

Paignton Community & Sports College Eclipse Case Study

“I am proud to be ‘Library Manager’ of two thriving resource centres.”

Paignton Community & Sports College is a mixed 11-18 Comprehensive School, based on a split site. We gained Sports College status in 2002 and currently have over 2100 students on roll. The Borough Road Centre accommodates Years 10, 11 and the Sixth Form. Waterleat Road Centre is the base for Years 7, 8 and 9.

The College set up its Sixth Form in September 1995, and has since gone from strength to strength. Bishop’s Place Centre, in the middle of Paignton, provides further specialist teaching facilities which are also used for the majority of our Community Education Programme. Subsequently the school has a library on both school sites. They are well supported by students, staff and governors and have become ‘the heart of the college’ both educationally and pastorally. They are staffed from 8am until 4pm (4.30pm at the Borough Road centre library). They represent an enormous investment financially by the LEA, and both supportively and financially by the Principal and our Governing body.

When I originally joined the College in 1997 Sims library software was used in the Lower School library. The Upper

School library was still using the brown ticket system, which was time-consuming and outdated. The whole feeling amongst library assistants, such as myself at the time was that we were on the brink of the 21st century, we owed the future generations that were our students, to keep abreast of the new technology that was invading us. The internet was well and truly with us, and was invaluable as a research tool. We had to drag our libraries into this new age, and so came the transition to Softlink ALICE in 1998, which meant both libraries became ‘live’.

Unfortunately, we couldn’t successfully operate Alice between both sites, which caused a huge headache when pupils moved from lower to upper school each September. We were unable to tell, without a lot of paperwork if they still owed books from previous years. There was a history of the system ‘crashing’ every few weeks. I also felt that maybe we never had the full support of the ICT technicians as ALICE proved to be very fragile within our college network for various reasons.

“However, I enlisted the support of the ICT manager and took him along to a presentation of MLS Eclipse last year. He whole-heartedly embraced the system, (which was surely a good sign), and agreed he would support me if I decided to change our software package to MLS Eclipse.”

There were several deciding factors for me at the time:

- Softlink were bordering on creating ALICE as an internet based software programme.
- Devon School Library Service felt they may be unable to guarantee me their full support if they did.
- There was the fact that I could use e-learning credits to purchase the Eclipse software package!

I also felt that MLS Eclipse would represent an extremely good automated library software system as it was robust and could solve many of the problems we were experiencing. The fact that we could use e-learning credits to purchase the software meant there were no financial requirements to overcome apart from the training, which could be written into my budget.

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“MLS Eclipse was introduced into the school in October 2004 and training took place on the same day.”

Our data had been converted by MLS to co-incide with the training day and the ICT manager made himself available in case of ‘problems’, and to take part in training. He wasn’t needed but it was good to know he was there. There was a slight hiccup splitting the catalogue and students between sites, but it was quickly sorted by a call to the MLS office.

I felt the training was scant and would have found it more useful spread over 2 days. In fairness there were five of us trying to cram around one pc, it was quite difficult switching mentally from operating ALICE and there is so much ECLIPSE offers it’s hard to digest in a short period. The following days were easy though as ECLIPSE is so hands-on and simple to use.

“The help desk proved to be worth its weight in gold with the support they provided. I can’t sing their praises highly enough.”

Since ECLIPSE has been installed and running at the college (10 months) it hasn’t crashed once – a huge relief. I’ve introduced two local community colleges to the system, have written an article for our SLS newsletter and have no hesitation in recommending it whenever I have the chance. I feel there are many features of the software that I still have to explore, and hope to have time to do so this year. On reflection I can only wish it had come to my attention sooner as it really has made a difference to my job.

SearchStar is on all pc’s in both libraries (20 in total) and it is planned to install it on all pc’s across the college from September. I hope to combine inductions with the English faculty by getting our students to use SearchStar in the classrooms, allowing them to view our catalogue and visit the web pages recommended, maybe reserve a book, visit the library to collect their books, read them and then write a review online in the classroom. Maybe a small prize might be offered as an initiative for the best review. The English department are keen to go down this route as it will involve using both the library and using ICT and of course the students will love searching the Internet.

“Stock Check with Pocket Librarian”

We ended the last weeks of the summer term performing a stock check using Pocket Librarian. It felt cumbersome at first (we had borrowed it through SLS who assured me there was a slimmer version available), but it became easy to use with hands-on experience. We completed the whole exercise in just over a week, finalised the check, and can now begin the new academic year confident in our catalogue and able to produce reports knowing that our figures are accurate.

I’m uncertain of what else MLS could do to improve their service or software. As far as software is concerned I think I still have a lot to investigate so feel unable to comment regarding improvements. I think the service they provide is superb, they’ll keep abreast of all trends and technology, and I feel sure they won’t rest on their laurels.



Cassie Ferrara
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