



Holy Spirit Senior Primary School:

Inspiring the whole school community



In the four years since introducing digital learning tools within the learning environment, Holy Spirit Senior Primary School, in Dublin, Ireland, has gone on to achieve some amazing things. This has included enhancing staff collaboration, boosting student engagement and opening the door to new, innovative learning possibilities.

Underpinned by Chromebooks and Google Workspace for Education, this digital learning journey has had something of a transformative effect on the entire school community – most evident during Ireland’s unexpected school closures throughout COVID-19, when Holy Spirit had to adapt to the new challenges brought about by distance learning.

“Google Workspace for Education united the school community at a time when we never felt so isolated,” says teacher Audrey Cooney. “Through daily online meetings and check-ins with students, it brought us together when we most needed each other in terms of well-being and support. It really has been such an important asset for our school.”

Small beginnings

Rewind to 2018, when Holy Spirit was just getting started in the digital learning space. With no computer room – or even a Wi-Fi connection – the school was still convinced about the potential of online tools, so decided to embark on its own digital learning journey.

“Before investing, we wanted to see how other primary schools had approached it,” says Audrey. “I spoke with school leaders who had deployed Chromebooks and Google Workspace for Education. The benefits of Chromebooks were immediately obvious; they were durable, quick to load, easy to use and affordable – all factors that influenced our decision.”



My advice would be to start slowly, look at the experts you already have on your staff and create a digital learning team. Then employ a mentoring system, so you will always have someone to go to if you have a question – there’s never just one point of contact.”

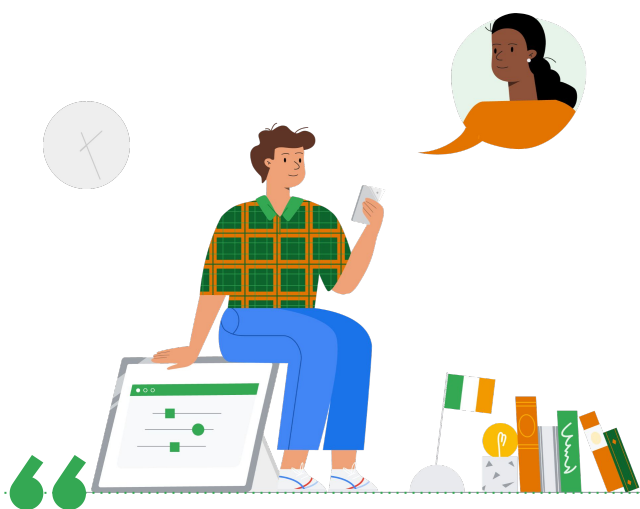
Audrey Cooney, Teacher





It wasn't long before the school purchased their first 60 Chromebooks and set up Google accounts for staff and students. After becoming confident with basic apps, such as Drive, Docs, Sheets and Slides, teachers and learners began exploring other tools and apps to bring new dimensions to teaching and learning.

"It's been an incremental journey, but we've made excellent progress over the last four years. We've come so far – from nothing at all, to a situation where Google tools have become such a natural part of our day-to-day teaching," says Audrey.



Google tools have united us in a way that wouldn't have been possible, previously. The support we provided during the remote learning period has bolstered our reputation, and other schools are now looking to us for inspiration, and we are happy to give advice on how to follow that model."

Audrey Cooney, Teacher

Boosting collaboration

Staff collaboration is a key area that has been strengthened with Google tools, as teachers and staff have found faster, more efficient ways to connect and work together.

"It's reinforced our team culture, by making collaboration easier and more natural – even when working together face-to-face wasn't possible. It's just all more efficient, and this has increased productivity," says Audrey.

It's also made it easier to share resources amongst teachers, which has helped new teachers in particular, as they now have immediate access to a wealth of ready-made and adaptable resources to support teaching and assessment.

"The key is to ensure staff feel confident with using the tools, and then you create that willingness to engage. And once they begin using them, they see how they can make their life easier. We now see staff supporting each other, by creating step-by-step guides and sharing YouTube videos on new tools," says Audrey.

Empowering learners and boosting engagement

To ensure pupils can benefit from the array of opportunities that digital tools can make possible, teachers at Holy Spirit have placed a strong focus on boosting interactivity in the classroom, to both inspire and engage learners.

"Sure, you can just move from pencil and paper and do the same thing digitally, but then there's no change in the learning outcome for the child," says Audrey. "So, we aim to inspire pupils, by introducing more interactive elements, so it's a completely different learning experience."

