

# Porchester Junior School

Carlton, Nottingham



## Case Study: Digital Learning with Planet Sherston



Inspired Learning

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# Digital Learning with Planet Sherston

With the recent announcements regarding the changes to the National Curriculum, and in particular the change from ICT to computing the panic in teachers eyes is beginning to rise. The new computing document is enough to make even the most adventurous teacher run for the darkest corner and hide from the terminology within it as it makes computing seem like an alien concept.

However, this is as far from the truth as it could possibly be because in many cases schools are covering most of the computing curriculum already without realising it. And if a school is already covering lots of the new requirements, then the need for investment in lots of new and expensive software and resources is not actually needed. In particular, if a school has a subscription to Planet Sherston, there are lots of resources within this that will help to cover some of those computing requirements.

At Porchester Junior School we use the resources within Planet Sherston to help with our new 'Digital Learning' curriculum that encompasses computing, Digital Knowledge, Key Skills and cross curricular use of ICT.

We achieve this as our Digital Learning coordinator has come out of the classroom and is covering staff during their PPA time. This allows each class to have dedicated 'Digital Learning' lessons each week.

This approach is not a new idea for the school. For many years, the Digital Learning coordinator would take each class once a week and develop a rounded "Digital Knowledge" that incorporated eSafety knowledge, digital creativity, Digital Literacy, as well as key ICT skills that were taken back and used within the classroom with their class teacher. It worked well for the school; staff liked it, and pupils Digital knowledge developed quickly.

With this approach working, the school decided to make the change from 'ICT' to 'computing' whilst keeping the "specialist teacher" approach. We looked at the school plans, looked at the new curriculum, and settled on a hybrid solution that incorporated the best of both. Both the Digital Learning coordinator and HeadTeacher felt that teaching computing most of the time would be detrimental to the development of pupils digital skills rather than develop them. Some of our pupils would not be able to access a computing heavy curriculum, whilst some of our pupils would not be interested in a computing heavy curriculum, and so instead we settled on the following scheme.

Within each 2 year cycle pupils will spend half the time learning computing in a variety of ways, using a variety of software, and in the remaining time we will teach a range of topics based on the

'Digital Knowledge'. Class teachers would continue to develop cross-curricular use of ICT within their classrooms.

We looked through Planet Sherston at the resources they were already offering the school and found that we could cover a lot of the computing aspects of the lower school (Yr3/4) curriculum through a variety of the resources on offer.

Within their "Crystal" section of Planet Sherston there are a range of programs, resources and features that fit well into the new computing curriculum.

The classic title "The Crystal Rain Forest" offers a fun and friendly introduction to programming using the Logo language. Thinking logically, learning the order of instructions to complete a task, and building and combining routines are all explained through a series of entertaining challenges that need to be solved. Oh, and once the program has been completed, 'Crystal Logo' is included as a standalone title to stretch pupils further and allow them to explore and experiment further with Logo.

Moving into the control area of computing, both 'Mission Control, V2' and 'Gomez Returns' introduce the concept of controlling computers with a range of various commands in a safe, simulated, situation. This approach also means that schools do not need to spend huge amounts of money on physical control devices that could possibly sit gathering dust in the corner of the room because no-one has had the time to sit and learn how to use them (of course, physical systems are a logical step up from the simulated approach, but only when the time is right and the pupils are ready for this)

These titles have always seemed to be aimed at the KS2 age range, but Planet Sherston also provide access to 'Flobot' - a lovely, friendly, and fun introduction to control and problem solving for younger children.

Of course this is just a small amount of what you receive with Planet Sherston. There are a whole host of additional programs included within your subscription in the 'Crystal' area that we have set out for the 'Digital Knowledge' side of our plans. To introduce the concept of spreadsheets to our pupils we use 'The Wizards Apprentice'. Like with 'The Crystal Rain Forest', there are series of challenges that introduce key spreadsheet concepts to the pupils in a fun and friendly way. By the end of the challenges, pupils have developed quite a sophisticated knowledge of spreadsheets and understand the basics of cells, columns, rows and even formulas.

As Planet Sherston is an online resource with 24/7 access to additional tutorials, explanations, downloads and resources that explain the Internet, email, databases and branching databases, graphs and charts our pupils can view these in their own time at home to further improve their Digital Knowledge.

So before you go spending money on new software, new schemes and new ideas, take a good look through what you already have access to. You may just be surprised what you find...