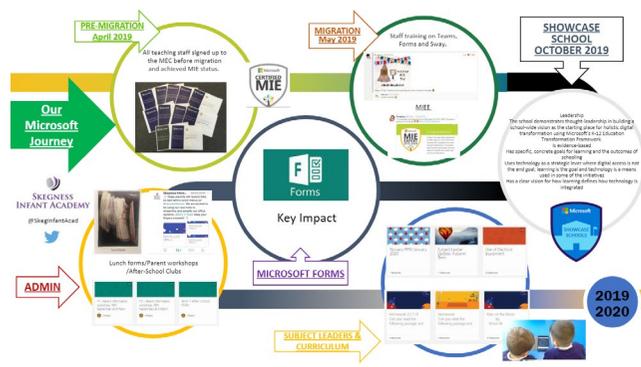


Revolutionising practice through IT – The Journey of Skegness Infant Academy



Rebecca Leighton is Head of School at Skegness Infant Academy (SIA). In May 2019 SIA migrated to the new digital system provided by GAT. Rebecca is an advocate of the importance of IT in schools, she has a firm belief that children have a right to be engaged with the technology, so that they are properly prepared for the world after school. Having worked as IT Coordinator earlier in her career, Rebecca was well versed with the challenges of introducing a new system and encouraging staff to use new ways of working.

The turning point for Rebecca came in December 2018, she was invited to a Microsoft Showcase event to investigate if it was a pathway that the school wanted to pursue. Rebecca decided to set the school on a pathway to gaining Microsoft Showcase status. In March 2019 this led to the staff being introduced to the Microsoft educator Community. The target was to ensure that every member of staff (teaching and support) was a Microsoft Innovative Educator (MIE) by the time the school migrated to the new digital system in April. The school met this target, staff enjoyed working through modules of interest to them and it built a sense of excitement in the school community as migration approached. The importance of treating all staff equally is hard to overstate. Rebecca firmly believed that every adult in the school had a role to play and having the same expectations of everyone in terms of engagement with digital technology was the key to building confidence in using the systems.

Once SIA migrated to the new system the real work of upskilling staff and students to take advantage of the new system began. Between migration and summer holidays started using TEAMS and phased out email. This was big change in the way that everyone worked, it took a lot of modelling, and Rebecca's leadership of this was critical in its success. There was a very clear direction from the top that TEAMS would be used. It was a challenge to embed this change with support staff who would not have historically engaged with technology e.g. – lunchtime supervisors and Some of TAS – aged range wider and less willing to be involved.



However, once they were shown how to use the technology, they saw the benefit of being 'in the loop' with staff communication and found the Teams interface much more user friendly and welcoming than they had email. Overall, Rebecca feels that communication across the school is more immediate, and that it reaches all levels within the school.

To date some of the biggest changes have occurred in the administrative functions of the SIA. Office Staff have worked proactively to streamline processes and in so doing have increased engagement levels from parents whilst simultaneously saving time that they can send on other, more valuable tasks. MS Forms has been used to great effect in collecting responses from parents on choices of school meals. Instead of sending out paper-based lunch forms the school now send out a termly text message with a link to an MS Form. Parents select from a range of options and then the office staff use the analysis functionality of forms to collate responses. Therefore, hours of time have been saved: there are no paper or printing cost and there is no longer any need to spend time in the chasing of the parents to fill out the paper forms. As SIA this time has been redistributed to attendance monitoring which has a greater impact on children. The work with Forms has subsequently been extended to cover the collection of information relating to uptake of after school clubs. Office staff have also worked with teachers to use digital technology to collect parental views and to organise progress evenings. Progress evenings have had their highest ever turn out since these changes were made.

The move to the GAT digital platform has, of course impacted in the classroom. Children at SIA make greater use of technology in classrooms, this is seen in their use of MS Forms for reading comprehension, increased access to coding opportunities and the use of FlipGrid for reading at home. The next stage of development will see this extended using OneNote and Teams in the classroom. Rebecca notes that where technology has been trialled, children have been highly engaged and very respectful of the equipment they have used. Staff confidence is growing with each lesson that they successfully integrate IT into their practice.

What can we learn from Skegness Infant Academy?

- Be proactive with the systems, leaders need to proactively learn about them as much as possible so that they can support their staff.
 - Plan your digital journey carefully for it to be successful.
 - Embrace it for the sake of the children, staff must embrace it to support the children in preparing for the future.
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