Report on ICT Survey of Gravesham Cluster Primary Schools, February 2007
David Holman, PEP Headteacher

Background

The survey was undertaken by the PEP HT, following a request from the Cluster ICT Steering Group. The main reason was to ensure that, in future, Hands On Support funding was properly allocated & spent. A key issue with HOS in Gravesham has been that funding has not been spent & many schools appear to have been reluctant to request it.

A meeting was held, with Primary Strategy ICT Consultant, Andy Place & a questionnaire devised to get a general idea of the resources now available in schools [hardware, software & staff expertise], how well they were being used & the type of support most needed. Rather than send the questionnaire to schools, it was decided that I would visit each of them separately & interview a key member of staff, thereby ensuring that everyone was consulted. Each 'interview' lasted no more that 30-40 minutes, so the task was not an imposition on the schools themselves & gave me an opportunity to see everyone during Term 3.

The questions to be asked in schools were emailed to them beforehand & they are included at the end of this report in Appendix 1

Schools' View of Hands On Support thus far

It was universally clear from talking to schools that, while any HOS they have had was effective & welcome, the vast majority found it difficult to access & in some cases, they were unaware of what was available. Specific issues included:

- The unwieldy nature of the original HOS online audit
- The unsuitability of the current bidding form, or lack of knowledge of its existence/where to find it
- Schools with leading teachers are now extremely reluctant to release them to support other schools, as with the impact of PPA time/management time/INSET, there were occasions when some teachers were only in their own class two days a week. Three or fours days was certainly not unusual.

Therefore, for HOS to work successfully in future the following need to be considered:

- ***A centrally funded Cluster ICT teacher to deliver HOS, working alongside PEP to share ideas, information etc. This is currently being actively pursued, with an advert for an HOS teacher, already placed.***
- ***A simple to fill in & easily accessible bidding form for schools to request support***
- ***General realisation among all schools that, if they want a member of staff to see a demonstration lesson, this is best arranged through visits***

to other schools. In this way, the 'expert' teacher is not taken away from their own class.

- ***To use the outcomes of this survey to prioritise support to schools, as there are a number of areas common to many of them, which could be addressed through some centrally based INSET***
- ***Recommendations are therefore made, as above, at the end of each section in bold type.***

Survey Results, Section by Section

ICT suites

- All primary schools have some form of ICT suite
- The commonest form is a 'half class' size – usually about 16 workstations enabling one between two, or half a class one to one
- Just one school has a full sized suite, although two others use wireless laptops on mobile trolleys instead/as well & several others are considering this as part of future developments
- ***In a number of schools, ITSuites are becoming life expired & they are now having to consider refurbishment. Advice on the type of hardware & software now available would be welcome – particularly the use of wireless [laptop] systems as an alternative to a room based suite.***

Inter-active Whiteboards

- All but two schools now have IAWB systems in all of their KS1 & 2 classrooms. Many also have them in reception classes, IT suites, hall and other teaching areas.
- This represents a major investment & while some of the installations are very recent, all schools report that staff have taken to them well
- In terms of teacher *competency*, about two thirds of schools said this was at least good, with the rest variable according to experience
- In terms of IAWBs being used to *transform learning* [rather than simply to display PPTs, worksheets, etc], about half of the schools felt confident about this, although this is a subjective judgement & it is hard to be sure if one school's perception would be the same as another's. However, in all cases, it was clear that expertise & confidence is developing as teachers get used to the new technology. Schools that have had the systems in place longest seem to be the most confident/competent in their use, which is not surprising.
- ***While a few schools were happy with the way their IAWBs were used, the majority were keen to learn more & would welcome both INSET opportunities and information on where to get good quality software to make the most of the investments***

- ***Only a few schools actually mentioned the pupils being involved with the IAWBs, so this may be an area for development***

Laptops for teachers

- All but five schools have now given every teacher their own laptop & in those that are yet to provide full coverage, teachers appear to be using their own computers to support their work
- As a result, both planning & record keeping is increasingly computer based in all schools, with almost 100% in terms of Lit & Num planning
- ***A number of schools who invested early in laptops for teachers are now finding they need to upgrade equipment & are embarking on rolling renewal programmes in an effort to spread the cost. It may be that support/advice in this area could help some schools save time & money, by ensuring they get good advice in terms of the best hardware & software available***
- ***As record keeping becomes increasingly IT based [particularly with the advent of RAISE on line], it will be important to support schools in both the input and analysis of such data.***
- ***Similarly, it would help schools to learn about effective methods to store & share/retrieve such data, as part of their network systems***

