Planning for a "Laptop For All" Scheme

The Coronavirus Pandemic brought with it many sacrifices and a lot of sadness. However, it also enabled people to find new ways of working. For example, our online parents' evenings have been a huge success and will be something that we continue.

Remote learning was a challenge for many, but there were also many positive things that came from this. The ability for work to be shared and monitored quickly and easily by students and parents. For staff to be able to record verbal feedback, quickly add notes to submitted work, for students to ask questions more easily, for a range of software and digital learning tools to be employed to enrich students' learning experiences to name a few.

It raised a clear issue for us as a school: we would lose many benefits if we were to go back to simply doing work in exercise books again. Much would be lost and it feels like a significant retrograde step!

Technology will *never* be a substitute for a teacher – this we have clearly seen! However, we need to make full and effective use of technology for learning. Pupils need to learn about safe, effective, and productive use of technology learning tools. We want to make the educational experience for pupils at Balshaw's as varied, dynamic and stimulating as possible.

Therefore, we are considering plans to launch a Laptop For All scheme from Autumn term 2021 to enable 1:1 access to technology for our students in every lesson which will enhance the learning experience for our students and enable us to continue to provide the best levels of education.

We are looking to utilise laptops which help pupils organise, communicate, learn and study both at school and when at home. Individual access to technology is not something that should happen in a few rooms in a school, it should be for everyone, everywhere and at any time. Young people are used to having access to the Internet at all times, in all places – school should not be the exception. We want our pupils to have access to the greatest source of information ever assembled and to study and research in their own innovative and personalised ways.

Discoveries made during Lockdown Learning:

- In **English**, teachers saw students producing much better creative writing. Why? Because editing, redrafting, shaping and crafting your text is so much easier on a computer than re-writing from scratch. Drafting is a process that requires writers to keep returning and re-drafting. This is a process that many students will only take so far when it has to be done on paper. Use of a computer saw students produce work that they had drafted and re-drafted many times over to achieve the impact they wanted.

- In **Modern Foreign Languages** our teachers saw much greater contribution and active engagement from students who would normally remain quiet. However, using tools such as virtual whiteboards where your answers remain anonymous to all but the teacher meant that self-conscious or unsure students were much more willing to put forward answers.

   MFL teachers also found that when students worked on a live document simultaneously in a class, receiving instant teacher feedback on common mistakes and misunderstandings, allowed students to make immediate improvements to their work, which greatly increased their confidence. Furthermore, students were then able to access other software, such as Text-to-Speech apps, paste in their writing and hear it spoken by a native speaker, which in turn helped with their own pronunciation and speaking skills.

   The use of Microsoft Forms also proved invaluable for assessment, for example with translation tasks, where texts could be broken down and students received instant feedback on their work.

- In **Maths** rapid feedback is something that encourages students and also allows for rapid progress to more challenging work take place. As Maths is a subject that lends itself to digital marking, there are many tools which allow students to get instantly marked work and dynamic feedback. Again, algorithms allow students to make much more progress by being able to target areas where they need to develop Maths skills and to rapidly accelerate progress by providing challenge where they have their strengths.

- In **Science** during the lockdowns we found that assessing knowledge retrieval through programmes such as Educake was invaluable. Although the programme is self-marking in class, the teacher is able to do follow-up work on common errors and misconceptions that can be identified immediately. Office 365 Forms were used regularly in lockdown and has a place for homework, informal assessment and most importantly for the drafting of responses to 6 mark exam questions. These would then be kept on the device to refer back to.

  During practical Science investigations results may not always be valid but through use of Focus e-learning students could carry out the simulation and gather a set of results to work with. Students would be able to research and find out for themselves when they ask a question on a topic in class or go to relevant revision sites to help them draft responses to exam questions. Students are also able to conduct virtual experiments and dissections that we would not usually be able to do within the school environment.

  As with other subjects we found that many of the quieter students took a more active part because of the anonymous nature of low stakes quizzing on various programmes we used.

- In **Computing** as well as being able to teach without geographical restriction within the school, the use of computers and the cloud in daily school life is an excellent preparation for future employment. Using online assessment is very useful as it provides instant feedback on areas which pupils either understood or had found difficult. Participation from pupils was very high and instant feedback for teachers was invaluable. Using devices supported home learning and pupils were able to continue with project work, online learning using sites such as iDEA, Seneca, and Scratch. Pupils were also able to undertake 'flipped learning' where they would research a particular topic in advance of the theory lesson with the teacher. This allowed pupils to have some prior knowledge during a later lesson and enabled them to have a greater understanding of the topic.

- In **Art** staff and students enjoyed exploring a wider range of artists and designers which the online work allowed us to do. This was covered this in a lot more depth than we would normally, and students seem to have enjoyed this. It also enabled students to find their own favourite pieces of different artists work rather than just the ones which we have shown them in our lessons.

  Students also had the facility to type out/redraft the written information on these artists and express opinions on the work. Knowing that students would have a device with them would help us to include more of this into our schemes of work. Having access to their own devices will also allow for the possibility of introducing more digital art to the curriculum through the use of image manipulation software tools such as Adobe Photoshop.

