



A Microsoft IT Academy Case Study



Customer: St. Mary's College
Website: www.stmarysderry.com
Number of students: 900
Country or Region: Ireland
Industry: Education

Customer Profile

Opened in 1959, St. Mary's is an all girls' school for pupils of 11-18 years. Found in the heart of the Creggan area of Derry, the College has a staff of 90 and over 900 students.

Situation

St Mary's College recognised the importance of IT in Education and the need to find a training programme that would help their student's development, the school's development and further its technical credentials.

Solution

When the school was introduced to Prodigy, an I.T. Learning Solution Provider who manages the Microsoft IT Academy Programme in Ireland, it opened the door to working more closely with Microsoft and building on the school's IT knowledge base. The IT Academy has provided a valuable training environment for St Mary's, fostering closer links with Microsoft and its products.

Benefits

- Access to globally recognised Qualifications
- Microsoft Software donation for up to 50 computers
- IT Training For Students of all abilities
- Free eLearning
- Free entry in the Be The World Champ competition (www.betheworldchamp.com)
- Discounts on Exams
- Discounted Textbooks
- Free Teacher Training

For more information on becoming a Microsoft IT Academy please visit www.prodigy.ie or call +353-1-2360424.



Digital literacy encouraged among sixth year pupils.

“The feedback on the Microsoft Qualifications has been very positive. There is a real sense of personal achievement as well as academic achievement. The Microsoft IT Academy caters for everybody, from the novice to the more IT literate,” *Paul Wade, ICT Manager, St Mary's College, Derry.*

Situation

As part of the Specialist Schools pilot scheme in Northern Ireland, St Mary's chose science as its speciality in an initiative that provides opportunities for pupils to benefit from wider learning experiences. A grant and additional funding are made available to ensure maximum impact of the available expertise and resources, helping Specialist Schools build on their particular curricular strengths and assume a broader dimension by collaborating with other educational institutions, local businesses and people in the community.

St Mary's identified IT as an important strand in its science agenda and appointed Paul Wade as ICT Manager to oversee the technical infrastructure that was seen as important to success. To integrate with Northern Ireland's C2K project, which delivers infrastructure and content to schools in the region as a managed service, St Mary's runs a Windows environment built on the Microsoft platform.

It was at an event held in Microsoft's Schools Technology Innovation Centre (STIC) in Belfast that St Mary's was first introduced to Prodigy, an I.T. Learning Solution Provider who manages the Microsoft IT Academy Programme in Ireland, this opened the door to working more closely with Microsoft and building on the school's IT knowledge base.



Why join the Microsoft IT Academy Programme?

The principal and management of St Mary's took the decision to join the Microsoft IT Academy Programme and participate in Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS), a training programme that would help the school's development and further its technical credentials. With modules around key Microsoft applications - Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint and Access - the courses provide high levels of digital literacy with a globally recognised certificate at the end. The more general Digital Literacy qualification was also introduced.

The decision was made to target MOS at sixth year pupils, providing them with valuable IT knowledge that would serve them well in further education and the world of work. Every year Students take the Core MOS modules, concentrating on Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

The school has two trained instructors who teach four sessions a week with an interactive whiteboard and connected PC, but there is ample opportunity for pupils to get 'hands-on' through practical exercises that are part of each course. To correspond with the iterations of Office running in the school, it currently teaches the MOS 2003 programme.

The school has six IT suites, two of which have been specifically kitted out for the Microsoft IT Academy. The desktop PCs have been configured to run the Certiport exam software that students complete at the end of each module. Successful candidates receive a Microsoft Office Specialist certification, a globally recognised accreditation that validates skills and improves career prospects.

The IT suites are open outside of school hours when homework clubs, including a Saturday morning session, offer further opportunities for pupils to come in and work at MOS on their own.

There is one Digital Literacy lesson a week, and, as part of its Extended Schools remit, it runs evening classes in the course for the wider community as well as school staff. "We get people coming in with a very basic level of IT," said Paul Wade, "so it's important that they don't feel there is any pressure on them. If they sit the exam and don't pass they have the option of a retake which they can take when they feel better prepared"

Exams take the form of an online test based around a task-driven approach that typically lasts around 45-50 minutes. Prodigy provides a special voucher that includes a password for each pupil to access the exam.

"We have a broad spectrum of ability, even in our sixth form, but the IT Academy caters for everybody, from the novice to the more IT literate,"

Paul Wade, ICT Manager, St Mary's College, Derry.

Benefits

The IT Academy has provided a valuable training environment for St Mary's, fostering closer links with Microsoft and its products. They also reinforce St Mary's credentials as it delivers on expectations to be a Specialist School in science.

Pupils inevitably come to the training programmes with mixed abilities, but this has not been a problem according to Wade.

So far, all the pupils who have taken the MOS exam have passed and attended a graduation ceremony laid on by the school in conjunction with Prodigy. "The feedback has been very positive," said Wade.

"There is a real sense of personal achievement as well as academic achievement."

Such a high success rate can be attributed to the way that MOS constantly measures the progress of individuals. A brief tutorial is given prior to each exam to ensure candidates are comfortable with the process.

Wade also praised the supporting role that Prodigy plays across all the IT Academy programmes: "As well as providing the tests they are always there to answer queries on the courses. They have been a fantastic help."

Going forward, St Mary's will be looking at the possibility of making MOS available to fourth and fifth year pupils. And in the future run the new Microsoft Business Certifications for Office 2007.