

north of Birmingham. The performance had to be an original piece of work and not longer than five minutes in length. After each performance the Rock Idol panel commented on each performance. Timings were critical and for the performance itself, there was no place for technical gremlins, roadies trailing miles of cable between amplifiers, tuning temperamental guitars, or artistes having tantrums or bouts of nerves – after all, the next group were waiting in the virtual wings ready to rock.

As well as being streamed onto the internet, the event was streamed live to a large screen erected in Chamberlain Square in the heart of Birmingham. Pupils watching the bands live or over the internet were encouraged to post comments, send a mobile phone text, or vote. Nearly 200,000 votes were recorded in the space of a few hours.

The competition rewards pupils who are passionate about a genre of music that is not the main focus of formal music education. It not only provides a public platform for these pupils, but also lends legitimacy to their intense interest in all aspects of this kind of music making and performance. "Events like Rock Idol enable music teachers to focus on the kind of music that our pupils are interested in and by tapping into their interests it enables us to open up other musical avenues for them," said Ellie Hollindale, Head of Music for the winning band from the Lord Williams's School in Thame.

The facility for pupils to post comments on the internet about each bands performance was a particularly powerful feature of Rock Idol 2005. Pupils in school do not often receive glowing (and just) praise from their peers, and often their peers cannot be bothered to put their unstinting praise into print. Through the medium of the comment facility, this situation is rectified and the rock bands are able to reap the benefits of reading and responding to the comments made by a much wider contemporary audience.

On this occasion, Rock Idol not only showcased some outstanding musical talent and performances, but also inspired large numbers of pupils to participate in a communal, geographically diverse event that video conferencing made possible without large numbers of pupils, carrying vast quantities of equipment long distances.

Winning schools and posted comments can be viewed at [www.bgfl.org/rockidol](http://www.bgfl.org/rockidol).

## 6,000 free music tracks

Audio Network is a library with tracks of just about every type of music you can imagine: from choral to hip-hop; from chamber to house; from rock'n'roll to drum 'n bass. There's some howlin' dog blues and some skanking reggae to "Lively up Yourself". There's wonderful percussion tracks drawing on Evelyn Glennie's huge collection of instruments from around the world. There's Indian sitar and tabla to levitate your soul or you can mash your brain to the 4/4 tyranny that is 'Dance'. There's even silent film piano music – just the thing for some of Pathe's earlier films – and a library of sound effects for digital movie makers. And it's all free to schools connected to the National Education Network at [www.audio.lgfl.org.uk](http://www.audio.lgfl.org.uk).

## Artisancam – creativity online

A wonderful resource on ceramics and other crafts is provided for the National Education Network by CLEO (Cumbria and Lancashire RBC). As well as videos of the artist in the workshop explaining and demonstrating techniques, it includes an online demonstration of making coil pots and a Flash activity to simulate the painting of ceramics. See it at [www.artisancamnorth.org.uk](http://www.artisancamnorth.org.uk).

## Accrediting internet services

It is the policy of the Department for Education and Skills that all schools should have available to them a Becta accredited service i.e. one which has been through a Becta testing service and has been accredited according to the quality of its content filtering and a range of other service quality criteria. Implicitly, schools will be expected to have taken up such a service.

By buying into an accredited ISP service from the local authority or managed service provider, schools are able to demonstrate they have taken appropriate steps to reduce the risk of exposing users to unsuitable online content. They do not however guarantee that there will be no access to offensive content through their networks due to the huge and transient nature of the Internet.

WMnet is a consortium of the 14 Local Education Authorities in the West Midlands established to co-ordinate the provision of a broadband network and support innovation in teaching and learning in 2,500 schools and other centres of learning in the West Midlands. To receive regular news and updates register at [www.wmnet.org.uk](http://www.wmnet.org.uk).

