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## Frog helps to enable a revolutionising 24/7 e-learning journey at Swan Valley Community School

*Since its introduction, Frog has helped to enable a revolutionising 24/7 e-learning journey at Swan Valley Community School. This has been reflected in the wide variety of learning resources that departments have uploaded / created and the fact we regularly get over 75% of staff and students using the VLE for teaching and learning in a school day. Other highlights include the fact that during a recent Ofsted inspection; Ofsted observed a lesson using the VLE for assessment, and commented that assessment was one of the outstanding features of the lesson. The adoption of a school wide policy of setting homework via the VLE and some departments setting up homework learning sites has also been a particular highlight. The VLE really has become an integral part of teaching and learning for both staff and students.*

### Background

Swan Valley Community School is a mixed, non selective, Kent High School, with 617 students. The school is a Specialist Sports College. Although the school serves a wide catchment area the majority of students live in the immediate surrounding area. The school is situated on a modern campus which is shared by the local library, pharmacy, youth service and health centre. The school is adjacent to the Manor Community Primary School.

ICT now forms part of the heartbeat of the schools life. Two years ago, the school, via the financial support of the Governors, consciously chose to invest in very significant key ICT appointments and infrastructure (including a VLE). For the school this was a landmark investment decision championed by the Headteacher. Subsequently, the Headteacher has sustained his commitment to believing that ICT and the VLE are key vehicles for raising whole school standards.



In combination with the VLE the school has adopted innovative strategies to promote e-learning, including Brain Training using class sets of Nintendo DS's and Wii's to engage all students with sport. However the Frog VLE, is the major part of our e-learning strategy and vision for ICT.

### The Challenge

With the arrival of a new Director of ICT in the summer of 2008; a new 24/7 anywhere/anytime e-learning vision for the school was to be adopted and made to come alive. Implementation of Frog was a key part in helping to realise this vision and provide value for money in terms of impacting on raising whole school standards, as championed by the Headteacher. However, before this vision could be fully realised there were some key challenges:

- **Persuading the Governors to invest** in Frog and an upgraded infrastructure in summer of 2008.
- **Ensuring the school appointed staff with technical ICT expertise** who would work as a team to support the upgraded infrastructure. This would also be a new investment.
- **Stabilising and future proofing the infrastructure** and developing a new innovative curriculum model for ICT. Both of these areas needed planned and gradual development.
- **Holding the schools “corporate nerve”** in September 2008 when we had purchased Frog but decided not to implement it until the infrastructure was stabilised.
- **For Frog to be able to work in an evolving environment** after initial stabilisation of the infrastructure. This meant an initial setup in a Novell environment progressing to Windows as technical infrastructure changed. This would place significant demands on technical support from any VLE company chosen.
- **Transform the staff’s confidence in ICT** systems and confidence to use ICT to enhance learning. The VLE must “just work” and be easy for staff to use so that confidence is built and staff believe in the benefits it can offer for progressing the quality of teaching and learning.
- **Embrace student’s passion for technology** and use this to inspire them to want to learn using it– especially in extending their learning beyond the classroom.
- **Link the VLE to the schools MIS** so that all data is easily transferable and students and staff have the benefit of access to things such as their timetable.



- **Introduce e-assessment** and formative learning conversations
- **Have a facility to create a parental portal** and meet the DCSF 2010 online reporting requirement.

### The Solutions

#### **Learning from the Far East**

Swan Valley Community Schools, Director of ICT was fortunate enough to visit a selection of schools in Singapore and attend the International Conference for ICT in 2008. This was a further investment and demonstration of commitment from the Headteacher. One of the things that struck him from the Singapore experience was the effective use of technology to progress learning right across the curriculum in these Singapore schools. Therefore using technology to progress learning and facilitating the improvement of standards right across the curriculum was key to the vision for ICT to be developed at Swan Valley Community School.

#### **Getting the right VLE to bring the technical infrastructure and curriculum together**

A new technical team of ICT staff was quickly put in place and we worked closely with the expertise of Synergic UK to ensure that the technical infrastructure for ICT was completely stabilised and equipped for the future. This was done in partnership with putting in place a new innovative and engaging curriculum for ICT right across the school. However to bring these aspects together choice of an effective VLE was absolutely essential. Unless the VLE could easily enable staff from all subject areas to start making more effective use of ICT to enhance students learning the vision would not have got off the ground. Fortunately, Frog offered a solution that ticked all the boxes that would provide a future proofed investment and to facilitate the vision becoming a reality.

#### **Accommodation of the evolution of technical infrastructure**

As part of its infrastructure development the school has moved to a windows network with active directory to sync easily with 3rd party products offered by the LEA such as web filtering. However when we started implementation of Frog we had the challenge of integrating it with a Novell Network running e-directory. This did prove a challenge but technical specialists from Frog were prepared to work with us to find a solution to making the system work in a difficult technical environment. However now we have made the move to Windows and completely revamped our technical infrastructure Frog integrates seamlessly with our Network and MIS. However, technical support from Frog is always immediately available should we ever need them. The key point is that Frog have worked with us at all stages of development; while we have completely revamped our technical infrastructure to make it a state of the art setup.