Broadband & Networks

- All but one school now has broadband & this last one is being addressed
- Likewise, all schools are now networked, although there is a wide range of systems in use
- RM CC3 is the commonest system & the majority are hard wired, though a few schools are starting to consider adding or substituting wireless as their present system comes up for renewal.
- Few schools have an intranet system, although many have the facility for teachers to email one another [via Easymail or similar] & to share information via the server
- ***Broadband has clearly revolutionised schools' access to a wide range of resources. Many schools have now taken up the Espresso software & all make much use of internet based resources. However, this is an area for consolidation as staff need time to get to know what is available & how to use it. It is an on-going challenge for all schools & teachers simply keeping up to date with what is out there.***
- ***Networks are often a source of frustration, particularly when it comes to trying to add new software. Many schools use RM systems, but others have used a range of other providers & neither appear to be 100% effective. Given the importance of getting such systems right, quality advice on what is best for each school is essential, particularly***

when [because of the technical knowledge required], HTs & their staff do not always appreciate the pitfalls or the necessity to build in future capacity when they invest/renew.

Peripherals

- This remains an area for development in many schools, with only a minority feeling they had both enough equipment & that it was well used
- Roamers & similar robotic devices were popular, particularly in KS1
- Dataloggers & similar devices were used the least
- All schools still have their microscope, which is used from time to time
- Digital 'still' cameras are popular in all schools, being particularly effective for recording pupils' work [especially in Early Years] around the school in a range of subjects
- The digi-blue movie cameras are increasingly popular, especially when used with some of the 2-Simple software
- A few schools are now getting involved in video-conferencing & this is also an area being explored as part of the extended schools initiaitive.
- ***Most schools highlighted peripherals as an area where they would welcome support.***
- ***Video, robotics & data logging were the aspects mentioned most***
- ***Several schools mentioned the fact that Roamers & similar devices weren't always reliable & could be expensive in terms of batteries. A couple of schools were investing in the higher profile robotic toys now available on the High Street & several mentioned the value of radio controlled cars & other vehicles***
- ***A couple of schools made the very valid point that control technology equipment like LegoTechnik is very expensive & this is an area where secondary schools may be best placed to support – particularly if pupils were able to visit & experience the equipment***

Leadership & Management

- About half the schools felt they had ICT well covered in their SEF, although all of them were confident they could justify its use to Ofsted
- Assessment & monitoring of ICT came across as less confident overall, although this was much to do with a perceived lack of a recommended system
- Only about half the schools were aware of the Becta Self Review & even in those that did know about it, most were still in the early stages of using it.
- Subject Leaders were doing their best to stay clear of doing technical support & focus on curriculum matters. Overall, while the subject leader was happy to offer advice to others on appropriate software, it was expected

that the other subject leaders would get to know about appropriate software in their own area.

- ***It is important for schools to ensure that the impact of ICT is properly covered in their SEF, not least because of the likelihood that Ofsted will be looking at this [& value for money] in future inspections***
- ***This will also help schools to both formalise exactly where ICT is being most effective and plan for its future development***
- ***Support for ICTCos in monitoring, assessing and evaluating ICT will be welcomed in all schools***
- ***Much of the above is of course in the BECTa Self Review, so this is probably the best way to support overall development of leadership & management in ICT***

Overall vision for ICT

While many schools articulated similar visions, there was enough variety to make some of them worth sharing:

- To embed ICT in all teaching & learning to make good T&L ever better
- To ensure all staff are confident at using ICT to enhance T&L on an everyday basis
- To enhance what teachers can already do in class
- Learning enhancement in all areas of the curriculum
- Expand the curriculum & share good practice
- To be an 'E competent school', with ICT as a major tool for learning, embedded in the curriculum for daily, personalised, learning
- Children are able to make decisions as to when it is best to use ICT as part of their learning
- Making ICT central to the daily work of the school
- Develop ICT as a tool for independent & personalised learning
- Total inclusion for every child

Teaching Assistants & Technical Support

- Some schools have been very pro-active in providing in house INSET for their TAs. Where this has happened, overall competence & confidence is good, often very good.
- However, as with class teachers, expertise can vary widely, often as much dependent on home use as work in school.
- In a number of schools, TAs are becoming increasingly proficient at working with the IAWBs
- In most schools there are at least one or two TAs who are used to do ICT admin related duties, as well as some of the house keeping matters like changing printer cartridges

