



Hwb+ CASE STUDY



CADOXTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Cadoxton flies flag for Welsh digital learning revolution. By Merlin John.

The public face of Hwb+ - the national website packed with resources connected to rich Education Wales media content on iTunesU—is already in place and open to all. Hwb+ is the dynamic private section for educators and learners and those who work with them. The pilot schools have been working with Wales' eight national Digital Leaders (mainly seconded expert teachers) and the Welsh Government's technology partner Learning Possibilities as it integrates its own secure LP+ learning platform with Microsoft's free Office365 service (email and online Office apps).

The pilot schools and the digital leaders have been testing the system before the national rollout. And they have been developing some of the exemplar learning and teaching being promoted by the Welsh government. It is looking for Hwb to support and be a catalyst for a transformation of practice in Welsh schools that can motor the country into the PISA (OECD) top 20 rankings.

It's a tall order but Cadoxton head teacher Janet Hayward, as one of the school leaders behind the exciting changes taking place in schools across Wales, is perfectly placed. She chaired the original 'Task and Finish Group' of figures from the Welsh education, industry and public life that came up with the concept of Hwb. Now she chairs the National Digital Learning Committee tasked with ensuring that this once-in-a-career opportunity is fulfilled.

"It's really quite something that what was a 'blue sky' vision this time last year is so quickly becoming a reality," she says. "We had a minister for education in Wales [Leighton Andrews AM] who was able to see the potential power of the use of technology in learning and teaching and was fully behind plans to make it happen.

"Transforming learning and teaching involves a culture change that can take time, but our teachers are all up for it, as are our children who are excited to work with innovative approaches."

The kind of change in education practice sought by the Welsh Government is already happening in schools like Cadoxton. Here the move is towards child-centred, project-based learning and teaching, and collaborating with other local schools for projects and resources, and working with partners like The Big Learning Company, the BBC, Microsoft and Apple.

For example, on the day of this visit Stuart Ball, a Microsoft education employee and former teacher, was visiting to upload entries to the company's Kodu Kup innovative programming competition.

Technology is seen as an important resource in this school culture, and Cadoxton is no stranger to technical innovation. A number of years ago it slashed costs for its desktop computers by using PCs powered mainly by solar energy.

The move away from 'chalk and talk'

While not all groups of staff might initially be excited to work in a new and different way, it's the kind of culture change that can take teachers with it as it opens up opportunities for professional development and advancement, and better pupil engagement. Year 6 teacher Ceri-Ann Clark explains: "We used to be 'chalk and talk' and stand in front of the class and teach the children, whereas now I very rarely have a whole-class lesson. It's now almost entirely independent learning in my room.

"The children don't like coming back for whole-class teaching. 'Oh, do I have to?' they ask, because they are so used to being on their own and independent in their learning."

It's the child-centred learning and the external partnerships that catch the attention of another visitor to Cadoxton, national Digital Leader Matthew Geary (one of eight), who has supported the school. It's on the edge of his patch, a massive tranche of mainly rural Wales spanning up the Swansea Valley to the Brecon Beacons and west across Carmarthenshire to Cardiganshire.

"It's a two-way process," he explained. "I support the schools and focus on their priorities while at the same time keeping an eye on national priorities like raising standards for literacy." He sees schools take different approaches. Primaries are more likely to take a bold, whole-school approach to using Hwb+ to change practice, while secondary's tend to start with a subject or department. For those joining Hwb+ in the following tranches there has already been exemplary pioneering work in schools right across Wales.

