

# St Helens LEA Review of ICT Provision Summer 2002



Since 1998 over £4 million has been invested in ICT provision in St Helens schools, through National Grid for Learning funding. Single Regeneration Budget funding has provided an additional £1.5 million and the LEA's successful bid for Excellence in Cities funding has led to the creation of 2 'state of the art' City learning Centres at a cost of £1.9 million. Schools have also invested heavily, both through their delegated budgets and their devolved capital funds. Add to this, initiatives such as Laptops for Teachers and NOF training and the total invested in ICT in St Helens schools approaches £10 million.

This report has been produced to provide a 'snapshot' of where this significant investment has taken us.

## Standards

Since January 2001, 14 St Helens schools have undergone OFSTED inspections. Attainment in ICT was reported as being below national expectations in only two of these schools. Attainment in 7 schools was said to be in line with national expectations, with pupils often making good progress from a low baseline. In 5 schools (36%) attainment in ICT was judged to be above national expectations. ***In three of these schools ICT was identified as strength of the school.***

In the ICT Survey, carried out in Autumn 2001, schools were asked to grade their ICT provision on a 1 to 5 scale (1 – excellent, 5 - poor). The results, which are shown below reflect a growing belief in schools that standards of ICT provision are improving.

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Primary</b>	3	19	23	14	0
<b>Secondary</b>	0	7	5	0	0
<b>Special</b>		3	1	0	0
<b>All</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>

A current trend (which has occurred in 3 recent OFSTED reports) has been the inclusion of 'the use of ICT across the curriculum' as a key issue in schools where ICT as a discrete subject was considered at least satisfactory.

At present, there is no statutory assessment in ICT at Key Stages 1 to 3. Teacher Assessment at Year 9 indicated that 77% of pupils achieved Level 5 or above.

Only 426 Year 11 pupils undertook examinations in ICT. Of these 369 pupils took the full GCSE and 51% achieved A\* - C.

The 2001 ICT survey identified what schools saw as the barriers to more effective ICT provision. The results are contained in the table below.

Lack of appropriate software	60
Lack of ICT hardware	60
Unreliable Internet access	54
Slow Internet access	50
Lack of knowledge about how ICT can be used to support the curriculum	45
Lack of expertise amongst staff	44
Unreliability of ICT resources	43
Lack of technical support	43

Strategies have been put in place to address each of these issues. This survey also highlighted the fact that for pupils in Key Stages 1 to 3 very little information is held about pupils' ICT capabilities or progress. A Working Party, led by the ICT Consultant, will be developing an assessment package for pupils up to Key Stage 2. The Key Stage 3 strategy will address this issue in Years 7, 8 and 9.

## **Infrastructure**

### National Grid for Learning

In accepting the NGfL Standards Fund grant in 2002-03 St Helens LEA committed itself to achieving a minimum threshold of access to ICT in schools. The baseline for access to ICT is defined as:

- A computer:pupil ratio of at least 1:11 in each Primary school and 1:7 in each Secondary and Special school by August 2002 and continuing progress towards the published target for 2004 of an average ratio of 1:8 in Primary schools and 1:5 in Special and Secondary schools;
- A connection to the Internet in every school, with all secondary schools connected at broadband level and as many primary schools as funding will permit
- Secure, networked access to management information systems provided to relevant school staff by August 2003.

Excellent progress has been made in each of these areas. The computer:pupil ratio has been met in all but two schools. The last survey of computer hardware in schools indicated that 1,400 computers are presently connected to the St Helens Intranet. All Secondary schools have a 10MB link through the Metropolitan Area Network and 10 primary schools are currently connected (this figure will rise to 47 by December 2002).

The target relating to secure networked access to MIS has already been met and all schools submit SIMS data electronically on a weekly basis.

### The St Helens Learning Zone

Schools access the Internet through a WAN (Wide Area Network) known as the Learning Zone. The original WAN ('VIPER' which was based on ISDN connectivity) is being replaced with a 10 MB broadband connection, through the MAN (Metropolitan Area Network) initiative.

Internet access in St Helens schools is filtered, through I-Gear filtering software, which is installed on the central server at the Town Hall (schools are able to load this software on their own server if they have the expertise). I-Gear has been demonstrated to be most effective in protecting users from accessing undesirable material. The I-Gear filtering methodology can be tailored to meet the needs of different classes of user as well as being modified to meet the demands of specific filtering requirements (for example the configuration on the central server prevents pupils from accessing interactive chat rooms).

Web based e-mail is also available through the Learning Zone. All staff and pupils in St Helens schools are able to register for a sthelens.org e-mail address, which runs through the mail server at St Helens Town Hall. The MailGear software allows the content of e-mail to be monitored for inappropriate content (eg. swear words). A number of secondary schools manage their own local mail servers.

In September 2001 a Web-based learning Co-ordinator (Ian Mallam) was appointed to co-ordinate developments in digital learning in the borough. The Intranet site is now known as the St Helens Learning Zone and a web site of the same name allows access to the resource on the Internet. The site provides hyperlinks to web sites of proven educational value for each National Curriculum

subject area. A number of project areas have been developed which provide curriculum support material developed by St Helens schools. Links have also been established with community learning projects. All schools have been allocated a '.sch.uk' domain with Nominet and have free web space on a web server in the town hall. Ian Mallam has ensured that these accounts have been activated and is working with schools to encourage the development of their web sites.

