



Facility Drives Personalised Learning John Cabot City Technology College

“ There are two or three things that we can't live without and Facility is one of those things. ”

Nick Jones, vice Principal,
John Cabot City Technology College

John Cabot City Technology College is an e-confident school with an innovative approach to education. It operates bold new projects designed to get the best from its students through personalised learning. The strategy is yielding results in both the academic and commercial worlds and one of the driving forces behind it is Facility CMIS.

The Bristol college's motto is "Bringing Learning to Life and Life to Learning" and Vice Principal Nick Jones believes that would not be possible without the support of a robust and effective IT system. The 1050 student secondary uses the Facility suite for its core data, reporting, registration, assessment, paperless exams administration, cover and scheduling. A key factor in the decision to use Facility was its complete integration to its central database. "An efficient school doesn't have 10 packages that don't relate to each other. The second critical factor was reliability. If you have an e-confident school with IT at its heart robustness is critical. It has to work," Nick said.

Effective Mentoring

Effective use of data has enabled the college to free up timetable time for all teaching staff in order to establish an organised mentoring scheme. Each teacher has at least one mentoring slot timetabled each week and associate tutors are linked to every form tutor. The system allows them to see two students a week so there are at least five opportunities a year to see each child.

“The power is that we now have the ePortal screen with all the data about each student so the sessions are not just a cosy chat. The mentor is informed by Facility, so the discussion is informed. Any decisions that are taken can be put straight into the Facility data and printed reports produced for the parents,” Nick added.

The average success for five grade A to C at GCSE is around 75 per cent. John Cabot gets 80 plus even though 75 per cent of its students come from deprived areas. Assessment is vital to the school's success and Director of e-Assessment is Colin Coles. He said: “The system has given a new dimension to assessment because it makes student information easily available. That has a major effect on the decision making about learning. You can identify the C-D borderlines and see immediately where the weaknesses are so you can take action. That can make a real difference to results.”

The school has a huge catchment area around 20 miles across and there are in excess of 100 feeder primary schools. Such a range means that it is sometimes difficult to communicate with parents. So the school plans to make student data available to parents online through ePortal.

Facility Support

Nick is a keen supporter of Facility and what it has done for the school. “We are a training centre for Facility and are proud to host it. We let local schools who are thinking of moving over to it to talk to the staff who use it.” He sees it as much more than an administration tool.

“I would advise anyone who is planning to use Facility to think clearly about the advantages. Many people move to a new management system because of negative experiences with other products. You need to look at how it can move you forward. It's not just an admin package - it requires strategy, management and good planning. The whole system revolves around the core data so you have to get it right.”

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Personalised Learning

The school operates Innovations Exchanges where colleagues can visit John Cabot to learn how it generates its successes. A number of pioneering projects have been launched in response to trends in education. When Chief Inspector of Schools David Bell said that citizenship was one of the worst taught subjects in UK schools John Cabot responded by introducing a special on-line course with citizenship at its heart. The course is completely IT-based so youngsters learn computer skills while exploring a range of local government topics. One positive result was that a group of students emailed the local MP to ask about a topic and he agreed to visit the school to talk to them about his work.

Another unique approach is the year seven Cabot Competency Curriculum, which has totally replaced standard lessons. The aim is to create a set of competencies that will enable students to learn most effectively throughout their time at Cabot. They are taught a range of thinking techniques and research skills.

They are also given chance to develop their ability in listening, talking, note-taking, asking questions and presenting their work. Children are helped to discover their own preferred learning style but also to develop techniques to boost their understanding from other styles, ensuring they have a full range of learning skills.

There are no subjects. Days are given over to different themes such as enterprise or innovation and the programme is delivered by a multi-disciplinary team. Students are introduced to topics, from foreign language skills to mathematics to arts and crafts, but without a formal subjects structure. Students collect stamps on a “Learning Passport” to show their progress.

Many students take a gap year to extend their life experience before university but at John Cabot a few have the opportunity to gain genuine work skills in real contracts for technology firms. The CTC Plus scheme offers sixth month contracts to selected students who are paid a bursary while working on projects for local employers. Past successes have included launching an award-winning web site for a charity and production of a technical tool for Rolls Royce jet engine maintenance. The device is now in commercial production. “These are real contracts, working with real companies on genuine contracts,” Nick said.

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