

PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Local schools step into an electronic future

Computerised school report cards and setting homework at the click of a mouse are all part of an education revolution taking place in Neath Port Talbot.

All eleven secondary schools in the county have signed up to the Lisol Pathways system, which is designed to save teachers' time and give parents greater access to school information.

Pathways allows parents to receive electronic report cards and teachers can set and mark work anywhere they have access to the internet on the system's virtual learning environment.

Pathways can also be expanded to include ground-breaking facilities in which parents can log on to the internet to check their children have arrived at school safely or help them with homework.

Cefn Saeson Comprehensive in Neath is one of a block of ten schools launching Pathways this term.

Sean Foley, Cefn Saeson's ICT and Data Manager, said: "It's a streamlining of school bureaucracy and will without doubt save teachers' time and make the setting of targets more convenient for staff. They will be able to access information from any place at any time.

"Ultimately, this is a first move towards a paperless administration, which has lots of ecological and environmental benefits too.

“Pathways will allow staff to input and access data, and write reports, from anywhere. It will also allow us to send school end-of-the-year reports electronically to parents who wish to receive them that way.

“It is going to cut down on teachers’ workloads. They will have easier access to documents because they will be on-line and can be done from their own classroom, another classroom or even in their own time at home. The reports will be easier to edit, to store without filling cupboards full of paper and to keep reports so that teachers can track a pupil’s progress.”

It is hoped that parents of the 810 pupils at the school who choose to receive an electronic report might receive one at the end of the summer term.

During the next phase of Pathways, pupils and parents will be able to access information themselves and the school will develop an electronic registration system so teachers can track pupils’ attendance more easily. “That might have an impact on cutting down truancy,” added Mr Foley.

Dyffryn Comprehensive School in Margam, Port Talbot, was the first county school to use Pathways, adopting the system a year ago.

Dyffryn’s deputy headteacher Cedric Burden explained: “We wanted a tool which was learner-focused, which would improve the standards achieved by the children. We needed a system that we could manage as a school - reducing costs and saving time.

“A significant education agenda at the moment is extended hours learning and e-learning.

The great thing about Pathways is that it is one environment where teachers can track pupil’s achievement on-line. With one piece of software it brings e-learning, reports, tracking and attendance together in one area.

“For instance, at the moment we are collecting grades on achievement and effort. In the past that data would have been written on paper or collected electronically and then staff would have had to analyze it, total it and distribute it. But now it is keyed in once by the teacher and the processes of distribution and initial analysis are done by the system.

“Pathways allows staff and pupils to have access to all the information that they require. It also helps parents and the local authority to be involved in the school.

“It makes virtual links within the school and with the outside world, giving real benefits.”

Dyffryn, which has 830 pupils, is now developing the element of Pathways which gives parents access to school reports on-line. “This means we save paper, have more immediate contact with parents and can send reports out more frequently without involving staff in clerical tasks because the information is already available in the system,” said Mr Burden.

“Parents will also be able to get information on pupil attendance and achievement; soon we will have a two-way process of information allowing for parents to put in their own information or comments.”

Helen Atton, business manager at Welsh IT specialists Lisol, added: “We are all delighted in Lisol that the secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot have decided to join the Pathways family. This is the first occasion on which an entire county has committed to the software at the same time.

“The software will offer Neath Port Talbot significant timesavings in the computerisation of pupil records and reporting. Parents and pupils in Neath Port Talbot will also form part of the school community with Pathways, as they will be able to view pupils’ records from home and even receive homework and school reports.

“We have a wide and growing user base across Wales, of schools using the software for monitoring pupil attainment and attendance as well as registration and community communication.”

Lisol supplies high quality IT solutions to the education market in the UK. Based in Cardiff, its staff has been working with schools, colleges and universities since 1999 and its systems are in use in many educational establishments across the country.

Notes for the Editor:

1: The other Neath Port Talbot schools using Pathways are:

Sandfields Comprehensive; Glanafan Comprehensive; Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera;

Llangatwg Comprehensive; Cwrt Sart Comprehensive; St Joseph’s RC Comprehensive;

Cwmtawe Comprehensive; Cymer Afan Comprehensive; Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive.

2: For information contact Lisol on 029 2049 1200 or go to www.lisol.co.uk

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