Every school has been provided with comprehensive guidance on how to develop policies for appropriate Internet use.

#### The North West Learning Grid

St Helens LEA is a member of the North West Learning Grid (NWLG). This is a consortium of LEAs who are working in partnership to develop on-line curriculum resources and regional broadband connectivity.

For the past 3 years LEAs have received a grant from central government to develop broadband Internet access. LEAs in the NWLG have 'pooled' part of this money to create a broadband infrastructure, which will soon link all member LEAs in the North West. The remainder has been used to provide local links to the St Helens MAN. It is the government's intention that all regional 'Grids for Learning' will connect through a national high-speed network such as 'SuperJANET' by September 2004.

The St Helens Metropolitan Area Network now uses the NWLG connection for access to the Internet through Satelcom, providing an annual saving of £15K. This saving will progressively increase as bandwidth expands due to 'economies of scale'.

#### Videoconferencing

The advent of the MAN has provided an opportunity to develop videoconferencing across the borough and beyond, through the NWLG. Funding secured through Excellence in Cities has enabled the purchase of video conferencing equipment for all secondary schools (with 3 additional units available for loan). At present only peer to peer conferencing is possible but the purchase of a Multi-conferencing Unit (MCU) will allow up to 12 concurrent users. Use of the NWLG's MCU will allow multi-conferencing further afield and a pilot evaluation is taking place in October 2002 involving 7 LEAs.

## Support and Maintenance - Enterprise plc

Following a need identified by schools, for a co-ordinated approach to support and maintenance for ICT, a tender process was undertaken in accordance with EC Public Services Contract Regulations. Following this process a contract was awarded to Enterprise plc on the basis of cost and quality.

The main aims of this contract are;

- To provide a coordinated approach to the support and maintenance of schools ICT systems
- To allow teachers, managers and administrators to concentrate on the use of ICT to raise pupil attainment and to reduce the admin burden
- To provide advice and support at operational, management and strategic levels

The contract embraces all aspects of ICT, including both Curriculum Systems and Management Information Systems. It also covers the Central Systems that provide schools with a secure intranet and filtered e-mail & Internet access. Support is provided via a free-phone number to a 24hr/365 day call-centre.

Schools were provided with three options as listed below

<b>System</b>	<b>Service Option</b>		
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
School Systems - Equipment and Non-SIMS Software	✓	X	X
School Systems - SIMS Software	✓	✓	X
Central Systems – Internet and Intranet	✓	✓	✓

All St Helens schools have signed a contract for one of these Service Options. The number of schools choosing each option is included in the table below.

<b>OPTION</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>
Option A	43
Option B	31
Option C	2

Too often in the past, technical problems have prevented schools from making the most of the potential which ICT offers. This contract provides schools with the opportunity to ensure that teachers and senior managers are freed from resolving technical issues and can concentrate on teaching, learning and managing.

The process of developing this contract was a very positive demonstration of schools, St. Helens Council and the private sector working together in effective partnership.

The contract started on the 01 August 2002 and will run for three years, with an option for a further 2 years.

## **Staff Development**

An extensive ICT Training Programme has been established and the LEA continues to play an active role in NOF funded training, through the Learning Schools Programme. NOF training has had a mixed reception from schools. Although a small number of schools reported an increase in confidence and use of ICT most schools felt that the training had not provided value for money. The INSET programme for ICT includes day conferences/training for the role of ICT in the teaching of all core and foundation subjects this year.

## **Schools receiving extra support**

As from September 2002 we will be allocating more school based support for ICT. This will take the form of in-class support, INSET sessions and consultancy. The support will be targeted at schools where ICT has been identified as an area for development. We took the following into account when 'identifying' schools for extra support;

- School Self-Evaluation
- OFSTED reports relating to the use of ICT in the curriculum.
- Schools involvement in the SRB5 project.

## **SRB5 Count me In Project**

SRB5 'Count Me In' is largest Government award for urban regeneration ever made to St Helens. The SRB grant award of £25million to 2006 will help to attract further investment from other partners, which together will result in a huge £134m investment programme for the Borough. £1.6M of this funding is targeted at ICT provision and will lead to 48 state of the art ICT Learning Centres being built in St Helens schools. So far 30 ICT Centres have been created in Primary and Secondary schools. These facilities are being used to both enhance curriculum provision and provide out of school community access.

## **CLCs**

One of the key elements of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative was the establishment of a network of school-based City Learning Centres (CLCs). There are 2 CLCs in St Helens; one at Haydock and the other at Rainhill. These provide state-of-the art ICT-based learning opportunities for the pupils at the host school and for pupils at a network of surrounding schools and for the wider community. Each of our CLCs has a 'specialism'. At Haydock CLC the 'flexible space' will be used for ICT and Creative and Expressive Arts. At Rainhill specialist equipment for Computer Aided Design and Manufacturing has been installed. The CLCs will enhance learning across the whole curriculum, including providing extension activities for Gifted and Talented pupils and study support. They will encourage innovation and new ways of teaching and learning. They will also offer opportunities to the local community to utilise the power of ICT.

## **Key Stage 3 Strategy**

The ICT strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy begins in September 2002. It is intended to transform the way in which pupils are taught ICT in Years 7, 8 and 9. Standards Fund provides funding for an ICT Consultant for a two-year period. This post has to be re-advertised as we were unable to appoint in the Summer term. During the Autumn term the CLC Directors will be providing consultancy for schools to support this initiative.