behavioural issues, and the importance of keeping children in a local environment. In particular, ECM advocates a fully inclusive approach for institutions involved with childcare, with a focus on multi-agency teams.

The overall goal of ECM is to encourage inclusion, where schools deal with students in-house as much as possible. For institutions such as Hunters Hill, this means providing more support to client schools and focusing increasingly on the most challenging children who, even with

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additional on-site support, cannot continue in mainstream education.

Under the ECM, there are specific changes at Hunters Hill, too. One is that, until recently, children stayed on a residential basis, from Monday to Friday. Now, however, they must have the opportunity to attend daily.

Hunters Hill needed to find a solution to support an increasing network of stakeholders: day pupils, parents, partner schools, social services, and other partner agencies. One of the key partners is Connexions, a government agency providing support and advice on topics including education, housing, health, relationships, drugs, and finance.

Solution

Ian Black, Assistant Head of Hunters Hill and Information and Communications Technology Lead for the school, discovered a potential solution during a visit to Singapore in February 2004. “We decided to invest in hardware and increase capacity to bring in collegiate schools to share the benefits,” he says. “I saw how schools in Singapore had been able to do things that would never have been available to us. Using the Microsoft® Learning Gateway framework would, however, be the answer.”

When Black returned to England, he contacted Microsoft to arrange a meeting with him and Lewis. David Martin, Principal Education Consultant, Microsoft, says: “They saw the advantages of Learning Gateway straightaway.” Martin put them in touch with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Teksys.

The school already used Serco’s Facility central management information system and had a basic network infrastructure connecting 120 computers. Teksys developed a comprehensive Learning Gateway framework to meet the school’s exact needs.

The core of the solution consists of Windows Server® 2003 operating system, Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 communication and collaboration server, Microsoft SQL Server™ 2005, and Microsoft Office SharePoint® Portal Server 2003. Safety and security are assured by using Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration Server (ISA) 2004, which also helps improve performance. Microsoft Class Server 4 is a virtual learning environment that supports the collection and analysis of student performance data in real time and can be shared with other agencies.

Finally, Microsoft Live Communication Server 2005 gives a real-time communication platform that supports effective, efficient collaboration. And, as part of the school’s overall Learning Gateway framework, it offers enhanced security and seamless integration with the other products in use. With Web part technology, the school’s central management information system can also be linked to the Learning Gateway framework.

From the outset, the school wanted its technicians to be involved as much as possible. Teksys invited them to observe the entire process from design to implementation. The requirements analysis and specification took place during summer 2005 and installation was complete by the end of November, involving 20 days of consultation by Teksys in total. Training was given to a core sample of school employees.

Benefits

The school can now transfer key information safely and securely to learners, parents, client schools, governors, and other key agencies. The solution satisfies the changes in legal requirements and gives the school revenue opportunities by providing services to client schools.

Connecting the Entire School with Ease

When you show staff what they can do with it, they can all see the potential. All the school governors are using it to keep track of numbers, review documents, and circulate agendas.”

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For More Information

Teksys is a specialist Microsoft services business providing a range of consultancy skills and software services to optimise customers' Microsoft-based infrastructure platforms.

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Hunters Hill is a residential school, and students have computer access in the home units and in the classroom. The Learning Gateway framework ensures students can access Internet resources, including the virtual learning environment, safely and securely at any time. What's more, pupils can access their work from any computer that has an Internet connection—including at home. Parents can keep track of their child's progress and take part in surveys and feedback online.

“The sheer user-friendliness of Learning Gateway makes it a great tool for everyone,” says Lewis. “I can contact any student or member of staff at my desk, and everyone uses it. When you show staff what they can do with it, they can all see the potential. All the school governors are using it to keep track of numbers, review documents, and circulate agendas.”

K. Springs, Senior Administrator at Hunters Hill, says: “Information sharing is phenomenal and a key feature of the Learning Gateway. To go back to the days of memos, making sure notices are put on boards, would be retrograde. I'd hate it.”

Instant Feedback Improves Learning

Students also gain faster access to resources and feedback, which Lewis believes makes for a better learning experience. Employees can monitor student progress quickly and conveniently and support children accordingly. Assignments and marking is processed online, giving students instant feedback in a consistent and clear manner.

“We're in the game of enhancing self-esteem—many of our learners have behavioural difficulties, and several are on the autistic spectrum,” says Lewis. “They need systems and structures that support an environment where things are predictable and safe. Instant feedback is absolutely essential to support our learners, and Learning Gateway helps us improve their learning experience.”

Swift and Secure Links with Partners

Communication with partner agencies is also improved, meeting the challenges outlined in ECM. Personalised access can be given to individual social workers, health professionals, and Connexions employees. Data protection is assured by ensuring people can only access details of the students they work with.

“All students from year nine onward must have a Connexions interview to consider further education, apprenticeships, and training options,” Lewis says. “Connexions employees in Birmingham can now videoconference with students, as well as access key data easily and securely.

“We also use the ‘Live Meeting’ facility within the Learning Gateway to arrange meetings and presentations for up to 1,000 people simultaneously. Our greatest challenge is ensuring we keep ourselves at the cutting edge of information and communications technology. The Learning Gateway, the 2007 Microsoft Office system, and Windows Vista™ are all supporting our ambition.

Connecting Partner Schools

The school is also offering to build, host, and maintain Learning Gateway portals for partner schools in its region. Three schools have already signed up, and others have expressed an interest.

“Hunters Hill offers a shared resource to all its client schools through its Learning Gateway, meeting its ECM obligations,” says Martin. “Some schools are keen to have a Learning Gateway portal of their own, giving Hunters Hill additional revenue opportunities.”

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