  It allowed our GCSE students to complete work on Cubism and Picasso in a more individual way as they could explore the whole range of work and examples that can be found on the internet. Having their own device would help all students to carry out research so that they can include a personal response in certain projects which allow for this, such as the Year 7 shoe drawing, Year 9 landscape painting and Year 10 Cubist pieces as well as the exam in Year 11. Including a personal response in their work is one of the Assessment Objectives in the GCSE mark scheme.

- In **History** we have sought to take advantage of online software that can provide instant feedback. This can, and has been used, to identify and close gaps in understanding and address misconceptions. Using a blended approach to learning and utilising technology within our History curriculum means that the key resources, knowledge and guidance is available at student's fingertips and allows them to take a more active role in their own learning and progress.

- In **Geography** we used Educake for low-stakes homework and revision, this provided instant feedback for both students and staff. Retrieval tasks at the start of lessons during lockdown were done using Form quizzes and interactive whiteboards. These approaches resulted in greater pupil participation and instant feedback for the teacher, which allowed them to re-teach misconceptions.

- In **P.E**. **and Sports Science** lessons, the ability to set and manage assignments online, and then provide rapid feedback/marking on students' work was empowering. This new system has allowed much more independence for pupils, allowing them to research and work on their assignments outside of school hours. Having laptops available for every lesson would allow pupils to research further around topics and access a world of information and video content not possible without that instant access.

  In indoor practical PE lessons, performance analysis software can be used. Pupils could easily compare their technique to professionals to gain better understanding of how to improve. They can give live feedback on the performance of others and record that feedback instantly for future use.

- In **Music** the lockdown situation forced us to think more creatively outside the box, to come up with musical ways of delivering music education in a musical way outside of the classroom environment at home.

  Some of the ideas and methods used were intended to be embedded in the new music curriculum from September, regardless of lockdown. The main new features are the use of two VLE music platforms : "Focus on Sound" www.portal.focusonsound.com and "Musical Futures" www.musicalfuturesonline.org There are huge advantages with these resources, mainly the fact that students have access to all the work and resources to consolidate learning and revisit any time at home. In addition to accessing classwork, students can access support materials and extension work to an advanced level from their computers both at home and in school.

  The Music department had to change the KS3 curriculum considerably since many students do not have instruments or equipment at home. Most of the changes at KS3 involved more focus on composition projects using free online software such as Chromemusiclab : https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/ Exercises were set using the VLE "Focus on Sound" platform so that students can log back in and continue refining work and consolidating concepts from home. Teachers can view student work and set assignments.

  The focus for KS3 has primarily been performing using the "Musical Futures" pedagogy. Many students have missed so much practical music making over lockdown that this was a priority. "Musical Futures" facilitates performing, composing and Music Technology in an engaging manner. Students can log in and continue practising and working from home.

  The main instruments we study for practical performance in school are Ukulele; Piano / Keyboard / Kit & chair drumming, and Bass Guitar / Guitar are also dipped into. Lessons and resources, including good quality play-along song libraries / backing tracks are now available at the touch of a button via computer. This also includes DAWS (Digital Audio Workstations), whereby students can access free high-quality software.

  KS4 have been introduced to Edu.Bandlab which is a virtual classroom and music sequencer / composition tool. Whole class assignments can be set online, and students can access their work both at home and at school. Teachers can view this work, assess it, and give students feedback. Computer access for all could be transformational, from those with SEND to those musically gifted and talented.

- In **Drama** moving a heavily practical subject like drama to remote learning, took a lot of imagination but pupils across year 7 and KS4 fully embraced the lessons taught remotely, proving that you can do drama anywhere. Moreover, when a subject is taught across a whole year group by one teacher marking, recording and quality assuring hundreds of assessment points is much better using online platforms. They take pupils minutes to complete and the data iss immediate, organised and easy to track and interpret. This would continue should each pupil have access to a laptop in the lesson, allowing some analytical skills to be weaved through the curriculum in year 7.

  Pupils with specific needs or that are reluctant to perform in front of their peers, but using technical theatre as a directional tool to engage these pupils is possible if all students have a device. As you might guess, recording and viewing back performance on their devices and immediate access to resources that had been pre-recorded for revision purposes promote a more independent learning.

- In **Food and** Nutrition students enjoyed and gained a lot from watching live demonstration of cooking skills. These were recorded so pupils could watch theme at a later date. A bank of live demonstrations has been produced which they will be able to access. Students gained a lot from having instant access to recipes and comparing ingredients. As with many other subjects, results and feedback could be given instantaneously using systems such

as Kahoot.

- In **Technology** students enjoyed the live demonstrations of more technical drawing skills and were able to quickly look at the work of others in terms of iconic designers or exciting products and using that research to inform their own design decisions. Students will be able to virtually model ideas using CAD software. Having devices with them in the future would aid the design process between sketching ideas, researching and reviewing ideas more seamlessly as a more integrated way of learning.

