



FIREFLY & CASTLE PHOENIX TRUST

Case study



Overview

The Challenges

When Caludon Castle School looked for a virtual learning environment 7 years ago, the main aim was to improve student engagement in home learning. They also wanted to replace their historical systems which relied on simple folder structures on a shared drive, which they felt did not add much to the administrative or teaching and learning experience.

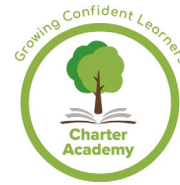
As the Castle Phoenix Trust has expanded, their aspirations are to improve consistency across the schools and use digital technologies to enhance creative learning across all subjects.

The Solution

The use of Firefly has increased student engagement in home learning; provided a virtual learning environment for students both in the classroom and at home; and given all staff a place to easily find resources, administrative forms, and bespoke CPD offerings.

As the "hub" for resources and links, Firefly has enabled creative solutions to a number of needs across departments and provides the schools with a consistency of approach. The "shared language" of Firefly means students and staff always know where to find what they need and this enables the trust to make the use of digital technology both meaningful and manageable.





Castle Phoenix Trust



There are six schools in the trust - 3 secondary and 3 primary. Five of the schools are in the Coventry area with one school in Warwickshire. The founding school was Caludon Castle Teaching School which had a history of specialising in 'leadership' which underpins all of their work. Their "Faculty-Centred Leadership" gives autonomy to faculty leaders to make decisions in their own teams, such as allocation of directed time.



The Case Study

We spoke to

Alex Handy, Lead for Digital Technology, who is also an economics teacher and supports creative teaching and learning, especially using digital technologies, across the trust

Victoria McManus, Deputy Headteacher at Caludon Castle School who is also responsible for overseeing the Faculty-Centred Leadership, teaches maths, and manages the timetable and cover across the school



Home Learning

The original roll out of Firefly began in Caludon Castle School 7 years ago and replaced a historic system which was a bolt on for SharePoint. The aim was to add something extra on top of the folder structure and it was felt that more could still be done to make something more engaging and easier to use. Initial aims for the use of Firefly were to improve engagement in home learning.

Alex: We wanted a way to deliver home learning and promote it and encourage students and parents to engage with it. We know some of the parents are very proactive with Home Learning, some did not want it at all, but the majority maybe didn't know how to support it, or didn't know what "good" looked like.

As the use of home learning through Firefly has developed at the schools, the faculty leadership team, overseen by Victoria, have created 7 home learning template pages. These help staff to easily and quickly create resources and also enables sharing across each school and across the trust, using the import/export feature.



Audio Feedback

One particular Firefly tool, which both Alex and Victoria are passionate about, is the audio recording ability which they use for feedback to students. This especially came into its own during remote learning periods.

Alex: We know feedback is vital and I believe verbal feedback is just better. Verbal feedback [after a self-marking quiz] can give more information, quicker, than detailed marking in many cases. It is also quicker.

Victoria: We used a lot of audio feedback in lockdown and it reduces workload significantly. What I can say in 30 seconds of audio would take much longer to write down for a student.



COVID and Remote Learning

Firefly being already well used in many ways through the trust, though not yet embedded in every school fully yet, prior to lockdowns in March 2020, made it easy for the schools to find a way forward quickly and using a system the students already knew.

Throughout remote learning periods, and now for those who need to self isolate, there was always work set for each lesson through Firefly in the form of tasks. Parents were provided with short training videos, provided by Alex, to ensure they knew what to do to log on, and videos were also used on Firefly as a method for keeping them up-to-date with changes.

Alex also noted that the students in their SEND unit, The Phoenix Suite, had accessed remote learning and in many cases saw 100% attendance. Some of those students, who may have felt particularly isolated, also tended to want to stay on for longer online to chat and they had to put systems in place around that. For some students the volume and quality of work increased in that digital environment.

Although they noted that disadvantaged students did suffer the most in terms of learning loss, Alex feels it was not as bad as it might have been had they not had Firefly in place for that remote teaching, learning and monitoring.

Students also had access to a special button on their dashboard when they were isolating at home. This "Safe@" button was always visible when they logged in and, if needed, students could click on the button, fill in a short form saying what they were feeling, and this was then emailed to the DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) and Deputy DSL. Although it is a shame it was needed (and it was used) this was a necessary lifeline for students who may have been having issues. In at least one case this was also used by a student to report a concern about one of their peers which was very powerful. Sitting this within Firefly also helps to give them a way to report something without it going through their home email accounts which may be traceable.



Teaching and Learning with Technology

Alex has aims for all staff using technology in lessons in meaningful, and manageable ways. The next steps he is working on, which fit in with the trust aim "Digital technology enhances and transforms learning", are to ask each teacher to enhance student learning through technology in at least one lesson per week. This is based on a simplified SAMR model and would look for ways in which technology is threaded through in meaningful ways which give a better outcome because the technology is there.

And as a more aspirational goal the trust would like to see one lesson a half term, which can be planned as a department or for a year group, using technology in a way which is somehow transformative. This may involve connecting to someone outside the schools or creating a real world link or project.

Cover Lessons

As students and staff are so used to working with Firefly now it is easy for staff to set cover lessons when they are away from school. There are template pages for these lessons to save a teacher time, which comes in especially handy for short notice cover which was not preplanned. Teachers simply assign the task and adapt it to their lesson, editing the boxes where needed. Noone needs to reinvent the wheel!

