

Step^{Up} Project

School Excellence Fund: Step Up Project

October 2018 - October 2021

School Report:

St. Louis Secondary School
Castletown Road, Castletown, Dundalk, Co. Louth

Nine schools took part in the Step Up Project. Schools submitted a final report telling the story of their Step Up Project. The reports are descriptive accounts of what happened in school given their unique context and circumstances. The reports are not prescriptive of what should happen in all schools. Reports should be read in conjunction with reading the overall Step Up Project composite report.

1. Identifying a focus
2. Key Implementation practices
3. Implementation Steps
4. Implementation narrative
5. Enabling Conditions
6. Impact
7. Future planning

1. Identifying a Focus

January 2018

We set about using a School Self-Evaluation process to identify a need and priority for school improvement.

We wanted to focus on improving Teaching & Learning and recognised that an audit or mapping of the Statements of Learning of the Junior Cycle Curriculum would establish how we might adjust the curriculum in 2018-2019 to best meet the needs of the students' learning experiences.

We looked for the support of an external facilitator to manage the conversation with the school staff as we recognised that proposed change would have to be managed with sensitivity. We engaged an external facilitator to work with the whole staff on a day in January 2018 & the consultation on that day identified obvious gaps in our delivery of Statement of Learning 24: *'uses technology & digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner'* and a concern about the development of the key skill *'Managing Information and Thinking skills'*.

The whole staff, including the Board of Management, agreed to make the development of digital technology a target in our school improvement plan for 2018-2019. Our project focused on the Digital Technology element attached to each of the Junior Cycle Key Skills (p.13 of Framework for Junior Cycle)



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Dundalk

Focus: Using Digital Technology
to enhance teaching and learning



Principal Michelle Dolan gives an
overview of the project and its
impact on teaching and learning

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Coincidentally we became aware of the Step Up project and applied with the hope that the project might support our SSE process and offer opportunities to access professional development.

2. Key Implementation Practices

Our application was made during the summer of 2018 and was successful. We secured the cooperation of English, Science & Business teachers of the first year who would join a Step Up Team in September 2018 and shared plans with the whole staff in August 2018.

The team consisted of teachers who were confident in the use of digital technology and a number of others who were nervous but willing to upskill.

The first few months were scaffolded with supports and events from the Inspectorate and JCT.

- **Sept. 2018** Launch of project in DES Athlone | Principal M. Dolan and Deputy Principal M. Gilmore met with other schools engaged in the project
- **Sept. 2018** Meeting in Athlone to refine our proposal within our own context – Deputy Principal M. Gilmore, Teachers R. Mallon and A. Kirk.
- **Sept. 2018** Meeting of full team from the three departments in school to discuss project, concerns and ideas etc.
- **Oct. 2018** Further meeting of team to discuss initial classroom practice and decision to give students online survey to look at starting point around knowledge of ICT/Digital Media.
- **Oct. 2018** We submitted a refined proposal to the Step Up Link Team.

3. Implementation Steps

- Step Up team worked collaboratively online to plan and review.
- Step Up team worked collaboratively to share practice & resources - funding from project supported these meetings & events.
- Step Up team attended webinars on Reflective Practice and attended Step Up events.
- Step Up team engaged with Inspectorate and JCT.

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- Step Up team recorded own reflections & observed / videoed students in classrooms.
- Surveyed first year students to establish a base-line measure of their ICT skills & attitudes.
- Whole staff updated on progress.

4. Implementation Narrative

Year 1

Our project focused on the Digital Technology element attached to each of the Junior Cycle Key Skills (p.13 of Framework for Junior Cycle).

We surveyed the first- year students to establish a base-line that we could measure against, at the end of the project.

We invested our ICT grant into a trolley and Chromebooks to support student and teacher access to devices to support the embedding of digital technology into classroom experiences.

Six teachers worked with 1st Year groups in English, Business and Science.

Each department used more digital technology in their planning and shared learning in professional dialogue across these departments.

Teachers planned collaboratively using SchoolWise while each department also aimed to use more digital technology in their teaching and in the tasks required of students when learning.

All departments developed the skills & knowledge required to reflect the Features of Quality required to attain a higher descriptor in the Classroom Based Assessments in Year 2 & Year 3.

- The English Department provided opportunities to develop communication skills for the oral communication task and give feedback online using Google classroom.
- The Business Department provided opportunities to develop the budgeting skills required to complete and edit an online budget in excel/Google sheets.
- The Science Department provided opportunities to develop research skills and the discernment required to access relevant data for a project of the students' choice, preparation for Classroom Based Assessment in Year 3.



English teacher Gemma Finn shares some of the challenges faced during the project

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- Four students trained as *Digital Champions*, peer mentors on Thursday 6th Dec 2018. They supported the improved learning of other students. Two students from the group learned how to use iMovie to record and edit videos. They took photos and videos and edited it all into a 60 second video which they presented at the end of the day two other students from the group learned about good web design and how to make a web page appealing to customers/viewers. They also learned how to track views on a webpage.