# WMnet Update

News from the West Midlands Regional Broadband Consortium  
Issue 9: November 2005



## Climate Change ...

WMnet's key activity in 2005-6 is to enable schools to tackle issues related to climate change through innovative resources, activities and events for a range of subjects and ages using the National Education Network. Information about all aspects of the WMnet climate change programme is at <http://climatechange.wmnet.org.uk>.

### ... Pledge your school

The Climate Change Pledge helps schools commit to raise awareness of the issues and begin to take action to reduce the effects of climate change. Developed by WMnet and the Bishops Wood Centre, Worcestershire the Pledge has three levels. Schools receive a certificate to acknowledge their achievement at each level. The Climate Change Pledge for Schools will be launched by Bill Giles, ex BBC weatherman, at BETT on 12th January 2006.

### ... Ask an expert

Five Ask the Expert sessions, of particular interest to geography students in Key Stages 4 and 5, take place in the Spring Term. Each half hour session will be webcast and students can watch it live or view the recording when convenient:

- January 25<sup>th</sup>: Weather and Climate Change, Bill Giles OBE
- February 8<sup>th</sup>: Implications for food production and the countryside, Dr Peter Kettlewell and Dr Paul Beckwith, Harper Adams University College
- March 1<sup>st</sup>: The role of oceans in our changing climate, Prof. Harry Bryden, Southampton University
- March 15<sup>th</sup>: Transport and Climate Change, Dr Lee Chapman, University of Birmingham
- March 29<sup>th</sup>: Impacts of Climate Change, Dr John Thornes, University of Birmingham

The webcasts take place from 11.00 to 11.30 am. On the climate change portal you can find information about each session, how to submit questions and how to check that you can receive the webcast.

### ... Ask a question

The Ask a Question facility on the Climate Change portal is now open. Pupils are invited to

send questions to WMnet's resident experts at the University of Birmingham's School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences.

### ... Young People's Parliament

Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils are invited to a climate change debate with a focus on citizenship at the Young People's Parliament, Birmingham, on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006. Groups may attend the Parliament or take part in related online activities. In school, students can view the debate via a webcast and electronically submit their votes on the issues raised.

### ... Global Science for real

Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils may contribute to an international database used by climate change scientists around the world. The GLOBE Programme is running one-day training courses for teachers in various West Midlands venues. Look out for one near you (visit their website at [www.globe.org.uk](http://www.globe.org.uk)). You will learn about the range of data-handling activities on offer and how your pupils can benefit from using this global database and sharing their work with pupils in the UK and other countries.

## Virtual Victorian School

Key Stage 1 children can explore a groundbreaking virtual reality 3D model of the Victorian classroom at the Blists Hill Victorian School site of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum.



Blist's Hill school – virtually

Programmers at Wolverhampton University have created a virtual reality model from the original plans of the school as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup>



century. It enables children to 'walk' around the school and find a range of objects associated with the school day, for example, slates, bells and a fire. When found they can then be seen in use. Teachers can stimulate discussions about similarities and differences between Victorian school life and life in schools today using supplied worksheets, maps, photos and other resources.

Sarah Jones (Telford and Wrekin) is enthusiastic about the simulation: "We use it as a whole class, big board activity, exploring the playground and some of the items. Using drama we have had a game of guess the object with pupils in pairs miming playing with the objects for their partner to guess what it is. We have then moved into the classroom and explored some of the items inside. This has been followed up with a game using pictures of items from the classroom and modern day items for pupils to sort and play games with. The pupils have to decide which items go into a Victorian classroom and then work in pairs to explore the school themselves. Children find navigating easy and have enjoyed the challenge of finding all the items. The school has been a hit with both pupils and teachers."



Blist's Hill school as it was

### Creative Citizenship

In collaboration with Creative Partnerships, Pablo Productions is organizing a series of activities and events in West Midlands schools on aspects of citizenship.