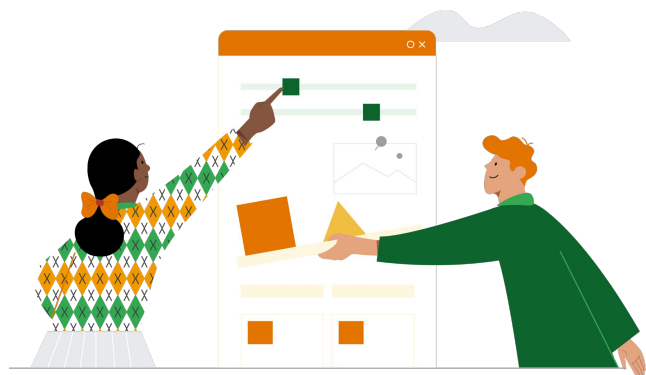


This focus on interactivity is empowering pupils, by placing them at the centre of their own learning and giving them the space to explore their creativity. Activities such as personalised dictionaries in Google Slides are helping pupils take responsibility by identifying their own priorities. Meanwhile, the array of content possibilities within Google tools is giving learners the power – and confidence – to express themselves in new ways.

“The biggest shift has been moving from the child as a ‘consumer’ of content to being the ‘creator’ of content. Seeing children of eight years old adding text, maps, images and audio to their work – it’s such an innovative way for them to share their learning. The impact has been so impressive that we’ve made content creation a core focus of our digital learning plan.”

Google tools are also supporting teachers to tailor learning to the different needs and abilities of pupils. Within this framework, they are providing a scaffold for those who find tasks more challenging, whilst giving space for high achievers to test themselves.

“It’s so subtle. You can assign the same tasks to everybody, without anyone realising some learners have received altered tasks to reflect their abilities, which does wonders for their sense of worth and self-esteem,” says Audrey. “There’s an entry point for every student, and there is scope to push on certain students who thrive on challenges.”



Feedback and self-evaluation

Feedback and self-evaluation are key parts of the learning culture at Holy Spirit, and tools such as Google Forms make it even easier to access and analyse the student voice, the parent voice and the staff voice through questionnaires.

“It supports the six-step self-evaluation process we follow at Holy Spirit, which prioritises input from all stakeholders. Google Forms is a quick and effective way of getting that input, keeping it all in one place, and analysing it to identify priorities,” says Audrey.

As part of this ongoing self-evaluation process, a recent survey amongst teachers and pupils shows just how positive the impact of Google tools has been.

Of the participating teachers:

- **100%** said Google Workspace for Education tools improved their students’ learning experiences.
- **100%** said using Google Workspace for Education empowers their students to become more independent learners.
- **80%** said Google Workspace for Education had improved collaboration with their colleagues.

One teacher notes: “it teaches students how to use the internet correctly and safely, for example, by finding reliable and trustworthy sources and sites.”

Meanwhile, **93.2%** of the participating students say they feel more confident using Chromebooks.

One learner adds: “I think one of the best things I have ever done on the Chromebooks is my Google Slides project on the Seven Wonders of the World, which I am very proud of.”

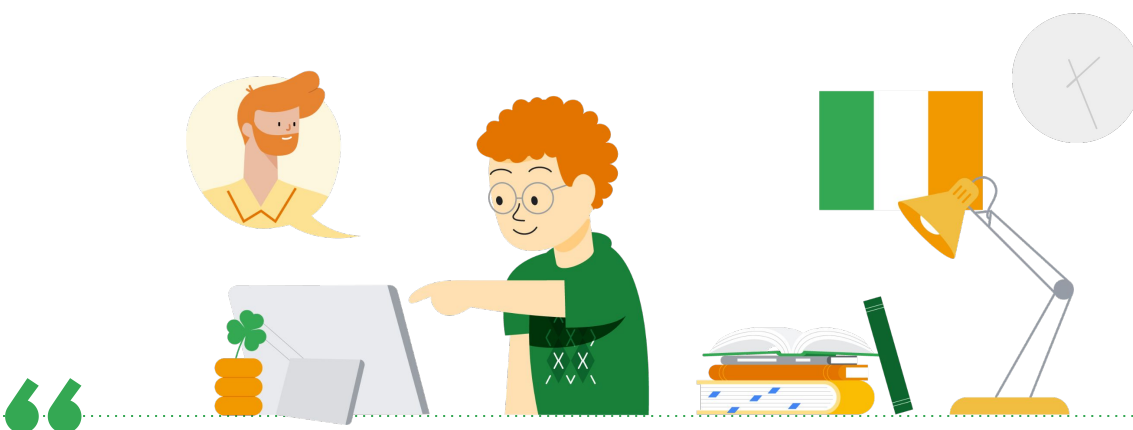


The journey continues

This transformation in teaching and learning is having a significant impact on student performance – evident in the work that learners are submitting. And the positive impact looks set to continue, as Holy Spirit has plans to strengthen their digital learning journey in the future.

One example is the introduction of e-portfolios, where students can collate all their work in one place. This will act as a valuable resource to track progression and share their work with their families.

“We don’t want to rest on our laurels; we know there are more tools that the children can benefit from, and it’s very exciting to have that challenge ahead as we continue to learn together,” says Audrey.



Our students have increased their motivation and interest in learning. It’s such an enjoyable experience for them; they don’t even realise they are learning because they’re having so much fun. And they have a greater sense of pride when they get to present their work.”

Audrey Cooney, Teacher