

CASE STUDY

Established in 1973, The Merton Primary School in Syston, Leicester is a co-educational, non-denominational school catering for 362 pupils aged 4 – 11 year olds. Earlier this year, head teacher Shelagh Thomson was keen to improve school-home communications. Here she shares The Merton Primary School's experience of working with New Ways to Learn to support this.

"At The Merton Primary School, getting parents to come to school and gather information about what's going on so that they have a better understanding of school life can prove difficult at times. We see parents on parents' evenings and they come to one-to-one meetings when required, however, when it comes to school-wide presentations, many do not attend.

It's incredibly important to engage parents and maintain good school-home communications. Our parents are lovely, but they're generally more concerned about how happy their child is at school as opposed to how well they're performing. Parents are pupils first educators and maintain a strong influence on learning outcomes, so it's really important for The Merton Primary School to keep in regular contact with our pupils' parents. These past six years we've used texting to inform them as many prefer this form of communication over email. On our website we also have resources specifically for parents too, including our school plans, a parents' handbook, our school dinner menu and information about school inspections and performance. However, we wanted to find a new, exciting educational technology that could better engage parents.

The Merton Primary School is one of 10 primary schools which form the Syston and Thurmaston Educational Partnership (STEP). Within this partnership are different groups, including one for each school's ICT coordinators. This particular group received coding training with expert education, IT and design professionals New Ways to Learn. Through this I got to speak to Sanjesh Sharma, the company's managing director, and found out more about one of New Ways to Learn's new products, the Paper Portal: this is an augmented reality (AR) enabled school newsletter designed to improve parental engagement. We met with Sanjesh and he gave a demonstration to show how the resource worked. I thought it was incredible and couldn't believe that a piece of paper that you could photocopy and send home to parents could present a variety of school news items using interactive, dynamic multimedia. It had an immediate impact. We've dipped our toes in QR codes in the past and some of our teachers have already used AR apps in lessons, but these have tended to be the more ICT savvy staff. So while

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we were familiar with the use of augmented reality in education, we hadn't seen it in action like this before.

We implemented the Paper Portal in January this year and then at Parents' Evening in March we asked parents if they'd looked at this and used the resource since the weekly newsletters have been sent home. Out of 120 parents, a third of them said they had. It's still early days in terms of judging the impact of the resource but the children love being selected to feature in the Paper Portal and the parents we have spoken to about it seem impressed.

I'm really trying to push out the Paper Portal at the moment; I put a weekly copy in the school foyer and in all our Friday assemblies I'll discuss what and who are in the newsletter for that week. I'm hoping over the coming months parents will be more engaged with the resource.

In these early stages, I am responsible personally for the collection of material for the Paper Portal. Once you have the material, it's incredibly easy to upload this to the cloud space set up by New Ways to Learn and its team handle everything from there. From next academic year, we may look at putting together a rota and assigning a different member of staff each week to collate content for the Paper Portal to make things easier and bring in new ideas and insight.

The Paper Portal features four different zones: Zone 1 is for videos and Zone 2 is for still images. For these zones we capture sporting events, film music classes and take photos of everyday classroom work etc. Zone 3 is an information sheet which I write a week ahead and Zone 4 is a parental help zone so that parents can help students with homework. Zone 4 is the most important to me; when I hear parents are regularly using this, that for me will make the investment in the Paper Portal really worthwhile.

Alongside the Paper Portal, we're also interested in working with New Ways to Learn to provide more training. The team is great to work with and it is clear that they are experts in the field of technology in education. I would definitely recommend New Ways to Learn to other schools looking for quality training and educational resources."

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