

Building teachers' confidence and boosting learners' skills at Dominican College

When the Irish government announced it would be piloting a new digital learning framework, Dominican College spotted an opportunity to enrich teaching and learning by embedding technology into its own digital learning strategy. Lorraine McCool, Deputy Principal of the all-girls post primary, chose Google as a key partner, using Google Workspace for Education and Chromebooks to transform learning experiences and foster collaboration.

Choosing Google

To ensure the school had the proper foundations for success, the senior leadership team reviewed all available options before embarking on the new digital learning strategy.

"We took the time to talk to other schools to see what was working well. We sought advice from the Department of Education's Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). We were conscious not to rush – we wanted to get it right from day one," she says.

When Lorraine took Dominican students on a tour of the local Google office and they were given a presentation on Google Calendar, she saw the potential right away.

"I knew it would be perfect for our transition year students. They are always on the go and have a million things to think about, so it offered a great way to organise all their activities and ensure everything was communicated to everyone. And best of all – it was free!"



With Google, we are opening the world to the classroom and enriching learning by connecting students with the real world. They can have a video conversation with a scientist in another time zone who is working to get more girls into STEM. They can connect with a member of local government to discuss the legal age of voting. It has really transformed how much we can do in the classroom."

Lorraine McCool, Deputy Principal



After a successful Google Calendar trial, Lorraine and her colleagues looked for other ways Google could support their digital learning framework, eventually landing on the combination of Google Workspace for Education and Chromebooks.

Previously, the school used a range of devices that were never charged properly and were being slowed down by students saving files directly onto the devices. Chromebooks offered a more consistent and reliable solution.

“As a school, you look for the best value you can get, and Chromebooks were the most affordable option. They are robust and long-lasting, which is especially important for the school environment. They are easy to charge, and the battery lasts for an entire school day, and you work on the cloud, so there is no slowing them down.

“The admin part is easy, too. You manage everything with one account, and can easily add new users. We put all that together and said: Chromebooks are for us.”



Our advice is to start small and build your confidence. Start with some simple apps and tools, and then look at how you can support your students. The good thing about Google Workspace for Education is that it is intuitive – the skills are transferable across all tools.”

Lorraine McCool, Deputy Principal

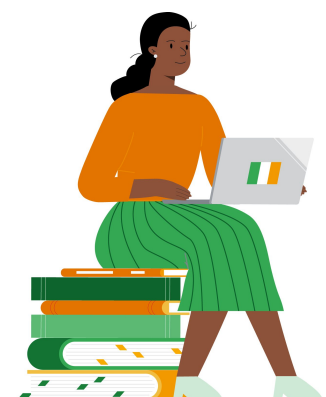
Supporting staff

With a Google Partner on board, Lorraine invested in 30 Chromebooks and equipped all teachers and learners with Google accounts. She also organised a full-day digital training workshop during the school’s staff planning days, which was delivered by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

“Those sessions were really positive. The teachers were wowed by the Chromebooks – the touchscreens in particular – and the big thing was that everything worked! It created a new energy and enthusiasm for digital learning.”

This was followed by the creation of a core digital learning team, which brought together the most engaged teachers to support and educate their colleagues.

“Again, we took a steady approach, focusing on a few key elements to begin with, such as getting to grips with Google Classroom and Drive. As the teachers built their confidence with using the shared space, and started to see the benefits, they began moving on to other tools and apps,” says Lorraine.



Leading by example

Dominican College’s success has come from its unified strategy that sees Google Workspace for Education at the centre of all collaboration and digital tools used at every level of the school.

“If we want to convince others to use the tools, the senior leadership team needs to also use them,” says Lorraine. “And we believe teachers using the tools as end users, will help them to see things from the perspective of their students.”

Enriching learning

As teachers became more confident with Chromebooks and Google Classroom, the Digital Learning Team was keen to enrich learning with digital tools too.

To boost digital literacy, the school introduced a weekly digital media literacy class for first, second, and third year students, which included everything from online safety to digital footprints. The impact was immediately apparent when junior students enhanced their classroom based assessments with slideshows, posters, and interactive text.

