



Contact details: <http://www.thomasalloynes.staffs.sch.uk>

Email: Ian Cartwright: cartwright@tahs.org.uk

Thomas Alleyne's High School extends the classroom beyond school walls with Frog's 'Facebook-style' technology

Thomas Alleyne's High School in Staffordshire is transforming the culture of learning with the help of Frog – a learning platform that enables teaching and learning to continue outside the classroom. Ian Cartwright, Project Manager, discusses why it is time to embrace such technology to engage the whole school community and transform the education system.

Thomas Alleyne's High School is a mixed comprehensive secondary school in Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, catering for 1500 14-18 year-olds. When Ian joined in April 2007, his brief was to review the school curriculum and ICT provision. At the time, the school was equipped with interactive whiteboards and projectors; however, internal communication was still limited to paper-based memos and pigeon-holes. His role was to change the mind-set of staff to get teachers and students using ICT more effectively for day-to-day communication. The school recently welcomed a new Headteacher who is keen to invest in new technology benefit teaching and learning; this change of leadership has opened the school up to new ICT developments.

Fostering a new culture of leadership

A major development in the school's ICT infrastructure has been the implementation of Frog in September 2009. Having tried and tested various learning platforms, the senior management team decided that Frog was the best option. Ian comments: "We found the Frog support team to be very approachable and responsive to our questions and concerns. We found the system to be easy-to-use which was important as we had to cater for teachers with minimal ICT skills as well as those with more advanced technical knowledge."



The school has already found that the technology significantly enhances flexible learning as it allows students and teachers to access all school information, including homework, diaries, email, resource booking and timetables, from one online location. Ian comments: "Frog is changing the way we work and is helping to foster a culture of leadership in the school. We have set up forums which have really helped our students to network with each other; they are transforming students into keen learners both inside and beyond the school classroom. Also, teachers love being able to work from home and to set work for absent students more easily than before."

Getting staff on board

Frog was initially introduced to staff in summer 2009 before it was rolled out to students. The Frog logo was placed on the school website to familiarise staff with the brand and briefing sessions were held to demonstrate the importance of moving away from the traditional classroom, hence the true value of installing new technology. Images of steam coming out of a teacher's head whilst marking assignments were used to illustrate the need to stop and question the way processes are carried out. It was emphasised that students are now accustomed to using the latest technology such as Skype, Facebook and Twitter, so such technology needs to be translated into their learning process to fully engage them.

The school ran twilight sessions to show staff how to use Frog, including how to assign work to students and upload files from any computer, anytime. They were asked to devise an action plan for utilising the system to meet the needs of their students. The school's daily bulletin of news, events and notices are now only available through Frog, requiring staff to log in to the learning platform in order to access the information.

Involving students in online debates

The school has introduced 'debate of the week' onto Frog to get students involved in forums. Within four weeks it received 400 posts from students, including those who are normally reluctant to participate in class discussions. Ian comments: "Debates such as 'should British troops stay in Afghanistan?' and 'should we still have Remembrance Day?' are engaging students who are normally quieter in the classroom – those who have got something to say but don't usually put their hands up." Popular forum topics include 'school uniform preferences for winter' and 'preparing for January exams'. One student had to return to Zimbabwe for a few years and now that he is back he is using a Frog forum to gather support for a school charity project over there.

Truly engaging parents

The school is working to meet the Government's target to offer parents real-time access to their child's learning on a timely and frequent basis – at least once per term by September 2010. Ian comments: "We believe that true parental engagement is about bringing parents into the classroom



on a virtual level, making them aware of their child's daily school life and encouraging them to take an active interest. Frog is helping us to facilitate this communication between parents and teachers, enabling well informed conversations without overwhelming the teaching staff with additional workload." The school also plans to let parents book parents' evening appointments online through Frog.

Top tips for other schools

Ian's advice for other schools is to choose a learning platform that you are comfortable with demonstrating to the rest of the school; one that can work for your whole school community with the flexibility to tailor it as needs change. He adds that it is also important to consider cost, accessibility and levels of support provided by the supplier. His top tip is: "Look at what other schools are doing across the country and in your local area, speak to them to find out how effective they think their learning platform is and evaluate what aspects would work or not work in your school."

Future plans

Thomas Alleyne's High School hopes to allow more departments the flexibility to tailor learning resources. For example, the IT department has so far been able to amalgamate an AS exam analysis report which is hyperlinked to the paper, marking scheme, examiner's report and grades, at the click of a button. There are also plans to launch more forums under the management of each department so that every subject is covered. Ian concludes: "We now face the challenge of integrating the rest of the pyramid of schools, including all the middle schools in the area and all parents. We want Frog to be a tool that the entire school community keeps coming back to because they genuinely want to use it."

Next summer the school will hold consultations with parents about how Frog can help them to assist their child with their learning and find out what they want the technology to provide apart from simply informing them about their child's attendance and behaviour.