

# WMnet Update

News from the West Midlands Regional Broadband Consortium

Issue 4: Winter 2003-4



[www.wmnet.org.uk](http://www.wmnet.org.uk)

## 1,000 schools now connected

Over 1,000 schools in the West Midlands now have broadband connections at a minimum bandwidth of 2Mbps. Many have greater bandwidths. This is 40% of schools and it is expected that by the summer of 2004 over half of West Midlands Schools will have broadband. This is a very creditable record for the 14 West Midlands' LEAs and is one of the most rapid regional rates of connection of the country.

## West Midlands Regional Network goes live

The new regional backbone network is live and functioning. It connects the MidMAN group of the seven West Midlands universities to the national SuperJANET network. The first LEA has already been connected to the network and the remainder should all be connected by early 2004. Schools in the West Midlands will then be linked to the other regions in a high bandwidth national education network that bypasses the internet and provides guaranteed levels of performance and service, including video-conferencing. The backbone connection is provided by the West Midlands Networking Company, sponsored by Advantage West Midlands.

## ITN Pathé News Archive

The ten Regional Broadband Consortia have purchased schools' rights to high resolution versions of the entire ITN / Pathé newsreel archive. It is intended that the schools' archive (all 7.5 terabytes of it!) will be hosted on the West Midlands Regional Network at the technology information centre at Millennium Point. This resource will provide teachers with 90,000 video clips and 12 million still images that can be adapted to lesson plans and presentations. Schools and local authorities will need to prepare themselves for the use of this resource, because rich as the material is, its use in teaching will require planning. More at [www.britishpathe.com](http://www.britishpathe.com)

## The WMnet Portal

Work is in hand in partnership with Netmedia to upgrade the WMnet portal to serve as the hub of the region's broadband activity. To be launched at BETT 2004, the new portal will provide easier access to resources and in addition enable special interest groups and people working on collaborative projects to work together across the region, through a new community builder feature. See [www.wmnet.org.uk](http://www.wmnet.org.uk).

## Birmingham Lives

The 70,000 plus items in the Carl Chinn personal archive are now being brought together in a collection that anyone, anywhere in the world, can access. Working with the Birmingham Grid for Learning, Birmingham Lives has been created to provide a searchable database of the many items donated to Carl as a result of his popular daily local radio programme. A full time archivist is now employed to sort and digitise this important collection that will inevitably continue

to grow. A useful feature of the website is a 'shopping basket' into which resources can be deposited by the user; these can then be viewed as a collection or shared with others, for example setting questions asking pupils to interpret the theme of the teacher's collection. Pupils can be asked to make a collection that reinforces or proves a particular learning objective. Complete shopping baskets can also be assembled as a theme or a teaching resource for others use. Why not try shopping in the past at [www.bgfl.org/birminghamlives/](http://www.bgfl.org/birminghamlives/)?

*Birmingham Lives: the Carl Chinn archives on line*

## School Website Directory

The biggest school website directory in England has been re-launched and provides a free platform for schools to promote themselves. More than 5,300 school website addresses are now entered in the directory on the National Grid for Learning portal. Schools are invited to ensure their own website details are up to date in return for a free advice booklet with suggestions on how to improve their websites further. Schools can also submit a short piece of text about themselves to accompany their entry in the directory. The listings information is taken directly from the Department for Education and Skills' database. In addition there is also a link to the school's latest Ofsted report. Uniquely, the directory also identifies schools that have been awarded the NAACEMark. The NAACEMark, developed by NAACE in association with Becta, is a quality standard which recognises a school's success in developing and implementing a strategic approach to ICT. See [www.ngfl.gov.uk/schoolsites](http://www.ngfl.gov.uk/schoolsites).

## Family Learning

Lickhill First School in Worcestershire has 130 four to nine year olds. It has a history of developing family learning through a series of activities and initiatives over many years. The school has also been involved in 'laptops for beginners'

courses, which a local college runs over a 12 week period, for parents, community and school workers.

