



STEALING AN **EDGE** ON THE COMPETITION

Edge Grove is one of Britain's leading fee-paying schools. Head of digital learning, **Ian Kay** and head, **Ben Evans** tell **Tim Martin** how 'gaming' is changing the way pupils learn and talk about the school's approach to procurement, e-safety, digital networking and ICT collaboration

Home to just over 400 co-ed pupils aged between three and 13 as well as a scattering of weekly boarders – over 40 for those counting – Edge Grove School is situated in 28 acres of beautiful Hertfordshire parkland. Alongside this impressive, traditional residence runs a modern, creative approach to ICT that is overseen by Ian Kay, head of digital learning and head Ben Evans. Both have been involved in delivering a new strategic ICT plan over the past four years, a plan that aims to, "...ensure teaching and learning is innovative, exciting and tailored to our pupils' individual needs," Ben says. "Rather than simply issuing all pupils with a device we have carefully considered the best options to maximise pupil progress and engagement. This has allowed us to embed a creative curriculum with academic rigour at its core."

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS

A key part of this creative curriculum is 'gaming'. The concept involves the use of software that looks and feels similar to computer games usually found on traditional computer consoles. 'Gaming' is an additional teaching method to those already on show in the classroom and acts as a motivational tool for pupils who might otherwise be unenthused about a particular area of study. Many of these apps are free and others are very cheap; if this is new to you, just type something like, 'education gaming apps' into your favourite search engine to begin to explore this brave new world!

Already convinced of the merits of 'gaming' and the improvement it can make to academic performance, Ian says that the feature has quickly

taken off at the school and is particularly useful for extending pupils once they have completed their original tasks – as well as for creating networks beyond the classroom. "When it comes to competing with people in other countries results have been extraordinary. You can connect with someone on the other side of the world and interact with them at the same level at which Edge Grove pupils are working," he says. "We've found that, often, pupils will pick things up more quickly when they are gaming compared to other teaching methods." Software packages that cater to this need are also preferred. "We use software packages to support independent learning. These also give pupils the freedom to investigate a subject on their own, presented in a game-like fashion," says Ian.

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A mixture of iPads and Chromebooks are provided for pupils – mainly because these devices allow opportunities for independent learning. This investment was part of a specific procurement plan and the result of discussions regarding best practice by the school's ICT steering group rather than, as casual observers might conclude, the school succumbing to the power of advertising.

Over a five-year period networking capabilities at the school have been transformed from a bonded dial-up connection to fibre broadband. "The transformation has happened due to the 'cloudification' of education. As a result of now using virtual learning environments (VLE) and Google Classroom its essential to be on the cloud. Using VLE and Google Classroom allows users access on any platform – whether PC or Mac – and enables them to work anywhere, not just in a classroom," Ian says. "To make that work we have had to invest heavily in fibre connections as well as in the data security of off-site storage solutions."

SAFETY FIRST

In common with other schools, e-safety matters are included in child protection policies and Ian says getting parents to recognise the importance of online safety, and encouraging them to use new technology and experiment with the apps that their children use, can only help to support their child's social and academic development. "At the beginning of the term we had a meeting with all our parents and I explained the kind of issues we are facing. One of the main points I was making to them was not to think, 'I don't understand this, therefore I'm not interested.'" The use of government guidelines, such as Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) resources, supplements e-safety work at Edge Grove and helps to ensure age-appropriate ICT teaching and learning. "It's also the case that, because ICT is being used in every subject, teachers are aware of mentioning copyright and plagiarism issues. That side of protection is important, as is the kind of information we are putting out and how we look after privacy and identity issues," Ian explains.

THE END OF LEARNING IN ISOLATION?

Assessing how the future of ICT in education will unfold, Ian suggests that it's up to school decision-makers and teachers to develop core digital skills for a generation raised on smartphones and tablets, as opposed to having a clear division between traditional ICT lessons – where a child is dependent on a keyboard and mouse – and sitting at a desk with a textbook for others; those days are over. "The barriers between different classrooms is going to breakdown. We will see more resources being cloud-based and rather than seeing subjects taught in silos you will begin to see more cross-curricular work happening. That's how children learn anyway; they don't really learn topics in isolation anymore," he says. "The fact that tablets and other electronic devices are becoming part of a pupil's personal pencil case is a huge development. To give an example, it's quite funny that our reception age children who come to the ICT classroom to do their digital literacy work are constantly poking the screens because that's what they are used to." Ian also remains attentive to the pace of change in ICT through his membership of the Independent Association of Prep Schools' (IAPS) ICT group and using CPD events to identify what is working well for other schools.

These efforts to unearth best practice and make informed decisions to improve teaching and learning – combined with a range of devices to complement ICT skills – clearly demonstrate the lengths to which Edge Grove is prepared to go for its pupils – this Hertfordshire hub of innovation is in good hands. ■