- In **Religious Studies** we have been able to offer immediate feedback through low stakes quizzes and forms in 365 suite of applications. There are a wide range of digital resources to enrich RE learning. For example, many places of worship offer virtual tours of sacred buildings. Accessing these will help students to see inside a 'real life' place of worship. Thee are many more resources and clips that teachers can set for students to further stretch and challenge their learning. As in English, when writing extended answers, students will be able to draft, redraft and edit their extended pieces of writing on word.

What are the other benefits of this scheme?

- **Preparing students for real life**
  The excellent collaboration tools that we have become used to working with in Office 365 and meetings using Teams are the way that businesses and organisations work. We want to ensure that Balshaw's students are used to working in this sort of environment.

- **Balshaw's can manage the devices and provide the best levels of eSafety for our students**
  E-safety and protecting your child and their use of the device is crucial. We do not allow mobile phones in school because of the risks to wellbeing and safety that their use can cause. The devices that your child uses will have safety software installed on them and when in school they will be behind our firewall and safety monitoring system to ensure that they can only access suitable sites and materials.

- **Comprehensive insurance and warranty with zero excess**
  Built into the scheme is a full insurance with zero excess, rapid repair and support for the device over the two years of use before the device becomes yours

- **Affordable monthly payments**
  We know that buying a Laptop/Laptop device is a significant financial investment in your child's learning and future, so payments are spread over two years. Support will be available for families who are financially challenged and the scheme will be provided automatically for Pupil Premium/Free School Meal students.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

- **How will the use of these devices affect teaching?**
  Your child will still experience the same quality of excellent teaching that Balshaw's provides. What the devices will allow is for a fully blended learning experience in the classroom.

- **What is "Blended Learning"?**
  Blended Learning is a term used around the world. As its name suggests, 'technology' is blended in to lessons alongside more traditional teaching and writing.

  The benefit of blended learning is that it opens up lessons. Students can become even more independent. Strategic planning allows the teacher to give more time for discussions and higher-order thinking activities which are personalised during face-to-face interaction and feedback.

  The online tools enable students to have personalised instruction which supports different pace and styles of learning. Learning becomes more mobile and students are able to access reliable, up to date, stage appropriate resources at home.

- **So how would they be used in lessons?**
  Teachers will still teach! Blended Learning and Laptops will not replace the teacher. Instead, they will enhance learning and ensure that student-teacher interactions are more personalised.

In lessons, there will be the option for our students to complete their work using exercise books or their device. Where the use of laptops is planned as a requirement for a lesson, school devices will be provided to students for the duration of the lesson if they are not part of the scheme.

- **Can we provide our own laptop for my child to use?**
  The answer to this is no.

  We are unable to manage, control and maintain the content on laptops that are not managed by our software infrastructure and this poses a safeguarding risk to the children in school. We would not be able to offer direct IT support for devices that we did not know. We are not able to purchase licences for software on machines that are not part of the programme. We wouldn't be able integrate the device into our systems such as the printer network for example.

  One of the main reasons for only allowing laptops that are part of the scheme into school is the warranty and insurance that are in place for the laptops bought as part of the scheme. If your child was to bring their own device into school and it was lost, damaged or stolen, you would be entirely responsible for this.

- **Will it be compulsory to be a part of the laptop scheme?**
  No.

  We cannot require this from all parents. We do hope that the vast majority of parents will do this and on the occasions when the use of a laptop is planned as a requirement for a lesson, a school laptop will be provided to where available for a student who is not part of the scheme

- **What happens if my circumstances change or my child leaves the school?**
  If your child was to leave the school you would have the option to return the device or make the remainder of payments that would mean you would take ownership of the device.

  If your financial circumstances changed, it is possible you would be eligible for Pupil Premium support or you would have the options as stated above.

So what next?

We have invested heavily in the infrastructure of the school to be able to support a scheme like this – it is something that I have believed will be hugely beneficial to students since I started as Headteacher. However, we require the support of the parents and families of students through engagement with the scheme to be able to make this happen. Using our buying power and working with strategic partners the package aim to put together will be significantly cheaper than the equivalent package available on high street.

Without your support we will be unable to deliver our vision for 1:1 learning.

We would like your views

We know that many people have bought devices during lockdown, but our survey showed that the majority of our students do not have a laptop which they can call their own to be able to use as and when needed – much less to be able to bring it into school.

There is much for us to do to ensure that we have orders, insurance and laptops in place ready to continue using them as part of our blended learning as we were able to do during the Lockdowns. Therefore it will be really helpful if you could complete a very short feedback form by clicking on this link.

When we have this feedback we will be able to start looking in detail at the specification of a range of different devices in order to communicate with you again much more specifically about what device will be used as part of the scheme.

Please complete the consultation form by Monday 14ᵗʰ June.

Link to feedback form here: https://bit.ly/2PCop2C

Your sincerely,

Mr Steven Haycocks
HEADTEACHER
BALSHAW'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. (Psalm 119, vs 105)