

Silverdale School

Improving behaviour, literacy and social cognition with iPad

When Silverdale School's primary department doubled in size, their ageing PC lab could no longer accommodate a full class. After seeing what nearby Stephenson Memorial School were doing with iPad, they decided to ditch their desktops and invest in tablets that could be customised to each student. The result? Improvements in pupils' behaviour, engagement, literacy, motor skills, working memory and more...

"We had an ICT suite, but of the eight computers in there you were lucky to have six working, and the server was really slow," explained head of primary Beth Darby. "Because our students have behavioural difficulties, whenever anything is slow or unresponsive it's incredibly frustrating for them, and when they were sharing work at the end of the lesson they all had to crowd around one screen, which wasn't good for the plenary aspect of what we do. On top of that it was very difficult to plan an ICT lesson, because you couldn't trust that anything was going to work."

Inspired by a visit to local e7 lighthouse school Stephenson Memorial Primary School, Beth decided to move the school's focus from desktop to iPad. "The Governors were really supportive of us using new technology to achieve our targets," said Beth. "We share work with them using Apple TV and an app called Aurasma, and they've really enjoyed seeing progress."



Testing the water with staff training and parent engagement

The first step was to find out if the rest of Silverdale's staff thought iPad would be worthwhile. "If the staff didn't feel like iPad was something that they were going to be able to use, or that it wouldn't benefit our kids, we weren't going to roll it out," admitted Beth. "But the sessions really opened our eyes to the possibilities."

Staff from Silverdale attended five after-school training sessions at Stephenson Memorial, and then received their own iPad deployment four weeks ahead of the student rollout, so "by the time we rolled iPad out to the kids, staff were ten weeks ahead, and had ten weeks of resources ready to go."

The school's next step was to host a morning tea for parents, where they could learn about the iPad scheme and what impact it would have at home. "When I stood in front of the parents and said, 'we're going to be spending £13,000 on your kids, they nearly choked,'" said Beth.

"Some of them were really excited, others were worried because their children had been labelled by other schools as 'naughty'. But we explained that we absolutely believe that this will make our young people more independent learners. That it'll make them more curious. That they'll ask more questions and find more answers themselves. And I think the fact that our security restrictions were going to be so high meant that parents were a lot less worried."



In a nutshell...

Who are they?

Silverdale School in North Tyneside is a BESD school and ARP provider. They cater for up to 60 students aged 7-16, each with complex individual needs. Their pupil behaviour and safety was recently ranked as Outstanding by Ofsted.

What did they need?

Silverdale wanted to roll out a 1:1 iPad scheme. As well as training and devices, they needed to update their WiFi in order to get the most out of their investment.

How did we help?

As well as providing iPad, resources and technical support through our e7 Project, we designed and deployed an Aruba WiFi solution that would give Silverdale the coverage and capacity they needed.

What were the benefits?

- Students now work on a device that can be customised to suit their individual learning needs.
- Students have access to a richer range of resources at home, and have all made progress in literacy and phonics.
- Parents and teachers can use the device as a behaviour management technique.
- Apps have been instrumental in improving students' fine motor skills, working memory and social cognition.



iPad as a behaviour management strategy

As a BESD school, one of Silverdale's main goals is to improve the behaviour of their students. Since the rollout earlier this year, iPad has been a key part of their strategy.

"What we say to pupils is that if they're not managing their own behaviour and they're at risk of causing damage because of that, then they can't take their iPad home. So we've seen an improvement in behaviour because they're desperate to take it with them."

The school has created individual security settings for each student's iPad, and for any of them to be changed, a parent or guardian has to call the school and request it. "That means parents can use it as a behaviour management strategy at home, too," explained Beth, "because pupils know they have to be managing their behaviour at home for parents or carers to ring me, and again in school before we'll agree to any additional apps or upgrades."

Softer approaches have worked too, with apps like Emotions and A.L.E.X. helping students practise social and communication skills. "Emotions is really good for recognising and teaching about emotions and social stories. It gives students different social scenarios and social contexts for common emotions and we use that as an engaging way to get them to talk about their behaviour in a more positive way."