Students were surveyed again at the end of the year to measure any change in attitudes and skills.

Digital Technology was established as a school need and priority so the Coordination of Digital Technology became a Post of Responsibility for an Assistant Principal.

Year 2

As teachers changed, we continued to work with the English Department into second year.

We also brought on board two second year Digital Media Literacy teachers who worked with the original student cohort. Teachers worked with the original students to continue to improve their digital skills and encourage safer internet use while following the NCCA Digital Media Literacy Short Course Specification resources.

Work with students and meetings with teachers continued through term 1 & 2. We were beginning to plan our evaluation of the process when school closures were announced on 12th March 2020 due to Covid 19.

Teachers and students moved into remote Teaching & Learning - the cohort of students participating in this project were best placed to use Google Classroom as a learning platform as a result of their experiences. Many teachers were also much more ready to teach online as a result of the school's focus on providing CPD and devices to staff as a result of our School Improvement Plan relating to Digital Technology.



5. Enabling Conditions

Our experience of supporting new first year students in 2018-2019 highlighted the need to develop media literacy in the first months of first year so that teachers could easily introduce digital learning without having to teach/coach in basic skills related to the use of Chromebooks / Google apps. We surveyed students and identified the diverse range of experience and skills acquired across 25 different feeder schools in 6th class.

Teachers had easier access to Chromebooks and are using them regularly in their work.

Teachers were talking about Teaching & Learning using digital technology. We had a teacher who was very enthusiastic about providing one-to-one support to staff from the Step Up team but this grew organically into her providing support to other colleagues.

Other colleagues started to offer help and a culture of peer support emerged as a result of our participation and focus on sharing practice.

Teachers were more aware of the Looking at Our School document. An audit (Dec. 2019) asked staff to highlight where their individual practice fell (effective/highly effective and the resources used). This audit and subsequent surveys determined the CPD we would offer in future months.



Deputy Principal Mary Gilmore speaks about the role of leadership and managing change

Digital Champions were trained to act as peer mentors in year 1 and more students accessed the training in year 2 to support Teaching & Learning in the classroom.

We applied for the top-up grant showing how our work with Step Up and the Digital Framework was supporting Teaching & Learning. We were able to buy more Chromebooks with the original ICT grant in 2019 and the top-up we received.

We appointed an APII post as a Digital Coordinator as a result of the need identified through the Post of Responsibility review process in 2018-2019. The coordinator meets the Principal weekly, discusses technical issues, accesses support from local IT company, audits CPD needs and monitors the school's whole school Digital Strategy using the Digital Framework.

6. Impact

- Evidence of impact on student learning - High levels of engagement during school closures 1 & 2. Students continued to learn despite school closures.
- Evidence of higher student confidence when using digital technology.
- Evidence of greater teacher collaboration and confidence around the use of ICT in class.
- Evidence of a culture of disseminating good practice.
- APII role is continuing after review - BoM and staff have agreed in a Post of Responsibility review 2019 to retain Digital Technology as a whole school priority and need.
- Developing Digital Technology is a priority on the school improvement plan and is monitored weekly by the APII co-ordinator and Principal.
- Digital Champions will continue to support peers and access training / opportunities.
- Digital Media Literacy is timetabled, and teachers have been trained to deliver the short-course materials.
- Accessing Chromebooks is now embedded.
- All staff have their own device and were able to move seamlessly into remote Teaching and Learning.
- All students access Google Classroom to access resources, assignments, feedback.
- Digital Coordinator created a new resource to support teachers, students and parents using Google apps.
- Bespoke CPD with Siobhan O'Sullivan PDST Technology with a focus on managing assessment using Google Classroom - training was a direct response to feedback from surveys completed after lockdown on how staff managed remote teaching and setting up on Google classrooms in Sept 2020.
- Hardware/IT infrastructure purchases made where necessary.
- We monitored weekly engagement online and reported to parents via a report on VSware during school closures.
- SEN supports continued during school closure Jan - March 2021 including applications for RACE
- Guidance teams continued to support students preparing for UCAS, CAO, DEAR, HEAR applications
- All information evenings and induction meetings moved online - parents, students & teachers have upskilled- we can report very high levels of student & parental engagement.



