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Repton School:

Powering digital transformation at Repton School

Repton School in Derbyshire became a Microsoft Showcase School in 2015 when Head of English James Wilton made the decision to trial digital technology in his classroom, believing it would lead to greater student engagement. Since then, the school has witnessed a transformation in ways of working, effectiveness, results – and wellbeing.

In 2016-17, James began using OneNote with two Year 12 classes to deliver their A-Level coursework lessons. OneNote provided the platform for lesson planning, delivery, resources and live feedback to students. All the work students undertook in class - on the smartboard, on laptops or on paper - was captured and put into online exercise books or the group content library, building up a repository of all the collective knowledge of the class.

James reflects: "It took around seven weeks for students to become comfortable with a new way of learning, but once they saw the benefits there could be no return to our old style of working."

Putting OneNote to work across the ability groups

Next, James undertook a larger piece of work with a high ability Year 11 class, with all examined work and coursework delivered through OneNote. As the year progressed, lessons became increasingly collaborative. Against MidYIS data the class secured a value added score of 1.7 in the final exams – convincing evidence that the digital technology was enabling his high ability students to achieve more.

The next step was to demonstrate that similar results could be achieved with lower ability students. In the 2018-19 academic year, James used the same methods with a lower ability group, and against MidYIS the class secured a value-added score of 1.24 – but the value of EdTech has gone beyond enhancing grades. When working through OneNote, students take far greater ownership of their work, sharing and recording everything they produce in class, whether working with James on the smartboard, in the collaboration space, or individually.

Making progress in lesson

The most interesting effects of the school's tech transformation have been on James's hands-on teaching. As he can dip in and out of all the students' work at any point in the lesson, his formative assessment practices have been finely honed – and he can adapt his practice in response to learner needs within the lesson.

James notes: "This minute-by-minute approach has enabled students to make much more rapid progress, while use of Microsoft 365 software has increased the variety of ways they can to respond to tasks."

As students became more familiar with OneNote, James discovered that his role in lessons became more of a facilitator than an instructor, as co-construction and collaboration has become a feature of all lessons, feeding positively into students' sense of ownership. As a result of these shifts, the culture of the classroom has changed immeasurably.

Enhancing wellbeing

For James and his colleagues, the impact of EdTech has been most noticeable in enhancing well-being - among teachers and students alike. James reports feeling a greater level of control over his work, and is able to redirect time towards the activities that make the most difference to students – and provide more direct feedback. Meanwhile, less time is being spent marking after the lesson.

Students, too, feel in better control of their work – and anxiety levels have reduced – as they never leave the classroom unsure of what they have learnt. As part of a continuous feedback system, they can ask questions through OneNote (without the potential embarrassment of alerting their peers) which has led to greater participation rates with homework.

Showcasing best practice

Now, in the 2020-21 academic year, James has been promoted to the school's senior leadership team as Director of Digital Development, working with colleagues across every department to replicate the successes he saw in his own projects. He has also become one of the UK's only Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert Fellows, sharing his work across the Midlands and nationally.

> *James was convinced that the digital technology was enabling his high ability students to achieve better outcomes*

Learnings from Repton School

- Success is much more likely when the school leadership team has 'bought-in' to the digital agenda

- Take calculated risks with your practice - ensure that any risks you take are guided by the principle that changes will improve student ownership and outcomes

- Avoid using technology for its own sake

- Start small, think big.

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