Thorns Community College, Brierley Hill is working with professionals to produce a dramatic performance on the theme of relationships. Foxford Specialist Arts College, Coventry is now working on learning resources to support its 'Enough is Enough' video on Racism. St. Margaret Ward Specialist Arts College, Tunstall, is working with an NHS

Printed on recycled low-chlorine paper

initiative on healthy living and lifestyles. Deansfield High School Wolverhampton is working to develop the Creative Citizenship website. Stourport High School is working on a dance performance concerned with the issues of tolerance and respect.

More: [creativecommons.wmnet.org.uk](http://creativecommons.wmnet.org.uk)

### Beyond Pathe

Students from Holbrook Primary school in Coventry were treated to an exciting day of filming for the Beyond Pathe evacuation film.



The students were collected from their school by a 1940's bus and taken to the National Trust's back to back houses in central Birmingham. After filming some emotional parting scenes there, the students were taken to the Severn Valley railway at Kidderminster where they were met by a large number of volunteers in authentic World War II period costume, and boarded the train to Arley station. Along the way they had a good old fashioned sing song and delighted the veterans with their knowledge of lyrics and tunes! There was also plenty of time to share experiences and ask questions.

Once completed, the film will be showcased during the Beyond Pathe online festival in November. More details on the web site. <http://www.beyondpathe.org.uk>

### Making the News

Making the News is a free online publishing resource for schools developed by E2BN, the East of England Regional Broadband Consortium, in partnership with the Open University. It is available across the country through the National Education Network.

The platform enables pupils of all ages easily to generate and distribute stories, news and information and is. It works like blogging but has built-in safeguards through multi-level

©WMNet 2005

moderation. Learners can publish a story with photos or a video clip in a few minutes – it really is a simple process!

Following a well-attended training workshop in October, West Midlands schools are now setting up their own Making the News sites and contributing stories to projects like Beyond Pathe and Climate Change.



### Making the news in the west midlands

The project has been extremely successful and now offers new functionality including enhanced interactive content such as Flash Meeting, an easy to use videoconferencing system, which will allow learners to set up, interview, record and publish online.



### Example of a pupils' news item

Project manager Jeff Howson describes how one school used Making the News: "A Suffolk middle school used it to report live on their school trip to France. Year Seven pupils prepared and filed reports on their trip each evening, allowing parents and friends at home to read about what they had been doing within minutes of activities ending. The pupils spent a week in the Ardèche region and took part in a range of activities including caving, climbing,

Printed on recycled low-chlorine paper

river trekking and a two-day canoe trip through the Ardèche Gorge. Each evening pupils uploaded their reports and photos School trips can be a worrying time for parents, especially if their child is away from home for the first time. Making the News helped the children reflect on what they had been learning and, at the same time, kept parents up to date and reassured about their experiences."

The Making The News competition closes on 16<sup>th</sup> December and is open to primary and schools in England. The prize categories give some idea of the range of activities possible with Making The News:

- Local news story
- Personal story
- Food report
- Field trip
- Environmental story
- Overseas report
- ICT story
- Music report
- Education story
- Feature on any topic

To find out more and submit stories go to [http://kmi4schools.e2bn.net/wmnet\\_central/](http://kmi4schools.e2bn.net/wmnet_central/).

### Rockin' the Idol

On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October the Birmingham Grid for Learning crashed. This unlikely event was caused by an unprecedented number of children trying to access the grid at once, all trying to get online and vote for their chosen rock band taking part in Rock Idol 2005. The rush for web access was almost matched by the rush to text and e-mail the judging panel to influence their opinion and choice of winners in this annual battle of the bands. Later on in the day and into the evening, the grid took a further pounding from pupils logging on to watch the video recording of the competition.

Rock Idol proved once again that it is a great example of how video conferencing can galvanise and engage the creative juices of large numbers of pupils.

Over 40 schools around the West Midlands registered an interest in the competition, with 14 rock bands taking part in the final competition. Organised by ATHENA Excellence in Cities Education Action Zone in partnership with Birmingham Learning and Culture IT, WMNet, Gigajam, Professional Music Technology and Polycom, the event required each rock band to perform live over a video conference link to a panel of judges in a City Learning Centre just

©WMNet 2005

