
Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 19 October 2009
Subject: Use of Harnessing Technology funding to support transition to web based MIS in schools – additional information
Report of: Acting Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: To agree the use of Harnessing Technology funding to support transition to web MIS.

Contact Officer: Cathy Piotrowski, ICT/MIS, Learning & Support

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

Reason for urgency
(if appropriate)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To approve the recommendation that Harnessing Technology funding is used to support schools in the transition to a web based Management Information System (MIS).**

Additional information requested by the Schools Forum at their meeting on 28 September 2009.

Why web MIS for schools?

1. A number of advantages can be gained for both the schools and the local authority:
 - One pupil record containing all the required data in one place.
 - Improved consistency, uniformity and quality of data.
 - Data backups and upgrades are performed by the MIS supplier and not by the school.
 - No hardware required.
 - Remove the need for stand-alone systems such as Aspire to continue.

- More effective support as the problem can be accessed at the same time as the user.
- Improved reporting and access to schools' data by the Local Authority (LA).
- Better platform for integrating data with the learning platform for reporting to pupils and parents (similarly for looking at potential integration with the LA's central database).

Funding and costs

2. It is envisaged that an approximate cost of implementing a web MIS for Lower and Nursery schools will be in the region of £155K. This will be funded from the centrally retained Harnessing Technology (HT) Grant which has come about from savings accrued through aggregated purchasing since April 2009.
3. How the HT funding will be used (estimates):
 - Licences covering full suite of modules - £41K (one-off costs).
 - Data migration from existing MIS to web MIS - £20K (one-off costs).
 - 12 months hosting by the MIS supplier - £49K (this will include security of data).
 - First year annual support and maintenance - £45K.
4. From the second year, annual support costs will transfer to the schools (as is currently the case). An approximation of charges will be in the region of £1,095 per lower school – this will include support on the pupil admin, attendance, behaviour and school census modules.

(Upper/Middle schools will need to use additional modules such as Exams & Timetabling and therefore approximate charges are unknown at the present time.)

(Current costs for Sims.net schools are as follows: £1,000 Lowers/£1,500 Middles per annum. Integris schools pay £755 for pupil admin, attendance and school census modules.)
5. The MIS strategy proposes that a centrally provide LA support team continues and that the income generated from annual support charges is used to fund helpdesk resources. There will be a need however to review the provision when the Assessment module becomes operational.
6. Note: A special local support arrangement had existed for Sims schools up until 2004-05 after which Sims schools support was transferred to a national helpdesk. The LA had approached Capita in April 2007 requesting agreement for the LA to set up a local support team for Sims schools. This request was rejected on the basis that Capita felt it was not in the schools' nor Capita's best interests.

Consultation feedback

7. Feedback from discussions with schools can be grouped into four main strands:

1. **Connectivity:** Web MIS will need robust and resilient connectivity. Many schools have experienced poor connectivity in terms of slow speeds and resilience with the current infrastructure built around schools reliant upon other schools securing a link to the internet.

This issue is being resolved this term with a thorough renewal of the network. Each school will have increased bandwidth and be routed through their own unique connection to an upgraded core exchange network. This work is due to be completed by the end of December 2009. The improved network infrastructure will support increased internet traffic as a result of increasing learning platform and web MIS use.

2. **Who is paying?** There are a number of advantages for schools and the local authority in adopting web MIS for schools. Schools would not necessarily have budgeted for this change. There needs to be some incentive for schools to consider changing to a web MIS.

3. **Require Central Support:** The need to move to a web MIS is generally acknowledged by schools as they understand and welcome the need to rationalise the various systems so that all data relating to the pupil is held in one place as the single data source. However, there is anxiety about the risk involved in a transition to another system after years of investment made to maintain their existing MIS and when the MIS is such a critical tool in day to day management information requirements and in producing the statutory termly census returns.

Schools would expect the LA to establish a support team to manage the transition and provide a software development lead and helpdesk support.

4. **Tried and tested web MIS alternative:** it is essential that any web MIS being considered would need to have been tried and tested (for reasons explained above). They would also need to have the full range of functionality that schools currently rely on.

There are only three true web based MI systems currently on the market. Of these, one has developed an MIS for both primary and secondary; one has recently established a primary version and their secondary version is currently being piloted; and the third is not well known but established in a few primary and secondary schools.

Online Reporting requirements

8. This requirement falls within the government's drive to improve parental engagement. The complete data set that needs to be reported covers attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress, and special educational needs where appropriate.

There is no prescribed methodology and schools are encouraged to consider using a number of different approaches – for example, text messaging can be used to communicate brief attendance information, emails can be used for general information to parents etc. A number of schools have already established these practices.

9. Secondary schools are expected to have something in place by the end of December 2010 and Primary schools by the end of 2012. This requirement does not necessarily mean that the complete data set is reported online considering that MIS and learning platform software cannot all provide this functionality at the present time.
10. The MIS strategy proposes a longer term objective that online reporting is achieved through the learning platform and that data integration between the web MIS and the learning platform and that the parental engagement work is supported and led by the local authority on behalf of all the schools. This recommendation follows Becta's general principles for data integration and online reporting.
11. It should be noted that online reporting of the prescribed data via the learning platform is not yet available as a 'ready-made' solution as interoperability between these systems does not yet exist. However, there is a national drive for interoperability (in both MIS and learning platforms) to become a standard requirement through the work of the Systems Interoperability Framework Association (SIFA) who are closely working with all MIS and learning platform suppliers in agreeing data transfer standards.
12. There is time for the online reporting requirements to be achieved via the learning platform by the deadline of December 2012 for Primaries. Secondary schools however, will need to consider the many online reporting 'solutions' currently available on the market that would 'link' in with their existing MIS. A number of Secondary schools have already purchased or are currently researching the most appropriate and affordable option suited to their needs and existing MIS.