

# Washwood Heath Technology College chooses Steljes as their training delivery partner




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**Simon Mallet**, Deputy Head teacher,  
Washwood Heath Technology College

Washwood Heath Technology College is on the up and up. Under a new leadership team following a ‘Notice to Improve’ from Ofsted in March 2006, this large inner city secondary school in Birmingham is now delivering outstanding results with 82% of its students achieving 5 A\*- C grades at GCSE level in 2009 – way above the national average. ICT has been a driving force in this remarkable transformation in Washwood Heath’s fortunes, powered by a tailor-made training strategy designed and delivered by Steljes to enhance teaching and learning and get the most out of the school’s investment in the latest interactive learning technology.

This turnaround has been achieved in the face of some major challenges. Washwood Heath is a highly culturally diverse school in an area of significant social and economic deprivation, and a large proportion of its 1,400 students are from minority ethnic groups where English as an additional language (EAL) is commonplace. Two-thirds are boys, and the number entitled to free school meals or with learning difficulties or disabilities is also well above the national average. “One of our greatest achievements has been successfully integrating all these groups into one community within the school, and the positive ethos can now be felt everywhere,” says Deputy Assistant Head teacher Simon Mallet. “Our main focus has been on engagement and raising the aspirations of the students, and personalised learning – supported by access to ICT – is at the heart of this.”

With Head teacher Beverley Mabey at the helm, one of the new leadership team’s first tasks was to introduce strategies to empower staff to make them better facilitators of learning. “Before, there was good teaching but not necessarily good learning,” Simon explains. “Now we’ve challenged all our staff to make that jump and acquire the skills they need to engage their students more effectively through interactive technology.” A significant investment in upgrading the school’s ICT infrastructure was an essential element of its renewal programme, including the installation of a number of SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards that are a particularly effective way of engaging learners at the beginning of lessons. Yet as Simon points out, technology is only as good as the skills of the

person using it: “We could have gone on spending a lot of money every year on new equipment, but this wouldn’t have the impact we wanted if we didn’t train staff how to use it properly. Instead, for the next couple of years we’re going to spend at least 50% of our annual budget on staff development so that we make better use of the technology we’ve already got.”

The first step was to appoint a reliable external partner to design and deliver the staff development programme, and following a rigorous market evaluation and tendering process, Washwood Heath selected Steljes, the exclusive representative for SMART Technologies in the UK, as its training delivery partner. “Eight companies responded to our invitation to tender, and we chose Steljes as the school’s training delivery partner based on the strength of its proposed strategy,” explains Simon. “Looking back, it’s been a good partnership and Steljes have done everything they can to address our needs.”

A flexible approach is essential, as every school is different and no two individual’s training needs are the same. “We undertook a Training Needs Analysis for every teacher to highlight their current strengths and weaknesses,” says Shahina Burnett, Steljes Training Delivery Manager, “and this enabled us to create a series of sessions tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual teachers and the school as a whole.”

The programme consisted of five core units, starting with an intensive introduction to the basics of using



a spectacular leap forward in 2009. "Students are now more engaged, and much better at self-managing their work," concludes Simon Mallet. "We're trying to encourage them to be creative learners and thinkers, and the more effective use of interactive technology in teaching particularly helps the kids for whom English isn't their first language as it enables them to show their skills – and not their barriers."

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SMART Notebook™ software and the popular Microsoft applications such as Outlook®, Word®, PowerPoint® and Excel®. Further units focused on the proficient use of hardware such as SMART Boards and laptops, developing lesson content and using the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Each Washwood Heath teacher was issued with an ICT Training Passport that identified those courses – some mandatory, some not – they should attend, which was then stamped to confirm their attendance.

All Steljes training courses are delivered by certified instructors who are experts in their field and often former teachers themselves. Because of this, the uptake of the courses was very high and afterwards each delegate completed an evaluation form to provide feedback to the

trainer and determine whether extra sessions may be required. "The Training Needs Analysis identified a number of staff members whose existing skills were at the bottom end of the range," says Simon Mallet, "but they're now all pretty proficient and are successfully using Excel® to produce electronic mark books and using the Internet and YouTube with confidence. The more experienced ICT users are really starting to push the boundaries of how they use the technology to improve learning."

The reaction of Washwood Heath's teachers has been overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority embracing the training programme and realising its value. In turn, teaching standards have risen – with a direct effect on the latest academic results, which have taken

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