

## ICT - Equipped for learning

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The future for Labour's £55 billion Building Schools for the Future programme looks bleak, but the high-tech equipment that was a crucial part of every rebuild has already transformed working life for hundreds of teachers. Jack Kenny reports

Beth Ingham remembers the days when there was one projector between eight teachers and it had to be booked a month in advance. "You had to beg, steal or borrow to get it," she recalls. Those days seem a distant memory now, after her school's entire stock of ICT equipment was overhauled.

"It has enabled us to bring the lessons to life," says Ms Ingham, head of humanities at Newall Green High in Manchester. "Lessons are more exciting and the children are more motivated. Our new ICT focuses and engages them."

The reason for the sudden influx of equipment into the school was the £55 billion Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme to refurbish or replace every secondary school.

At Newall Green, it means pupils have their own laptops and each classroom is kitted out with ICT. For Ms Ingham, who teaches geography and RE, it means she can play music while the pupils meditate and the children can present their work on PowerPoint.

"Having access to laptops and the internet means everyone can work at their own pace and be independent," she says. "It's amazing. We can teach proper lessons now."

This sort of largesse may soon be a thing of the past, however, as the programme is now under review. Although no announcement is expected before Tuesday's Budget, the prospects for the programme look bleak.

But BSF projects already under way are expected to survive, which is good news for teachers such as Lisa-Jane Horrey, a biology teacher at Silverdale School, Sheffield. She says the new equipment has made an enormous difference to lessons.

Previously, teachers had to book computers, but now there are laptops for classroom use. "We can be sure of getting to them," says Ms Horrey. Each classroom also has an interactive whiteboard (IWB): they no longer have to be pre-booked and wheeled down the corridor. This makes it easier to embed their use in the lesson, she adds.

"If you book it and bring it in for the lesson, you use it all the time but that is not always the best use," she says. "Ideally you just need to use it to make the occasional point."

She also makes extensive use of handsets for multiple-choice questions to check how well pupils have understood a lesson. The anonymity means that everyone takes part. "I can see if I need to do more work to cover a topic," Ms Horrey says.

Silverdale was one of the first BSF projects to be completed, taking possession of its new building in 2009. Technology teacher Dan Rooke says that design has promoted the use of ICT.

Break-out areas give room for research and group work, an approach that has fed down into a collaborative use of technology.

"We have created one site where we have uploaded videos of the kids cooking or me demonstrating something about pasta or pizza," he says. The demonstrations are filmed on a digital video camera, edited and compressed, and then pupils can view them at home or in school.

"It is a change in culture," adds Mr Rooke. "They can use the clips to see something that maybe was not clear when it was first explained and they can play it over and over."

The school also has digital post boxes, where pupils can post work for teachers to collect, mark and return. The result has been a transformation in the way school uses ICT. "It is now an integral part of school life," says Mr Rooke.

The success of the project, he adds, is partly due to the fact that teachers were regularly consulted on what they wanted to see in the school, to make sure they got what equipment they needed and money was not wasted on kit they would not use.

At Brislington Enterprise College in Bristol, the BSF build took five years. The integration of ICT has also helped connect the school with its local community.

Parents have been issued with their own password so they can access the school's online portal, where they can view data on their child, including grades and notes on attendance and behaviour.

In the classroom, BSF has meant every classroom has its own IWB and projector and there is approximately one laptop for every three pupils.

A ground-floor enterprise zone is fitted out with ICT the pupils can use for their own research.

"We had to change because what we were doing was not working," says Natasha Pugh, the school's head of experience. "Now our pupils are engaged and so is the community."

But this investment in ICT also demands a new approach from teachers, adds Heather Evans, head of community. The requirement now is for "high-quality classroom practitioners, open to change, open-minded, adaptable, passionate about their subject and the school," she says.

At a nearby BSF school, John Cabot Academy in Bristol, an audit found that 60 per cent of staff used the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) on a daily basis. Chris Baker, head of e-learning, says the key is to create a need to use the site: at John Cabot it is used to host important information for staff.

All this technology may make lessons more exciting and may engage pupils' interest, but does it make any difference to how well they achieve?

Stuart Bisson, ICT faculty leader at Temple Moor School in Leeds, wanted to assess the impact of the BSF technology windfall. He set up a research project with Years 12 and 13 students in conjunction with Education Leeds, a not-for-profit company owned by the city council that provides local authority services to schools.

So far the results are impressive. For Temple Moor, the ICT bonanza has enabled the school to equip pupils with a range of devices, from netbooks to iPods and video cameras.

"And as far as attainment is concerned, everyone is hitting their target grades," says Mr Bisson. "It is all very positive."

#### REQUEST GRANTED

One 1,200-pupil school on the BSF programme with a specialism in technology and creative arts asked for and received:

- interactive whiteboards throughout;
- fixed PCs attached to IWBs and laptops;
- a multimedia kit for all teachers, including Flip cameras, digital cameras, speak and record microphones;
- 60 Sony e-readers;
- 60 Nintendo DS Lites plus applications;
- laptop trolleys;
- data-logging equipment;
- visualisers to display documents on screen;
- video conferencing facilities;
- voting systems;
- webcams.