

Werneth Secondary School Eclipse Case Study

Werneth School is an 11-16 secondary school in Stockport, Cheshire.

The school has students across a wide range of abilities, and all have daily access to the school library. Years 7 and 8 have fortnightly library lessons, with other year groups and subjects booking lessons in advance via a bookings file. Around 66,900 pupils and staff visited the Library during the 2004-5 academic year.

Although I arrived at this school only 12 months ago, I chose Eclipse for my previous school, and, as an ex-pupil, and volunteer librarian over the years, have watched the library at Werneth develop. The reasons for buying Eclipse for both libraries were similar; quite frankly, it is the best on the market, and, in my opinion, has been for some time.

Why do I know this? Well, back in the 1980s, Werneth's Librarian bought the original Micro Librarian package for the then "new" BBC computers, and used it for 15 years or so. It was at the forefront of library management systems for many years. Although Micro Librarian was thought out

carefully in the 80s, I personally felt that some of the housekeeping tasks could have been slightly better designed. As Windows and better PCs were gradually introduced, other library management systems began appearing, which seemed user-friendlier. Between 1992 and the present, I have worked on many school, college and public library systems, including, Autolib, Galaxy, three versions of Talis, and Micro Librarian. I'd also briefly looked at Alice.

Although many of these systems are perfectly adequate to use for running a library, and I was happy using them, I just felt that there were more logical ways of doing things, and none of them immediately jumped out and said, "Pick Me!" Some of these systems I didn't feel had adequate technical help, and in one library, we lost our OPACs for over a year due to clashes with other programs on the server. Because I had used Micro Librarian for many years, and had heard about the new system, Eclipse, I decided to give them a call.

“As it was the first time I had spent such a large amount of money on a circulation system, I wanted to make sure that I made the right choice – after all, it would probably outlast me, and I didn't want to saddle future librarians with an unworkable piece of software! ”

Right from the very beginning, I knew that Eclipse would be my choice. The help line staff were patient, friendly and very helpful – even though I probably spent hours on the phone discussing the system with them. They even took the time to sit down and discuss peripherals, for example, the best PC to buy, printers, etc, and answered all of my "What if?" questions. Installing the system was so simple, too – a technician came out to school, transferred all the data, showed me the basics, explained how everything worked, talked to the IT people about networking, and left an easy to use manual. After navigating around the system for 30 minutes or so, I felt as though I'd been using it for years! Reminders, statistics, backup and general "Tidy up" housekeeping within the system make life so much easier, and general issuing and returning can be left with pupil librarians. It is really simple to use – even if you're computer phobic!



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The IDENTIKIT just adds to the fun. The pupils think that the technology is fantastic – and obviously as you use fingers and not cards, both the pupils, staff and I know it is impossible to issue items to the wrong person. Book losses by pupils has dropped, as I can now confidently assure parents that yes, their son/daughter DID borrow that book, and no one else could have taken it by mistake! The web cam is very useful. It acts as a double-check for those who don't quite want to put their 100% trust in Identikit. I just find it so handy to have the pupils' pictures – you get to know them faster that way.

The Library Catalogue: SearchStar is up and running on 13 Windows 98 PCs in the library at the minute, but will soon be available all around school on the XP network for the pupils to check book availability, write reviews, check their own records and see what stock we have. All pupils are taught how to use the catalogue, which enhances their independent learning. Pupils are all aware that they can see me if they don't understand anything, and I will help them as much as I can. The most common mistake they make is searching for the bar code number instead of the class number! We will also be adding the SearchStar and the Curriculum to our lessons from next year,

Discovery makes cataloguing so simple! If the book details are online, they appear “as if by magic” as soon as the ISBN of the item is read in! It does save quite a lot of time – although sometimes it seems TOO easy to add books on!

and use the research poster as a framework for them during their year eight “mysteries” project. The I.T department are extremely happy with the way that Eclipse runs on our network, and although we have had a few teething problems after buying a new library PC earlier this year, the helpdesk people could not do enough to help us solve the problems we were having.

In an ideal world, where funding was not an issue, I'd LOVE to have scanners attached to all of the OPACS – this would mean not having to allocate PINs and password numbers to the pupils in order for them to review books! I'd also have WebOPAC so that pupils could access the catalogue from home. I don't want to go down the self-issue route – more because of issues with our security system, and although Pocket Librarian would be a nice toy to have, I feel that it would be uneconomical. The only time I'd make use of it would be when out on book buys – once or twice a year!

“Would I recommend MLS to others? Certainly.”

Without a doubt. It's a shame the technology was not around years ago. It'd have certainly made librarian's lives much easier! I'm just sorry that it's not more widely used in the public libraries!

Nicola Heath
School Librarian, Werneth School