Teacher Marie Meehan speaks about the overall experience of the project and links to Wellbeing



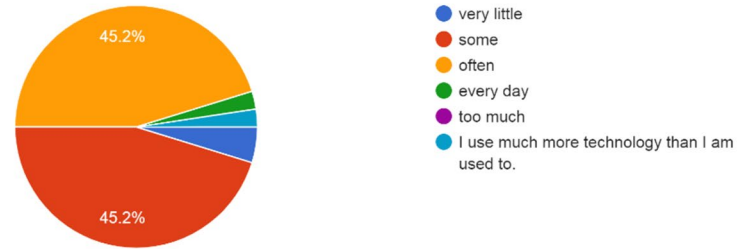
Special Needs Assistant Caroline O'Neill speaks about how students engaged during the project

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Data gathered from students

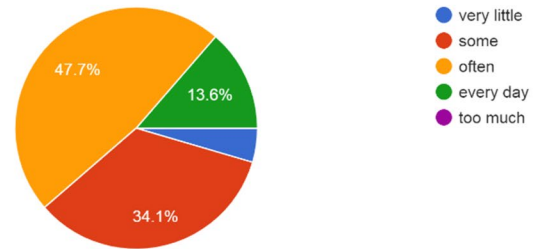
2018

How much technology are you using in class since joining St Louis 8 weeks ago?
42 responses



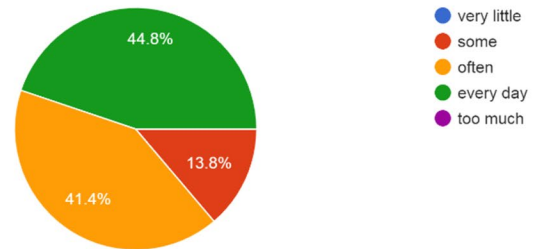
2019

How much technology are you using in class since joining St Louis 1 year ago ?
44 responses



2020

Are you using Digital Technology more often in class compared to a year ago?
29 responses



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Evaluation comments from students:

Write a few lines of self-evaluation about how confident and skilled you are when using digital technology compared to the end of 1st Yr / 2nd Yr

“I have learned how to use some apps like zoom that you didn't even know about and didn't know how to use. Since spending a lot more time on digital technologies over lock down I have gotten more skilled as well.”

“I feel confident using digital technology because of my DML classes in second year.”



Some students speak about their experience of the project and the impact it has had on their learning

“I feel a lot better using technology and a lot more aware.”

“During 1st year, I knew what digital technology was, but I just didn't do enough practice to upgrade my learning in it. In 2nd year, we spent lots more time with chrome books and in digital media class, we learned how to do loads of things just like editing a video etc. In 3rd year, we used chrome books often and not as often as 2nd year due to the pandemic going around but my knowledge for digital technology improved a lot since 1st year.”

“I think I'm more aware of the safety and policies of websites and sites not to use and not to plagiarize when doing a project or presentation, I feel more confident and more comfortable using the internet every day.”

“I am very confident and happy when using digital technology compared to 1st and 2nd year. I have learned so many new things related to how to do things online with the help of my last year class digital media literacy.”

“I was also a part of the digital champions last year which was extremely helpful as I learned new things related to technology in the program.”

“I'm more confident in using digital technology. In 1st year I wasn't sure of anything and I found it difficult to attach images and documents. Now I'm able to do it easily and I have my work handed in on google classroom quite quickly.”

“I would definitely say my skills in terms of technology have improved drastically, due to working online more often than I used to. A year ago, I would have to ask teachers how to attach documents, files and make videos. This year I learnt how to keep track of my work in different folders and working online in general.”

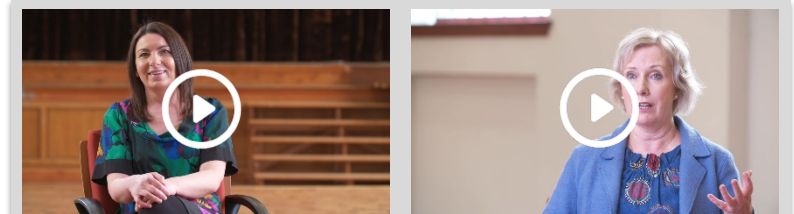
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“I feel like I have a wider knowledge of how to use digital technology compared to 1st/2nd year. There is much more to it than I thought before.”

“I feel confident online because I have used it so much in lockdown but because I was learning with chrome books since first year and doing digital media in second year I was very confident with it before.

7. Future planning

- We will continue to support students and staff by continuing to prioritise the role of Digital Coordinator within the posts of responsibility framework.
- We will consult with staff and students to discuss how best to embed the new skills, practices, attitudes and policies developed over the past three years.
- We will continue to access training and support for staff to build on their prior learning.
- We will continue to prioritise the use of Digital Technology with students in Junior Cycle, TY & Senior Cycle in line with the next phase of the Digital Strategy.
- We have piloted the use of e-portfolio in 2nd & TY this year, we will continue to develop this practice and monitor its effectiveness.
- We will continue to upgrade & maintain hardware and software systems within the school.
- We will continue to measure and monitor students’ skills and capabilities to meet their needs and prepare them for the digital world.



Teachers Joanne Mallon and Margaret Enright share their insights about the impact of the project