

A state-of-the-art computer system which offers secondary schools full and easy on-line access to information about all its new pupils has been taken on across one Welsh LEA.

Caerphilly County Borough Council has installed the system in almost 100 schools so that primaries can easily store and transfer academic and pastoral information on all pupils.

The ground-breaking system – Lisol Voyager - has been designed with teachers' help to meet the problems of transition and to assist in the moderation of teacher assessments.

Teachers from a number of schools, including Lewis School, Pengam, helped IT experts at Cardiff-based Lisol develop the system.

Mark Baker, deputy headteacher at Lewis School, said: "Voyager has very much been developed with teachers in mind because we had input along the way.

"Nobody else has come up with an idea which deals with transition in this way. Nobody else has solved this problem and this technology allows for so much to be done so very, very quickly."

The problems faced at Lewis School are familiar across the country. It needed to get better information from primary schools about every pupil arriving in Year 7.

In addition, the demise of Key Stage 2 tests meant it needed to be sure the same levels of assessment were being used across its feeder schools.

"With Voyager we can look at a class of Year 7 pupils and know what it is they can do," said Mr Baker. "We can look at a maths class, for instance, and know if they have done long multiplication. We can move them along quicker in Year 7 without repeating things from primary school.

"Schools in Caerphilly will now be able to accurately say, as the Welsh Assembly Government wants of all authorities, that we can produce teacher assessments which are consistent for every pupil."

Information on all of the children joining Lewis School in September will be transferred using Voyager.

Lewis School will have access to examples of every child's English and maths work, and information about their academic and pastoral needs.

Debbie Hartevelde, headteacher of Tir-Y-Berth Primary, explained the software worked as a management tool for primary heads and allowed them to communicate quickly with other schools in their cluster and with the LEA.

"Because this system is electronic we know that the secondary schools are getting up-to-date and valid information from us about the pupils and that the information is going to the person it needs to get to," she explained.

“Voyager’s facility to work on the consistency of teacher assessments is very important to all schools in Wales at the moment because we no longer have SATs testing at Key Stage 2 to validate teacher assessment. That means we need to be able to accurately assess children’s attainment, all staff must be confident to accurately moderate pieces of pupils’ work.

“Voyager offers the opportunity to moderate a piece of work as an LEA, as a cluster and as an individual school, therefore ensuring complete accuracy across schools.

“Accurate moderation is the key to successful transition and progression in Year 7.”

A report published this month by Estyn inspectors on changes in teaching under the ‘Aiming for Excellence in Key Stage 3’ programme noted that:

“Pupils make better progress in Key Stage 3 where there is planned continuity of learning between the primary and secondary phases.”

It highlighted good practice in general in which primary and secondary schools have found ways to share information about new Year 7 pupils.

It praised schools which had found ways “to pass on information, electronically, about each Year 6 pupil to all Year 7 teachers”.

“This is a simple but effective system,” said the report. “It is used well to track pupils’ progress and pick up underachievers through key stage 3. It has also reduced the amount of unproductive retesting that used to take place in Year 7.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

IT expert Leyton Jones, of Lisol, (left) Mark Baker, deputy headteacher at Lewis School, Pengam, and 12-year-old pupil Sam Griffiths discuss Lisol Voyager.

-ends-