

Changing teacher practice through digital technology – Newark Hill Academy



Sonia Kendal became Principal of Newark Hill Academy, Peterborough, in September 2015. Academising in April 2014, the school received a Good verdict from Ofsted at its first inspection in February 2017. Sonia is a passionate advocate of the use of technology in schools, believing that schools have a moral imperative to prepare children for the digital world that they will enter when they join the workplace. Sonia believed that without access to devices and suites of programmes such as Office365, pupils were disadvantaged. Once Newark Hill was onboarded to the new GAT system in November 2018 Sonia and her team got to work to put their own plans for a digital school in place.

In common with BCA the first step in the journey was to join the Microsoft Showcase School Pathway. At the launch event in December 2018, Sonia was trained in the use of Teams and OneNote. Before she left the conference, she contacted the school's technicians (via Teams!) to ensure that the infrastructure was in place so that students could use Teams immediately. The very next day Sonia launched Teams to the pupils through a series of assemblies and invited the pupils

to familiarise themselves with the system over the last 3 days of term and the Christmas holidays. On 2nd January 2019, Newark Hill Staff received INSET training on Teams and One Note. The expectation was that all staff would use OneNote for shared planning of lessons for year group teams and for the delivery of lessons to pupils. At the same time the school invested in 1:1 devices for all pupils in year 4,5 and 6. Every other year groups have access to shared devices. Ongoing CPD was secured through the MEC with staff all becoming Microsoft Innovative Educators (MIEs) and 8 staff going on to develop as Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts (MIEEs). Sonia recalls the rapid rate of change '...by the end of January it became our way of working. When I spoke to Microsoft staff at the BETT show later that month people were in awe of how much we had changed and the pace with which we had done it.'

When you visit the Newark Hill, it is abundantly clear that the use of digital technology is embedded across the school. Teachers at the school are very clear about the impact this has made on their working practices and their work life balance. Katie James, a Year 4 teacher at the school, has found that the use of Teams has made communication quicker and easier. This is supported by Lou Bowler, Year 3 teacher, who talks about the immediacy of Teams and the ease with which problems can be solved. It means everyone is up to date with everything that is happening around the school. This is particularly beneficial in the area of safeguarding.

Both Katie and Lou are quick to explain the benefits of using OneNote to plan and deliver lessons. The collaboration that is possible when teams of teachers can access and edit planning documents simultaneously is phenomenal. It has built collective ownership of the year groups; means that good ideas are shared easily; and critically removed a lot of mundane administrative tasks, freeing teachers to spend time on high value practices. Lou and Katie feel that they have changed the way they work for the better, and whilst it takes time initially to become fluent in the use of new technologies, this is more than compensated for by the time savings that come later. Although an unintended consequence the, positive impact of improving staffs' work-life balance has been warmly welcomed. In real terms at least an hour per day is being saved using EdTech.

The biggest impact has been on student engagement. The 2017 Ofsted gave the need to develop strategies to further engage boys as a possible area for future development for the school. Sonia and Lou are clear that the use of technology has been critical in securing engagement for both boys and girls. This is reflected in the engagement of students in school and out of school, the reduction of low-level behaviour issues and the strong attendance figures. In addition, students have become more independent in their learning as they are able to develop research skills and use online tools such as the thesaurus and search engines to find the answers to their questions, rather than always relying on the teacher.

The positive culture that Sonia has fostered at Newark Hill meant that the drive to digitalise planning and marking 'landed well' with staff of all levels of experience open to the prospect of working in a different way. They are keen to share the success they have had with others and encourage their peers to take risks and learn new things. Lou sums this up, 'I would say to all my teacher colleagues, give it a go, you will be surprised by how it makes your life easier. Just go for it!'



What can we learn from Newark Hill?

- The vision of the Principal is critical in ensuring that the use of EdTech gains traction
- Invest in high quality training for staff
- Have high expectations, all staff can master these technologies, children's futures depend upon it.