

## Using technology to sustain 'business as usual' during a pandemic at Danesholme Infant Academy



Carol May took up the headship of Danesholme Infant Academy two years ago. At this point the use of digital technology across the academy was extremely limited. As a proficient user of digital technology and a firm believer in the potential of technology to enhance the lives of staff and students, this was something Carol wanted to change. As Carol inherited an academy in Ofsted 'special measures' her immediate priority was to turn around the fortunes of the school. During her first year in post she made significant changes to the curriculum and to teaching and learning.

September 2019 marked the start of Carol's second year in post. Following an Ofsted visit the school moved from special measures to 'requires improvement with good features'. This enabled Carol to begin to shift her focus to broader developmental aims including the use of digital technology. Happily, this coincided with the school's migration to the new GAT IT system in summer 2019. Carol viewed the new system as a great gift, one that would enable students and teachers to harness the power of digital technology.

She decided that the best way to begin to promote this agenda was through staff training. Initially, Carol focused on what the 'Airhead' portal could do for staff and the ways in which using Microsoft Teams could make staff's life easier. In particular, she focused on demonstrating features that would enable staff to reduce or repurpose their workload.

As one would expect staff were keen to take advantage of the tools on offer. Carol was able to share her own experiences of using the technology to make her own life easier. More specific training followed the staff meetings with Carol using OneNote with her Senior Leadership Team (SLT) as a means of collaborating and sharing resources. This group of four people (including Carol) were to be the evangelists for the use of technology. SLT used OneNote as a tool to write the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); Academy Improvement Plan (AIP) and for monitoring purposes. They combined its use with that of Word online to enable staff in different locations to work simultaneously on the same document.



SLT quickly realised the potential impact that the use of this technology could have. Teachers were encouraged to use OneNote for the shared planning and the development of resources. Teaching staff came up with the idea of creating year team planning documents so that each member of the team knew what the rest were working on. It made the sharing of resources simple and enabled staff to support one another in practical ways that would save each other time. As lockdown began teaching staff had become familiar in the use of OneNote.

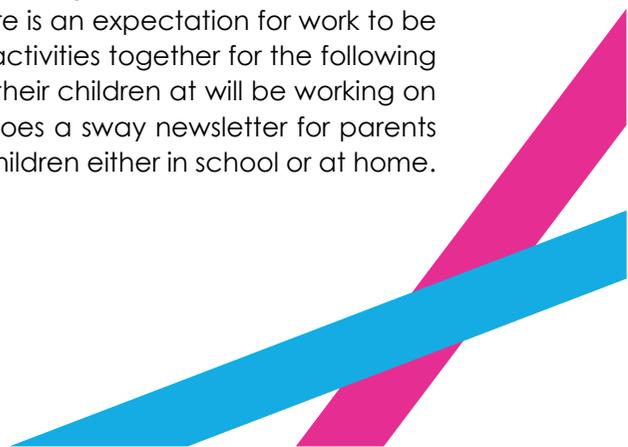
Lockdown proved to be a catalyst for the rapid adoption of digital technologies across Danesholme Infant Academy. Staff immediately began to access Microsoft Teams and it became a critical hub for sharing the OneNotes set up for lesson planning. Carol started to use Microsoft Sway for school newsletters. By using the dictate function in MS Word and then converting the document into a Sway she saved lots of time and had a newsletter that was accessible and fun to engage with. Staff started to use MS Sway as a vehicle for creating resources on a range of topics and they used the airhead platform to share these with one another. The team of teaching assistants spent the days when they were not in school producing a bank of Sways across the topics taught for all year groups in readiness for the Autumn Term. Staff saved time by using the tools available in O365 and as a virtue of sharing the new resources in an easy way.

An unexpected consequence of the lockdown was that Carol found that staff were more willing to approach her about difficulties they were having with the technology. Staff simply did not have the choice to use alternative methods to meet the needs of students. This meant they were more willing to ask for help. Carol found she was able to spend time supporting staff who were having difficulties with the technology on a one-to-one basis. Once staff were confident there was no going back. In this way Carol believes the lockdown acted as a catalyst in advancing the cause of technology at Danesholme Infants.

Advances in the use of technology continued to be made throughout lockdown. The next area for training and development during was the use of FlipGrid. This was used to film videos to keep in touch with students; for spelling tests and as a means for staff to read stories to the children. Carol also used it during the summer recruitment window when prospective staff was asked to present themselves as a candidate through FlipGrid.

In common with many schools during lockdown Danesholme Infant Academy was open to key worker children whilst online work was provided for the other children. Year teams of staff divided up the workload so that the teacher in school delivered the learning whilst the teacher working from home planned work and monitored all three classes. Carol has been thrilled with the speed with which her team have embraced the technology in order to support children through the pandemic.

Now that staff and students are back in school staff have continued to use the technologies they adopted during lockdown. Carol can use teams and the OneNote canvas to monitor the work that teachers and teaching assistants are doing and there is an expectation for work to be available online for children. Class planning is shared through OneNote and they use PPA time to put online activities together for the following week. Staff have continued to make use of FlipGrid to record a phonics video so parents know what sounds their children at will be working on that week. This is uploaded onto Teams and available to parents through airhead. Each year group team does a sway newsletter for parents each term. FlipGrid is also used by teachers who read stories and then these stories can be looked at by the children either in school or at home.





Parents too have been quick to accept the changes to the way Danesholme staff communicate with them. There has been an uplift in engagement with many parents making use of the online learning tools on offer. The analytics tools in MS make it easier for staff to track parental engagement and to make changes as a result of the engagement statistics.

The school is now using online forms for parents to complete each week about the books that their children are reading.

The next step for Carol is to fully embed this work and keep it going. The administrative team are now working to use these new technologies with plan to put every paper form into MS Forms and shifting all the useful information provided to parents online through the Airhead portal. They are now starting to experiment with the use of QR codes and power automate. Even the lunchtime supervisors are getting involved. A MS Form is used by them to record behaviour incidents on their school iPad. Behaviour incidents are logged in a way that is compatible with SIMS system and then recorded quickly so that the transfer of information from lunchtime staff to teaching staff is slick and seamless. Staff at all levels are embracing the technology and there is no limit to what can be achieved now that the whole team is on-board. Carol has this advice for anyone considering a digital transformation:

1. Get to know the ICT team. They've been extremely helpful, and they are there to support you.
  2. Have the confidence to try it! By experimenting with your own practice, you can see what works and then gradually introduce it to staff.
  3. Always emphasize the benefits of the technology in making staff lives easier and in helping them to better support children.
- 