



## Driving down Administration, Driving up Performance at Prince William School using FirstClass

Students, staff, governors and parents have different interests, yet keeping them all informed and up to date is a significant element of improving school standards. Using the Education Edition of Open Text's FirstClass product, the Prince William School & 6th Form Centre at Oundle has an easy way to communicate and share resources across its entire community of stakeholders. By implementing FirstClass, Prince William School have enabled their tutors and students to share, access and manage knowledge, information, and learning materials as well as creating and developing a secure and customisable online learning community.

Prince William School (PWS) is a Department of Education and Skills (DfES) Language College with 1,150 students and 75 teachers together with support staff and governors. The school has a simple ambition: "Aim high...succeed together" and this is exemplified by the fact that in recent years, PWS has exceeded its targets for examination success.

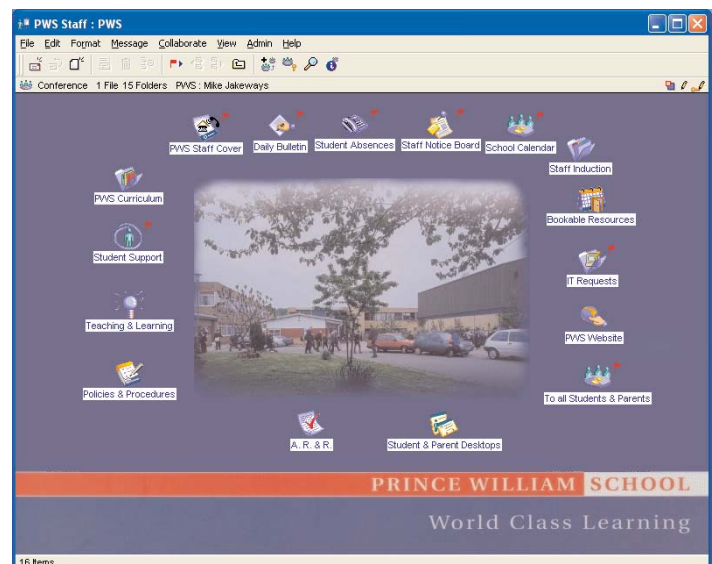
### Defining the Issues

Four years ago, PWS was thinking about how it might better organise the mountain of paperwork that is generated through its activities. "We were drowning under a sea of paper," says Mike Jakeways, Deputy Head at PWS. At the time, some teachers were looking at how Internet technology might not only assist in teaching but also in reducing administration. The school's first efforts at creating an electronic filing and retrieval system were unsuccessful because it was too complex. "We were very new to electronic systems and it was clear from the outset that we needed something intuitive and easy," explains Jakeways. "The early development didn't give us that ease of use factor." It became apparent that what PWS was really looking for was a system that could marshal all school resources. "Each school must have documented policies and procedures but the effort of keeping those up to date, distributed and available to anyone who needs them using paper and manual processes is incredibly difficult," says Jakeways. From a teaching perspective, PWS wanted its staff to easily share curriculum information.

### Implementation

After some further research, PWS came across FirstClass and were provided with a working version accessible over the Internet with which they could experiment. "It was great, the potential of FirstClass was from the outset, blindingly obvious" says Jakeways. Once the trials were concluded, PWS took the full product with licensing for 1,000 users. PWS had no difficulty in selecting FirstClass largely because:

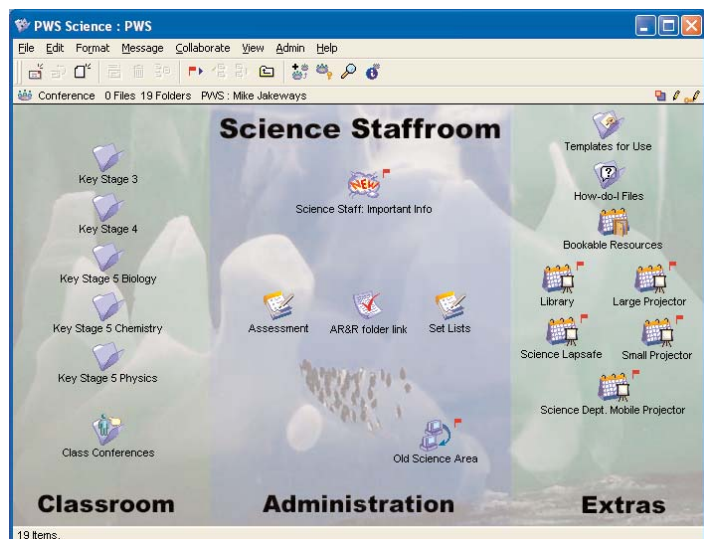
- **Most teachers rated it as easy to use**
- **It was easy to set up and maintain**
- **FirstClass is suited to a wide range of users including students, teachers and parents**
- **It is extremely flexible and secure and enables many different user groups to be created with permission controlled access**
- **It was easy to enhance and add applications without making bespoke changes**
- **It had the potential to create an easy to maintain and integrated reporting system**