All staff have a laptop and use internet at home. There are currently two computers in every classroom at least, one with a 17" screen, a CD drive and rewriter software. The school has no ICT suite, but it does have a trolley of laptops which can be moved into a classroom. A network was put in 18 months ago, and the school bought a portable projector and mobile Smart Board. In 2002, the school purchased a touch sensitive screen for use in Year 2, and mouse pen boards for use in Years 3 and 4. Since September 2002 all teachers have used interactive whiteboards. It is recognised that these offer visual, auditory, and also kinaesthetic stimuli for pupils (the touch sensitive screen gives feedback, for example). A teacher was appointed for two terms to release other teachers for a half day a week in order to provide time for teachers to look at Curriculum Online resources.

For internet access, the school has broadband at 512 kbps. According to senior staff, use of the online curriculum is now considered to be "bread and butter", and broadband "has made online planning and access possible." Interactive whiteboard access is available for parents and governors to use. There is an interactive whiteboard in the training and parent room.

Future plans include working with GridClub, offering passwords to parents, and links to project and holiday work, parental access to ContentStream and support to parents supporting out of school work.

Why is broadband needed?

- For speed of access and reliability
- To access high quality resources including auditory materials, moving imagery and animations
- To offer access at home as well as at school to such resources for pupils, teachers, and parents.

*Extract from the WMnet evaluation report:  
www.wmnet.org.uk/rbc\_res\_uploaded/WMnet\_evaluation.pdf.*

### **Multipoint Videoconferencing**

For two weeks in October 2003, schools from inside and outside Birmingham took part in the biggest dance class in the world, looked in on the Carlton television newsroom and observed the lynx and otters at the Birmingham Nature Centre – all thanks to video-conferencing. There was also the launch of an online poetry competition and soap opera which was scripted and acted by pupils from Birmingham schools, and videoconferences on maths and science. The response was overwhelming with most events fully booked. There are plans for another vc2w next year when the creativity and technology of the teachers and students in our schools will be tested with even more challenges.

### **Zap!**

Zap, a new site for young people 8-14, was launched at BITES at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham in November 2003. The result of a collaborative project between eight countries and funded by the European Commission, Zap is divided into two age groups, each full of educational and fun activities and resources for young people in and out of school. In Zap is a safe community area enabling children across Europe to share news and opinions in a range of languages. Messages are moderated and the school-based registration

process ensures that participants are safe. See <http://zap.eun.org>.



*Zap's attractive portal for younger children*

### **From Word to Hollywood**

*From Gareth Morgan, ICT Co-ordinator, Dawley Brook Primary School, Dudley*

The story begins at Easter when Kar2ouche appeared at school. At first my class of 7-8 year olds starting using the supplied package: Romans. With great graphics, nice sound effects and suitable prepared text, it certainly improved our knowledge about life in Roman towns and amphitheatre games. But then we started with Kar2ouche Composer and things really started to happen. We added a background, introduced a character, added a sound track and moved to the next frame. As the frames built up, characters moved, speech bubbles included, and the movie show was ready to present. Kar2ouche was just like a tape recorder: prepare, press record and play.

With the ability to add our own digital pictures to the background, we could use Kar2ouche Composer with anything. We tried describing our local place of worship, then our trip to Ironbridge and finally a wander around the Wyre Forest. It communicates with text, graphics and basic animation – way beyond a word processor or presentation tool! As for easy working, the built in examples and thorough manuals with Compose or the Romans Unit made it quick to understand and use in the classroom.

After this trial period I certainly see Kar2ouche being used in Literacy, great for working with dialogue. Starting French, an optional pack, would work well in any upper Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 learning environment. Another package about Ancient Egyptians would make it a good investment for ICT in history. The possibilities are endless.

### **What is WMnet?**

WMnet co-ordinates the provision of a broadband regional network for learning for 2,500 schools and other centres of learning, enabling access to high quality learning opportunities, content, services and innovative school management and professional development. WMnet comprises all 14 Local Education Authorities in the West Midlands working in partnership with Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency.  
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