- ***Given the value of TAs as both teacher and teaching assistants, the development of their confidence & competence in ICT is essential. A number of schools use either their technician or the ICTCo to provide in house INSET for their TAs, but it is nonetheless an area where most schools said they would welcome further support***
- In terms of Technical Support, only five schools have anything substantial. Most rely on one day per fortnight/half a day per week from EIS/Meopham/NTC.
- All comment favourably on the quality of their support, but [apart from those schools with in house arrangements] all want more.
- ***With only a few exceptions, technical support is a real area of need. A lot of schools appear to be just about getting by with what they have at present, but would struggle if there were a major crisis. Given the importance of ICT in all areas of teaching & learning, the provision of effective technical support is probably the biggest area for development highlighted in this survey.***
- ***Many schools requested that, if it was possible, some of the HOS funding be diverted towards subsidising technical support across the Cluster***
- ***It may also be worth considering whether to ensure there is at least one TA in each school who is trained in basic 'housekeeping' [both hardware & software] of ICT & able to know when to call in expert help. If there was a central resource for the latter [& in many ways this already exists], then schools could access help at short notice – which is usually the need when problems arise.***

Aspects of Teaching & Learning

- In almost every school, ICT was divided between timetabled sessions [working on skills] in the suite, further blocked time in the suite to do other subjects via ICT [eg internet research], plus the IAWBs in the classroom
- All schools also had one or more additional computers in each class [often networked & internet linked] so that pupils could also access ICT at other times
- A number of schools had the option of using a data projector in the hall to enhance assemblies, productions, etc
- Popular software includes:
    - internet resources of all kinds
    - IAWB software of all kinds, including big Books
    - The 2-Simple suite
    - Office
    - ICT Alive
    - Easyteach

- Espresso
- Clicker
- Sherston programs [various]

- ***Software schools are looking at next include:***
  - ***internet based resources, including DFES software***
  - ***2 Simple suite***
  - ***Clicker***
  - ***Espresso***
  - ***IAWB resources, including big Book software***
  - ***Learning Platforms [more 'advanced' schools]***
  - ***Video conferencing [as above]***

  However, in many cases schools were keen to consolidate what they already had, particularly in terms of internet & IAWB resources
- ***Given the range of software & internet based resources now available, it would be useful if schools could network with one another to share their views on what is most effective & offer opportunities to visit to see good practice. Many teachers already have some very useful networks with colleagues in other schools & this could be developed more widely.***
- ***It will be worthwhile developing the existing forum for ICT teaching – including perhaps a website/blog to share views & expertise.***

Additional Information

During the survey, schools were asked to give examples of where ICT had impacted in terms of contributing to teaching & learning which would not have been possible without the new technologies. Examples included:

- IAWBs generally
- Children producing their own powerpoint/music/video presentations
- Robots & logo
- Internet resources, both for CT's & pupils' independent learning
- Espresso, as above
- Digital still & movie photography
- Teacher modelling in key areas of maths, eg time, angles, measures
- Stimuli for speaking & listening

However, it was the IAWBs which come out on top every time. It is clear that, over the last couple of years, they have begun to revolutionise teaching & learning & have given teachers a learning tool that, properly used is an extremely powerful stimulus for children.

It will be important to ensure that teachers are well supported in how they use their IAWBs, in particular to maximise their potential as inter-active resources & not as a big screen to simply attract attention. There is lots of evidence to show that teachers are using them properly, but as undoubtedly

the most important new teaching tool for many years, their use needs to be monitored & evaluated carefully.

The other thing teachers seem to want most is TIME – to practice & embed new skills required & research the burgeoning range of resources now available via the web.

Summary & General Comment from PEP

This was a worthwhile & enjoyable project, which has highlighted just how far schools have come in terms of ICT provision in the last couple of years. For me, perhaps the most important finding is that we at least appear to have a relatively level playing field across all schools in terms of actual provision of equipment. Yes, there are some schools that are further ahead than others in ICT, but to find that the 'basics' of IAWB, Broadband, Network & laptops for teachers is in place in almost every school is reassuring and exciting – particularly when one considers the huge gap between the 'haves & have nots' only a few years ago.

The only downside of all this is that the equipment now needs maintaining & schools will have to bear in mind the cost of its' eventual replacement/refurbishment as the ICT world moves ever relentlessly forward. This is where strategic planning is so important & I think the following issues are important for both the cluster and individual schools to consider:

- ***It is unlikely that long term, centrally funded, technical support for ICT can be made available to schools – unless all schools can agree to contribute a small percentage of their annual budgets to a cluster fund, set up for the purpose. If this is not possible, then schools need to given serious consideration as to how best manage their growing reliance on ICT resources, both its maintenance and in terms of rolling replacement programmes***
- ***Once a Cluster HOS teacher is appointed, it may well be that the best way to spend the bulk of the remaining HOS funds will be to purchase good quality resources that can be made available to all schools – particularly if these resources are linked to a programme of INSET & support, based on the key needs identified in the survey. I would be happy to liaise with whoever is appointed to help ensure that support is directed to where it is needed most.***

My thanks to everyone for your support.

David Holman, Primary Excellence Project Headteacher for Gravesham