A.L.E.X., which Beth describes as "a cool version of BeeBot, but you don't have to buy the bots so you save yourself £300," has been used in the school's recent Sports Relief fundraising. Pupils worked together to guide A.L.E.X. the robot through 25 mazes on their iPad, then acted out similar scenarios in groups, with one pupil being the robot and one giving instructions while the other filmed them.

"It's good for computing, but it also helps speaking and listening. It makes them be very specific about what they're saying," said Beth. "Siri's the same – to ask a question, they really have to slow down and think about their words in a clear way, so it's been really good for some of our fast talkers."

Encouraging progress and positivity in literacy

Another area where iPad has had a huge impact is phonics and literacy, where "all our pupils have made progress in their reading and writing since last term." Previously, students with gaps in their literacy struggled to improve because "they didn't have books at home, and parents and carers didn't feel they could support the reading."

“We'll be recommending Jigsaw24. At no point did I feel rushed or pushed, or like I was buying something I didn't know. And when people ask me questions, I feel like I can answer them because everything was gone through so well with me. **”**

Beth Darby, Head of primary, Silverdale School.

"Our students find concentration and retention difficult, and because of their reading age a lot of the books available at their level are too babyish for them," Beth told us. "By having iPad, they've got a huge library of books available to them, some of which will actually read to them to help them with their phonics, and they're able to read at home and share books in a more positive way. It's gone from reading being something stressful to something fun that they want to share with their families."

The school already had a reward scheme in which pupils could earn 'attendance money' for good behaviour and attendance, and is now letting pupils put that toward buying their own eBooks.

The 1:1 rollout has also had some unexpected cross-curricular benefits. "The occupational therapist that works with our young people says that some of the games they play on iPad are actually really good for their fine motor skills and co-ordination, and our educational psychologist has said that the students' working memory is getting faster," said Beth.

Developing infrastructure to support the rollout

When they made the move to iPad, the school knew they would need to update their IT infrastructure to make sure they could get the most of the devices. "If the WiFi didn't work and the kids lost faith in it, we'd be in exactly the same position we had been in with the laptops, so it had to work," explained Beth.

Having worked with us to roll out iPad across the school, we were a natural choice to help Silverdale look into their WiFi, too. "Our Learning Trust had a provider, but I contacted [that company] on a number of occasions and didn't hear back. When I spoke to our e7 manager at Jigsaw24, he told me about Aruba, and they contacted me the next day and were here four hours later.

“I was really happy working with Jigsaw24. I thought they were really supportive and honest – it was a no brainer who to go with for support.”

Beth Darby, Head of primary, Silverdale School.

"With Jigsaw24, I felt there was a really good understanding of what we needed. They could have told me we needed an access point in every room and I wouldn't have signed off on it. I liked that they told me, 'one access point will cover this many devices over this area, and the next one will marry up with it. We'll make sure you have coverage, but we don't want to give you any more than you need.'"

The solution we provided, Aruba, gives the school maximum capacity and coverage for their budget. And because the WiFi network is built on intelligent access points that manage loads between themselves, learning won't be interrupted even if an access point goes down, or that the network will fail. There's even a management console that allows Beth to adjust security

settings for each individual device, and ensure that students in different age groups only connect to networks with appropriate age restrictions.

"When the guys came in to do the install they were very sensitive to our school and our students, and made sure that before they left they'd sat down with me and talked me through it, answered my questions, given me a demonstration and given me direct lines to people in case I was having trouble."

And was it worth the investment?

"It was a big investment," admitted Beth, "but I love the independent nature of iPad. The first weekend pupils took them home I think I got 12 new grey hairs a minute, but that Monday I got the most amazing insights into their lives, all of the students were really eager to share.

"One had about 75,000 pictures of his dog, and he's not very socially aware, but now he can engage another student in conversation by saying, 'have you seen my dog?' That's his only way to engage with people. Many had made movies about their families with friends using iMovie. And it's great when they come and say, 'Miss, I've finished all my books, can I have some more?', or parents are telling me how they love listening to them read at night."

And Beth's top tips? "It's definitely worth investing in Griffin Survivor cases, from an occupational health and a safety point of view. Also, liaise with other schools and see what they're doing! North Tyneside Learning Trust has been really great in providing lists of free apps we can use and libraries of free books."

Headteacher Peter Gannon is so impressed he's doubling the number of iPad available.

Want to know more about improving your WiFi or implementing iPad? Get in touch on the details below. 

