

The Blandford School Eclipse Case Study

The Blandford School is a Specialist Technology College recently expanded as a result of local reorganisation to take 1250 students aged 11-18.

When I took up post here in 1998 Micro librarian was running on an old Acorn. It worked, albeit slowly, but the standalone OPACs could not be updated since they had been password-protected and no-one knew the password any more. It was soon clear that if and when the ageing hardware gave up there would be no-one around with the knowledge and skills to repair it. A move to a PC-based system was essential and urgent.

Eclipse2 had recently become available and seemed to offer what we needed; it compared favourably with other packages on cost, and the data transfer ought to be straightforward. I put in a bid for a new PC and Eclipse2 software. In September 2001 the new PC was ready and I installed Eclipse2 myself. At that time the school's IT support was provided by a teacher who had historically taken responsibility for the computers. As the use of IT expanded he was unable to keep up with the demands on his time and I felt I needed to be able to manage

the Library technology as independently as possible. However, despite following the clear instructions, I could not get the data conversion program to work. MLS Helpdesk put me in touch with John who, after patiently talking me through various strategies, decided my Acorn system was so ancient that he would have to rewrite the program for it. The customised disk arrived within two days and all the data transferred successfully without further delay.

The Library system was not connected to the school network or the internet, which meant that installing updates was fiddly, especially when a new IT Manager blocked the facility to download executable files and removed the floppy disk drives! We couldn't use SearchStar either. At the end of 2002 I purchased Laptop Librarian (Copycat) to install on a donated standalone PC in the Library so that students at least had access to a regularly updated catalogue. I also acquired StockCheck and LabelPrint, both of which speeded up procedures I had been carrying out by other means. I remained wary of having the Library Management System connected to the school network because of the vagaries of the server and the tight security restrictions. There were occasions when my computer was the only one in school that was working, and I did not want to depend on technicians for updates and imports.

In 2004 we received notice that the local middle schools were to be abolished and The Blandford School would be expanding and would work across a split site incorporating a nearby middle school building. It was decided there would be two libraries, absorbing the Key Stage 3 books from the middle schools, but they should form a single service open to all members of the school and with one LMS, which would therefore have to be networked. The other school already used Eclipse2 so I anticipated few problems. What I did not take into account was the enormous workload the merger created for the IT Manager and his team, and the school priorities which put office and classroom use first.



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The schools merged in September 2005 and we opened the second site in the November running an Eclipse package taken over from the other school, effectively as a separate library. In anticipation of a single catalogue we had renumbered all the books on that site so that there should be no duplicates. Eclipse allows this, but it was tedious to do it in bulk.

Problems soon became apparent. We couldn't run the borrower import program since students would be allocated different PIN numbers on different sites. Newly arriving students had to be enrolled separately after checking by telephone whether a PIN was free on both sites. There was no quick way of knowing whether a borrower had maximum or overdue loans, or if a title was in stock or on loan at the other site. Students insisted on returning books to the wrong site, where they could not be discharged at once, and then trying to borrow from the other library before we had had a chance to ferry them over

to be returned on the correct system. Even with care and frequent telephone communication, muddles occurred and my time was increasingly taken up with sorting them out.

Finally, in February 2007, the two libraries were put on the school network. Eclipse2 is installed on the PC at the upper school library and acts as the server for the lower school site. Should the network fail, there is still one library system able to function.

I had ensured that there were no duplicate book or PIN numbers, so merging the data should have been relatively straightforward; but because we needed to retain loan records and statistics I entrusted this to MLS. I was able to download the relevant files and email them one day, receiving the merged files back the next. For those 24 hours we kept paper records to enter manually once the whole system was up and running. We haven't looked back since. The technicians have given me sufficient privileges to download the updates directly from the website, and I retain administrative control of all MLS software. When they have time the next step will be to install SearchStar on the library computers to enable the students to search the catalogue for themselves.

I have certainly had great value from the helpdesk over the last two years. It is one of the great strengths of MLS.

- There is always a prompt response – friendly, helpful and patient.
- They give you direct access to software specialists, who also understand the needs of school librarians.
- If they say they'll ring back they do.
- They don't give up on a problem, persisting until it's solved
- They treat you as an individual.

Kathryn Tyson
LRC Manager