Setting cover in Firefly means the teacher who has arranged cover still gets immediate feedback and can see how students have performed during that lesson. Sometimes this might involve a quick self-marked quiz or it may be some longer exam type questions the teacher will mark in detail, but then they may use audio feedback to save time.



Consistency for the Trust through Technology



For any Multi Academy Trust, it can be difficult to find the right balance of giving autonomy to schools whilst also providing consistency in ways which helps with sharing best practice and making workload easier for teachers. Yet this consistency is often vital to allow the benefit of the shared resources of each of the schools across the group.

One of the biggest challenges after the earlier rollout of Firefly was that it was so easy to create pages that staff got really excited by it and were creating a “proliferation” of pages which quickly became overwhelming and it was hard to navigate amongst them.

One key change made was to form a consistent structure of the platform - for menus, resources and pages. These changes were key in moving the use of the platform forward and making sure the experience was the same for everyone - which in turn has helped engagement as everyone knows that Firefly is where they can go to find what they need, without searching for ages.

Alex: I feel very strongly we need to look after our staff body and admin is important in that. If we can upskill our staff and make them great at three things - planning, delivering and marking - and let them do those three things well, then that would be brilliant. But we know that in reality there are loads of things that go alongside those things. And if someone is spending time looking around for a form they need, or trying to find someone to get it, or having to find it in the 37th subfolder on the shared drive of the one person who uses that form most of the time...then that is time taken away from them planning or marking or delivering lessons. Having consistency across the trust and having all of our admin on Firefly cuts down on the time and workload of those tasks.

Support from Firefly

Having the support available from the Firefly team has been a big help for the trust in ensuring as smooth a rollout as possible. When each school gets on board Alex knows that things will work and there is always someone at the end of the phone if needed. If anything will take time to implement Alex says this is understandable and easy to deal with if there is honesty from a provider about how long this will take, and Firefly gives him this information.

The support package available to support schools to get started with Firefly, including focusing on their aims as a school or a trust for the pedagogical rollout, is something the Castle Phoenix Trust has relied on.

Continuing Professional Development

Castle Phoenix Trust has created a trust-level Firefly environment, separate to the school ones, where just the staff have access. Here is where they have created a learning hub to support staff, at any level, to progress in their personal development. There are currently 200-300 resources on this site. When a staff member wants to join a course they are given access to those resources. Staff then create a personal page portfolio which can then be submitted for assessment to the course leader.

The Trust usually also hosts a yearly conference on learning and teaching but, due to COVID restrictions, they needed to move this online. On Firefly they added all of the resources from leaders across all six schools. They successfully delivered the entire day remotely, a feat which would have been much harder without Firefly! Those resources are still stored on their trust-level Firefly site and these can be searched and filtered by keywords to ensure all staff can keep access to this bank of resources.

This CPD element has been pivotal in sharing best practice across the trust and is a creative and successful use of the Firefly platform.

Victoria: When you think about what was achieved that day, it is no mean feat!

A further TeachMeet, which was held in person, was also organised via Firefly and enabled staff to have their resources on hand ready for their talks, without worrying about sharing memory sticks or logging into the email from a different school.

Some resources are a one slide PowerPoint with a simple "top tip" on. This CPD portal enables dissemination of best practice by everyone in the trust and helps trust leaders to see consistency of approach across all schools. This will also keep making it easier to onboard any new schools added to the trust in future, as well as to train new teachers to the trust.



Administration

Pretty much every document needed in school is added to Firefly. Each school has their own admin section of Firefly, and the CPD portal will soon have all trust documents added too.

What may seem like the simplest of elements of Firefly, adding documents and links, is actually vitally important to each school, and the trust as a whole, as it eases many of the touchpoints in the days of students and staff, as well as providing a central place for parents to know they can find everything they need.

This extends into learning further where students may ask teachers for a specific lesson resource to be added to the platform for them to go back to and revise from. A simple addition, now that Firefly is embedded in daily use, but one which has a big impact for individuals.

Subject-Specific Successes

Visual & Expressive Arts were one of the first departments to get started using Firefly as they immediately saw the opportunity to add multimedia content - videos, PowerPoints, audio recordings - to give students access during lessons to a range of learning resources. They have continued with this and use it creatively to set tasks appropriate to their subject

In Geography the schools are creating virtual visits. Whether the whole class cannot go for some reason, or an individual cannot go, they can still access information useful for coursework. For example if studying rivers and going to visit one they may record a section and then refer back to that whilst back in class to remind the students of what they saw.



What are the biggest barriers to a tech rollout such as this?

Victoria: Change is always the biggest barrier for any teacher. If you are changing anything you are always asking for some element of their time to start with.

Collaboration has always been a key element of using Firefly at Caludon Castle and then for Castle Phoenix Trust which has helped them to make time to ensure teachers can benefit from learning the new technology. The changes to the structure and the templates used to help staff to get on board with minimal workload have been key to the success and will no doubt continue to keep this moving forward.

Alex is keen that everything is meaningful for students, but also manageable and realistic for both staff and students, and that seems to be a real driver for Firefly working well across the schools.

What is next?

Although there is strong use across the trust there are schools who have joined at different points which means there is still work to be done to get everyone to the same level. Alex aims to have every school to a level, in hopefully another year, from which they can move everyone to the same systems in the cloud and collaborate and share even more, to both provide impact for all students and reduce workload for staff.

With the primary schools, particularly, Alex is also keen to keep exploring how Firefly will look for them long term as they have joined later than the secondary schools. Work is ongoing and successes, such as the parent videos for home learning, are helping to form this.





Powering the Modern Learning Experience