### **Developing cross curricular learning and staff training**

As well as infrastructure the VLE had to be key in developing cross curricular learning. The challenge that presented itself here was how to get all staff and students using the array of fantastic facilities that Frog offered when they had only been accustomed to using a shared area before. The good thing about Frog was that they didn't leave us to either sink or swim with it. There were recommended roadmaps available to help with implementation as well as a variety of advice from schools who had already successfully implemented the system. As part of the package there were two specialist training days where we had a training specialist from Frog to deliver advanced training to champions in each of our departments.

### **Exposure to the VLE and building confidence from a wide variety of angles**

The key challenge in getting staff to confidently utilise the VLE was making sure the training that the champions received was disseminated across the school. We did this by putting in place weekly drop in sessions, having whole school inset time dedicated to VLE development and incorporating use of the VLE into whole school policy such as setting of homework. This way staff had a wide variety of exposure angles to training for the VLE, from champions in their department to drop in training by the Director of ICT, to whole school inset, we even got a county based ICT AST to help work with staff individually to help develop their confidence with using the VLE. Training was provided to students in ICT lessons but getting the confidence of all staff through a wide variety of training which had the full support of the Headteacher - was the key to the VLE being utilised across all departments in the school to drive up standards and facilitate 24/7 learning.

### **A skyscraper needs to be built on solid foundations and go up a floor at a time not to fall over.**

Key to the success we have had with Frog and enabling the ICT vision to be realised was that it was done with the full support of the Headteacher, who sees ICT as a vehicle for raising whole school standards and the financial support of the governors.

Looking back the fact the school took account of the initial amount of confidence staff had with ICT was also very important. It was a matter of doing things a stage at a time rather than doing too much at once. This process enabled staff to see the benefits of using the VLE and that it actually saved them time and made their lives easier rather than creating more work. We started with the goal of getting all staff to transfer resources to their subject areas on the VLE so students had access to these 24/7. This was combined with building confidence in setting and marking work electronically. Once confidence had been built in this we were able to move towards the adoption of a whole school policy of all homework being set via the VLE.

As full training and support had been provided staff were able to see the benefit of this policy. Having the champions and an ICT AST working at the school was key in providing staff with the bespoke



help they needed to incorporate the use of the VLE into their lessons. After staff were confident with setting and marking work and uploading learning resources – we were able to introduce use of forums for initiating learning discussions. This has been particularly useful in promoting discussion as part of our new house system for vertical tutoring. We found that the best policy for this was to have a group of people responsible for publishing posts each day as the school was keen to ensure that the discussion stayed focused on learning.

We have recently developed learning sites for each department with associated forums. This works excellently in giving students really visual access to resources and to continue discussion with the subject forums that are attached to these pages. It has been relatively easy to develop these as training has just involved consolidating staff's understanding of how to create hyper links on pages and make straight forward changes. However, the key to this is that it was a progression on previous knowledge that had been consolidated with uploading resources. The fact that each step we have taken has built on previously consolidated knowledge has enabled staff to maintain confidence in the benefits of the VLE to help them enhance learning in their subject area.

### **The students**

The students are part of a new generation of learners to whom technology is very much second nature. Frog provided a facility that was intuitive to them and that they were able to fly with. Students loved the fact that they were able to access all their learning resources and coursework guides electronically and at any time they choose. They also loved the forums and have been very active in learning discussions in all subject areas. Particular highlights include house news sites and eco club information zones that have been developed by students for students. The only element that the school had to re-enforce was how to upload resources to be assessed when they had been set a piece of work. A guide was also sent out to parents to aid the students in doing this. However, after this had been consolidated students were able to hit the ground running with electronic assessment. This was recently demonstrated to Ofsted in an observed lesson and they classed this as an outstanding feature. Having this facility to develop learning conversations with students about assessment and the quality of their work is fundamental in moving forward the quality of formative assessment.

### **Administration Functionality**

Frog links seamlessly with our MIS so we are able to provide students and staff with full access to their timetables and easily link user accounts (we have even had examples of our students using i-phones to check their timetable to check what lesson they have). Our academic calendar has also been easily incorporated into Frog so that staff and students can see at a glance what is going on in a day. We have even introduced a Headteacher forum so that the Headteacher can send out school



updates via the VLE. It was also very easy to set up a link to Frog through our school website so the VLE can be accessed from anywhere in the world.

### **Accountability and Support**

The Governors hold the Headteacher and the Director of ICT to account regarding the impact of the VLE. Having Frog has created a more specialist level of "ICT enquiry" and application amongst students and staff. It has also developed a sense of convenience and ease regarding the location and distribution of work related learning. Finally we have new vocabulary common to staff and students that centres around e-learning.

### Future plans

The school has already started to look at some of the features of Frog 3.0 and incorporate them into its VLE design. The social networking features which Frog 3.0 offers also look very exciting. We have already experimented with adding a VLE news feed – which is great as it provides an ongoing stream of what is happening on the VLE. Students love the fact that they can see who has recently uploaded work and then comment on it. We have found that it is a great way to inspire learning. The facility to add staff and students as friends and set up learning relationships is also something we want to look at exploring more closely as this is second nature to most students and has great potential to inspire learning interaction.

We will also look to develop our learning sites to an even greater extent so that they become complete centres of resources and learning discussion across all subjects

Exploring the parental engagement portal to a greater extent and trialing its use will also be another exciting move forward for us. However, again we plan to take a staged approach with this working towards the 2010 deadline for online reporting.