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CALL

EMMA LEWIS EXPLAINS HOW A BYOD POLICY WITH THE EMPHASIS ON STUDENT CHOICE IS POSITIVELY AFFECTING CLASSROOM CULTURE AT THE W. YORKSHIRE SCHOOL WHERE SHE IS E-LEARNING MANAGER...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The North Halifax Grammar School is a selective co-educational state school of just under 1150 students. The school admits 155 students in five forms to Year 7 and has a Sixth Form of around 360. Ofsted has graded the school as an "Outstanding Provider" four times since 1992, making the school one of only thirty nine secondary schools in the country to have achieved that distinction.

The school converted to Academy status in June 2011 and has continued its specialism in science. NHGS offers a traditional academic education, with all students studying only GCSE courses in Key Stage 4 and only A/S and A2 courses in the Sixth Form.

We have a BYOD policy in place here at NHGS. We are mindful, however, that students come from a broad range of economic backgrounds and times are hard on parents' pockets, which is why we have opted for an environment where it becomes a choice for students and parents to bring in their mobile devices and not the norm.

The internet and the available software applications are fantastic resources if used effectively. Indeed e-mail and access to Google Apps for Education are tools that we use at NHGS, and we see the need for students to be able to access those resources anytime, anywhere, on any device. Should an opportunity arise in a lesson whereby a student wants access to the internet to enhance his learning experience but there isn't a laptop or computer in the classroom, he simply raises his hand and asks the teacher if it's permissible for him to use the school-wide wifi and his mobile device to access resources. We feel this is preferable to teaching staff asking or expecting every single student to bring in a mobile device.

We initially introduced mobile learning into school with GCSEPod, the audio visual learning and revision content designed to help those studying for GCSEs to revise outside of the classroom with their mobile devices. I saw the product at a conference in April 2011 and immediately recognised how it could be of use to our students and provide an easy introduction in to the concept of using mobile devices for learning.

We asked the team from GCSEPod to come into school and explain to our students how the product works and how to get the best results from it. We borrowed a class set of iPods for a week and we took them round to various classes of Year 9, Year 10 and 11 students to put it to the test. It was the students who decided whether we should use GCSEPod for revision and the verdict was an overwhelming yes. The GCSEPod team have helped us to maximise usage amongst our students, not only informing us of changes and listening to our feedback but providing us with posters to stick up around school. But in all honesty, it hasn't taken very much promoting as the students were on board immediately because they had been involved in the initial decision to introduce it in to school.

The Senior Leadership team supported the decision to introduce mobile learning as they saw the value in extending our PC and laptop provision through wifi with mobile devices and also recognised how the content would benefit the students.

As a school we knew we wanted to harness the power of the technology in our students' pockets; often the technology they used day to day was better and faster than what we were offering them and yet, like so many other schools, we were telling them not to use their mobile phones in the classroom. MP3 players and smartphones were coming onto the scene and ownership amongst our year 9, 10 and 11s was increasing rapidly – but because of school policies we were not embracing this new technology.

However, we also had to bear in mind that mobile solutions needed to be accessible on a PC as not everybody has access to a smartphone or MP3 player; so we needed solutions that worked across all platforms, mobile and traditional PCs too.

GCSEPod was the start of our mobile journey. We wanted an environment whereby it didn't matter what device you had, or who the manufacturer was. Any device, anytime, anywhere, anytime learning was our vision for the school... and that's been central to the choices we've made about our infrastructure. In fact, we rebuilt our entire network, which needed restructuring, around this concept and it's certainly not a decision we regret – we see it as key in our successful adoption of mobile technology.

We made the decision to "Go Google" with Google Apps for Education. Every member of staff and student at the school has a Google Apps account, and now it's become part of our daily school life and because it works well, everyone likes it and has bought into it more or less straight away. In fact, we were chosen to host the first Google Apps for Education Summit in the UK and we are hosting another this year. The summit focuses on helping people get the most out of Google Apps for Education in both primary and secondary schools and in Higher Education environments.

At the end of the day, it's all about people: if something is useful to people then they will see a value in it and use it.

What staff and students are saying...

**"BYOD ALLOWS FOR A CALMER AND MORE FOCUSED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT; INSTEAD OF CROWDING AROUND THE WHITEBOARD OR WAITING FOR THEIR TURN, STUDENTS CAN VISIT THE RESOURCES FROM THEIR OWN MOBILES."
(TEACHER)**

"I used Google forms for a feedback session on Of Mice & Men with Year 10 this morning. Some students were able to complete a short survey in the lesson on their phones and reply to me, all within 15 minutes. No paper and, even with a small group of four, all kinds of interesting issues about the book and controlled assessment fears came out of it."
(Teacher)

**"I THOUGHT THAT LAST WEEK'S LESSON WAS QUITE INTERESTING AND A LOT MORE FUN THAN ALL OUR OTHER LESSONS. I REALLY LIKE GOOGLE CLOUD AND IT'S REALLY USEFUL WITH ITS WORD DOCUMENT APP BECAUSE I HAVE A MAC. THIS WAS ONE OF OUR BEST LESSONS!"
(STUDENT)**