



CASE STUDY

Shire Oak Academy is raising its digital game.

David Eley is Director of Learning for the Computing department and also ICT curriculum leader at Shire Oak Academy in Walsall, West Midlands. Shire Oak is an 11 to 18 comprehensive Academy, with 1,450 students currently on roll. David had been working to set up more links with local primary schools in the area when he heard about the Digital Schoolhouse (DSH) programme three years ago and decided to investigate further.

Today, the school has a significant number of Year 5 students enrolling in the school specifically because of the work it is doing with Digital Schoolhouse. David tells us more...

“As a specialist Science College, we have set particularly challenging academic targets for our students in the Sciences and Mathematics subjects. We also have a history of working to support the teaching of these subjects in the local community. Therefore, even before we started working with DSH, we had strong partnerships in place with 10 primary schools where we had been developing Maths and Science teaching projects. But I was keen to expand on this and foster even more connections with our primary schools; Computing, being the subject of the future, which every school needs support in implementing, seemed the perfect way to do this.

Why computing?

To support the digital skills of the future workforce, computing knowledge is a must. Although today’s students are tech savvy, in order to keep up with the rapid pace at which technology moves, they need to develop a deeper understanding of how technology works, and not just what it can do. Making computing more accessible to primary schools seemed like a good way to start implementing this process.

The DSH programme uses play-based learning to engage the next generation of pupils and teachers with the Computing curriculum. During the Autumn term we deliver 10 workshop sessions (one for each of our feeder primary schools’ Year 6 classes), and during the Spring term we do the same for their Year 5 classes. We usually have anywhere between 25 and 30 students per session.

Once they’ve done the DSH workshop with us, I deliver a continuation workshop at their primary school. That works quite well as I get to see what facilities they’ve got, and get an idea of the sort of things they do during a regular school day. It’s also good for them to see us coming into their schools too – I think they really appreciate that, and again, it helps with the transition process.

Our current Year 8 students were the first group of DSH students we worked with; they came to us when they were in Year 6, and our current Year 7 students first came to us when they were in Year 5. We’re starting to see the impact of the programme now with these particular students and the results are really positive. The students coming into our school have a noticeably greater computing knowledge, which is great. But importantly they also feel comfortable with some of the staff, the wider department and the school itself, which I feel has really helped to bridge the transition gap for them.

The students really love the programme – I’ve heard from quite a few Year 5 students that they’ve decided to come to Shire Oak specifically because of the work we’re doing with DSH, which is amazing and testament to how valuable it is!

The programme also benefits the primary school teachers. Whenever we run a session, we try to help the teachers by suggesting activities that they can do with the students after we’ve left, to keep the momentum going, and to ensure that they themselves are also being upskilled while they are developing their curriculum. The ideal situation for us is for them to expand on the workshops we’ve done with them, and implement different ideas; in this way, the programme has even more impact.

It also works well for our teachers; staff in different departments know what we’ve been doing with the new students coming in, which means they can include it in their schemes of work. For example, we do a lot of work in with Scratch and Code Combat with the Year 5 students, so they can refer back to that to illustrate a point or build on information that they might be introducing to classes in Year 6 or 7.

Going forward

I can’t recommend the DSH programme highly enough and regularly suggest it to other secondary schools. Not only does it benefit primary and secondary teachers alike, but it means that once students start with you in Year 6, you’ve already got them motivated and keen to learn more and progress, which as a teacher, is hugely encouraging. The whole DSH national team are like an extension of our school; we actually have a WhatsApp group where we can suggest different software or companies we’d like to work with, or to ask their advice on certain activities any time we like. They’re so receptive, open and helpful – it’s a really great forum to have!”

**David Eley, Shire Oak Academy
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