Now, digital tools such as Kahoot and Jamboard are appearing across the curriculum. Google Earth is used to bring learning to life in Geography, while Google Scholar is helping students build their researching and referencing skills in History.

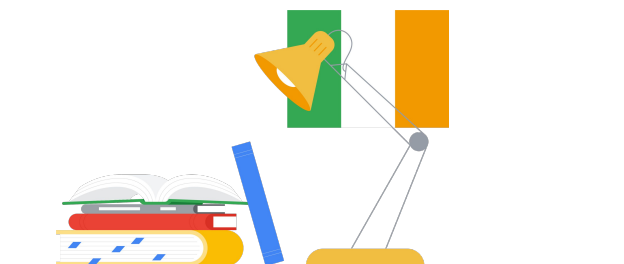


All different types of learning are now possible, and because different students learn in different ways, we can cater for everyone’s needs. Teachers can use tools to break things down for students and meet them at the level they are learning at. It has made learning in the classroom richer.”

Lorraine McCool, Deputy Principal

The introduction of ‘digital portfolios’ for transition year students, encourages them to creatively capture and showcase learning experiences. As these students get to try a wide variety of new subjects, such as Korean and Russian, digital portfolios give them the chance to record and express their key learning moments using Google Sites and different types of content, such as maps, videos, and slideshows.

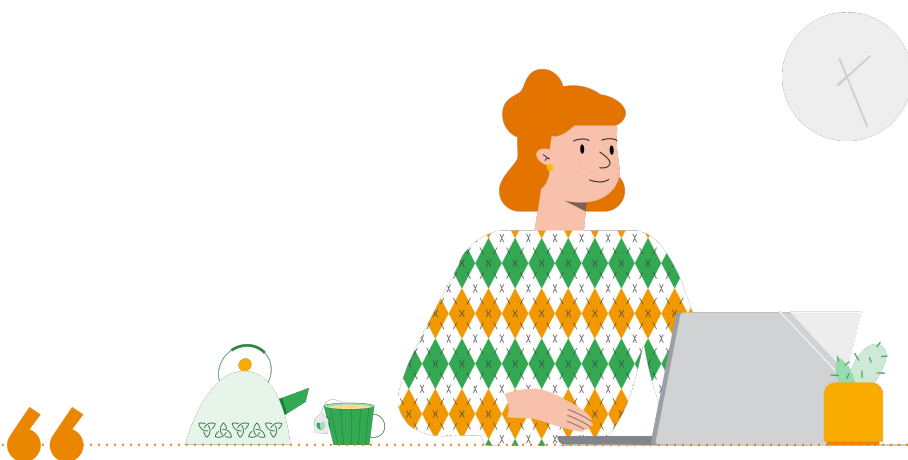
In the school’s most recent inspection, the initiative was described as a good use of ICT to support learning. Dominican is now building on this success by encouraging other year groups to use digital tools to reflect on their learning.



“For me, the big thing is that, alongside academic learning, we are equipping learners with 21st century skills – collaboration, communication, critical thinking – to prepare them for further learning and the workforce; for the jobs that have not been created yet,” says Lorraine. “We did a mapping exercise where we mapped our digital action plan against the key skills in the Irish curriculum, and we found that we were hitting every one of those skills through our use of tech.”

“During lockdown, teachers started coming together to say, ‘Where to next? Some wanted to make use of Google training opportunities, so they got together and set up a Google Classroom to collaborate and are now cascading their learning and getting others on board. Other teachers are holding workshops for colleagues to share new things they have learnt. It is a brilliant sense of achievement and supports their self-learning.”

This has seen teachers embrace the culture of continual learning and collaboration.



People do not like change, and teachers are busy people. Some have used one platform their whole life, and want to stick to that, even if another platform makes sense. But, by showing them that it can make their life simpler and easier, the message starts to filter through. And when they see the students start to embrace it, they can really see the value.”

Lorraine McCool, Deputy Principal