The PWS Staff Conference

The take up was rapid: "We didn't realise just how much people wanted to get 'online' and work with FirstClass," says Jakeways. However, at first there was some resistance among the teaching community: "Some teachers came to the project with very limited ICT skills and in a couple of cases, using a keyboard was difficult. As FirstClass is largely mouse-driven they quickly got the hang of

things and became as enthusiastic as everyone else." In order to facilitate training for all, PWS made an early decision to adopt a 'train the trainer' style of learning. This is where a small group of people are initially trained in the product's use, learn how to manage the system and then pass that learning onto other members of the community.



The PWS Science Staffroom

## Benefits

The initial implementation was so successful that PWS quickly became productive in its use of FirstClass. However, reporting was a special issue the school wished to address and for this, they approached Semantise, a value added reseller for FirstClass who have designed the electronic equivalent of a student's report. "We were particularly interested in a reporting system that would allow us to provide everyone with a means of recording interim assessment data and annual student reports. Semantise used the FirstClass Rapid Application Development Toolkit to develop the reporting system for us and it has proved to be a major success. It also enables us to archive reports so that they can be reviewed for target setting and progress planning at a later stage". notes Jakeways. Teachers can see previous reports and assessment scores, while tutors and others reporting on a student's progress can add in their comments. In addition, FirstClass is used for creating UCAS references for those students applying to go on to higher education.

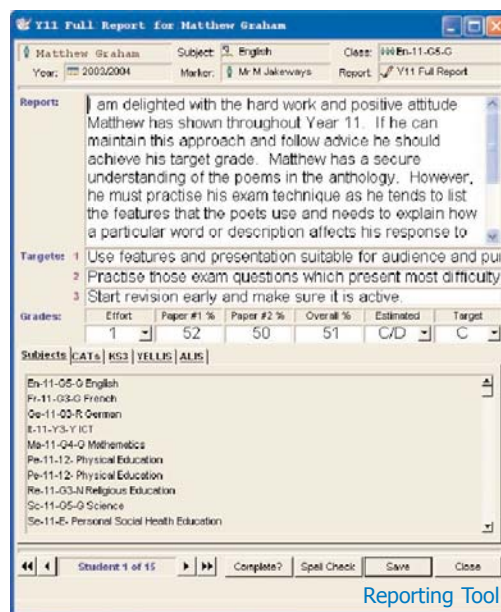
Nearly a quarter of all students have individual, tailored learning programmes. These programmes are confidential and PWS has used FirstClass not only to maintain these programmes but also to ensure that only the right people see individual student content. "FirstClass is very good at allowing us to make public a great deal of information but we have to protect students' right to confidentiality, we are satisfied that we can do that within the FirstClass environment." Today, the system is available to all staff, students and parents. Some staff are setting up work areas where they can input work schemes, resource notes and links to other resources and the teachers and students have permission-controlled access to email, discussion forums, calendars and instant messaging. PWS makes extensive use of the calendaring functionality in FirstClass for booking resources and arranging a variety of activities which saves a great deal of time and ensures that resources are not double booked. In addition, PWS has created social communities like the Rowing Club and Army Cadet Force. This allows anyone who is registered as part of those communities to gain access to their designated area. "It's a great way for external members to organise their respective clubs, including the booking of resources like the minibus while keeping all members aware of what's going on," says Jakeways.

## The Future

Full use of FirstClass has yet to be adopted by all teachers though Jakeways is satisfied with progress: "The important thing is to let people move forward at their own pace and not force disciplines upon them. What is perfectly clear though is that personally produced materials are more likely to be used than those put centrally on an LEA or DfES system," notes Jakeways. PWS is seeing some excellent examples of the way ICT and FirstClass can make a genuine difference to the process of learning. Indeed, at a recent Ofsted inspection, it was noted that FirstClass had brought forward levels of acceptance and confidence in ICT.

Going forward, PWS wishes to extend the system's curriculum content. Some departments are very strong at sharing teaching and learning materials, others are not so strong and PWS plans to extend reporting to cover modular courses and student self-assessment.

Software that makes a genuine difference in an easy-to-use manner is rare. Jakeways is convinced that without FirstClass, the school would not be where it is today and is justifiably proud of the resulting achievements: "We've made huge strides in driving down administration while improving student learning. The fact that we have exceeded our own targets for GCSE achievement and are rated as one of the best non-selective schools in the county speaks for itself. **Could we have made it without FirstClass? Possibly. Would we have a great learning environment? Most certainly not.**"



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