

ICT and the Primary School Library

Computerised Library management systems

Many schools in Coventry are already using MLS Junior Librarian software and it is the only system that is recommended by Coventry Schools Library & Resource Service. The system will obviously automate all of the issuing and returning of books, provide a catalogue of resources and can be used to keep track of valuable resources throughout the school (not just the library¹). It will be seen as a valuable time saver for teachers or librarians, but has the potential to be so much more!

Use by children

Junior Librarian is designed with an interface specifically to be used by children. Simple, clear buttons that give audio and visual feedback makes it ideal for pupils of all ages and abilities. Every tool or icon will "speak" to the user confirming what he or she has selected, although the sound can also be switched off if desired. The software can also be customised to accommodate differing needs. For example both the size of print and background colour can be adjusted to improve visual clarity. The time that information is on display to the user can also be changed, giving longer on display if necessary.

This allows children to practice their ICT skills in a real life context. Issuing and returning resources, writing book reviews and searching for resources and information becomes a completely independent and enjoyable experience and this has a positive impact upon use of the library. Even the most reluctant of boys is attracted by use of the barcode reader and even more so where the optional fingerprint scanner is used in place of borrower barcodes.

Curriculum support

Using the Enquiry function to search the database, children learn effective use of keywords and Boolean searches to enable them to find the resources to support any curriculum topic and to develop their information literacy skills

This learning opportunity is further enhanced by Readit- a cross-curricular information skills programme designed to work alongside Junior Librarian. Readit encourages children to become proficient at searching for, and handling information, as they integrate ICT into library time. Children are asked to work together and develop their speaking and listening skills as they search for and use information on a variety of curriculum topics.

Readit is available in 3 sets: Foundation/KS1, Yr 3 / 4 and Yr 5/6. One set is included in the package and the others can be purchased. All sets are now also available digitally for a cost effective annual subscription²

¹ When adding a resource to the database, other locations can be added to a drop down menu in the location box)

² **The Complete Readit Package (including all 3 sets)**@ £150 for the first year. £99 p.a. for ongoing subscribers.

The Review function can be used to enhance the English curriculum. Pupils can create their own reviews of the resources they have borrowed. The simple step-by-step questions guide pupils through creating the reviews and can easily be customised to suit your specific needs. Junior Librarian also includes a 'read aloud' feature to help encourage special needs pupils or those with learning difficulties. When activated this feature allows Junior Librarian to read the review back to your pupils.

Once the reviews have been approved they will be available for other pupils to read in the Enquiry module. Peer to peer recommendations are the most effective means of promoting reading. Judicious use of staff reviews of books can also stimulate use! With the addition of the optional Discovery module there is even more stimulation to encourage readers. At the click of a button your pupils can gain access to fabulous full colour book images, helpful book summaries, and Meet The Author interviews, video clips and fascinating biographies.

The software can be used as a resource for teaching the QCA ICT Schemes of Work that incorporate databases as a central theme:

Units 3C: Introduction to databases

5B: Analysing data and asking questions- using complex searches

5C: Evaluating information, checking accuracy and questioning plausibility

6D: Using the Internet to search large databases and to interpret information

The library database can also be used as a resource to support numeracy. Work could be done with older pupils on data handling, estimation and averages such as a topic on the most popular authors in school, or a bar chart with average number of loans per class or a pie chart depicting different Dewey categories.

Use of the Internet

In the introduction to the QCA Unit 6D it says: "It is important that teachers search the Internet first for suitable sites. Without this, children can spend many hours in fruitless searching, without any reward" Effective use of Junior Librarian can ensure an end to fruitless searching!

Few schools at the moment make use of the Website database in Junior Librarian. Individual websites recommended by staff can be added very simply and keyworded in the same way as printed resources. Thus a pupil using Enquiry to search for topics on Space, for example, would have results that included websites as well as books in the library. The website entry includes a simple Go button that instantly loads the website³ in a new window without the need to use a browser.

³ If the library computer is connected to the Internet

MLS has a catalogue of safe websites to get your database started, which can be freely downloaded from the User area of their own website⁴ In addition they have a new Weblinks service offered in conjunction with Carel press which is available on an annual subscription.⁵ This can be purchased with e-learning credits. This downloads thousands of educational websites, which are checked and verified weekly, directly into your catalogue. Each site is annotated and keyworded and all sites are chosen for their educational relevance.

The Junior Librarian also has a sophisticated Links function, which enables you to build links between printed resources and between resources and websites. Any one search will then also suggest linked items you might wish to try. This will enhance the search capability of pupils and teachers and ensure cross- curricular resources are fully utilised.

Support for Assessment, Self- Evaluation and Pupil tracking

Logging into the system as a "higher- level" user can be allowed for all appropriate staff. Data is secure since this is password protected or the fingerprint scanner can be used. Staff can then access lots of ready-made reports, including statistics for Ofsted, which can be searched and printed. These include current loans, past loans, overdue books, reminder slips for individuals or classes, children who have borrowed, most/least books, titles that are most/least popular etc. Data can be sorted and split by gender, age, tutor group etc. This enables very interesting comparisons to be made. An individual pupil's reading record can be tracked and analysed throughout his or her school career.

Network or Stand-alone?

To make full use of all the options mentioned above it is worth installing the software across a school-wide network. Books can still only be issued and returned on the library computer, but children will be able to search for books, reserve books, check which books they have on loan and write book reviews and add to the system from classrooms or the ICT suite or wherever they have access to the computer.

If the website database is fully utilised and particularly if the Weblinks service has been purchased, it makes even more sense to have this accessible across the school network. The Junior Librarian pupil interface could become the preferred search option rather than, for example, using Google. This encourages children, and staff, to consider all sources of information, both printed and electronic and ensures a more positive and safe result from Internet searches.

⁴ www.microlib.co.uk

⁵ Currently £50+ VAT p.a.

Training and support available

MLS have an annual Helpdesk Subscription for technical support. The Advantage Helpdesk subscription⁶ is worth considering since this also gives schools the Discovery Module mentioned above and a discount on the Weblinks service.

Coventry Schools Library & Resource service offer a cost effective Primary Computerisation package to enable you to quickly get up and running with your library management system. This includes 3 hours of staff training.

In addition we offer occasional, centrally based, Advanced MLS training courses to enable staff to get to grips with all the features of the software. We can also provide in- school INSET for all staff on using the system to support teaching and learning. This is often combined with a session on integrating Information Literacy Skills into the curriculum.

If purchasing Junior Librarian software for the first time, a discounted price is available through SLS⁷. It is also worth remembering that e-learning credits can be used to purchase this software.

For further information on any of the above please contact:

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⁶ Currently this costs an additional £95 per annum

⁷ Currently £1100 (full price £1350)