



How a large and diverse Secondary School in North London responded to the pandemic by introducing Microsoft Teams into their remote learning repertoire and why they feel it is here to stay

The Background

Hendon School is an Outstanding School, passionate about education and working with their young people to give them the best opportunities in life. They are a large Outer London mixed comprehensive in the London borough of Barnet with over 1,200 students (aged 11-18). The school also has a large sixth form with over 200 students following a range of pathways.

They celebrate the fact that they are a large and diverse family – given that despite being situated in a relatively affluent part of North London, they have a well-above-average proportion of students eligible for free school meals, and a proportion of students whose first language is not English and who originate from minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of students who have statements of special educational needs is also well well-above-average with specialist provisions in both hearing impairment and Autism Spectrum Conditions.

Against this background, it is no surprise that when the pandemic hit – in March 2020 – they had to react quickly to maintain the high quality education of their pupils – not least as they remained open throughout for key worker children and those classified as vulnerable.

Fortunately – and in keeping with their decision to embark on a new and dynamic phase of the school’s development at the start of 2020 – they were ahead of the game with respect to the use of technology in the school. This involved expanding the role of their technology partner – RM – to provide a fully managed IT service – building on a prior two-year relationship with onsite technicians supporting the school’s own Network Manager – to one where all of this was provided by RM.

The Response

The school were more advanced than many, in that prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, they were using an online learning platform through “Frog”. This had been in place for around 8 years, and its value had grown increasingly over the last couple of years, such that in 2019 they moved to digital planners and homework set electronically for the first time.

“We were very well set in terms of setting work and assignments for students as the platform we were using was well developed and all classes were already set up ready to go”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher



Importantly, when lockdown came, staff and pupils found it easy to switch to learning remotely, as this was largely how they had been doing their homework prior to the shutdown.

“I think the investment in Remote Learning stands us in good stead moving forward. We developed effective ways of setting, tracking and marking homework remotely and have developed huge amounts of content that can be transferable to next year and the future”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher

The only issue they encountered, was that the system they were using – “Frog” – did not support live lessons, and as lockdown continued it became clear that the school needed more direct engagement with pupils.

The school turned to RM for their advice, relying on them to share their insight from similar conversations they were having with other schools up and down the country. RM recommended that the school consider installing Microsoft Teams, a proposal that was agreed and in the second half of the summer term, RM set them up on MS Teams, as part of their Office 365 package.

“With Microsoft Teams, staff are now much more confident meeting in groups and using the technology to teach students directly. In the final few weeks of the summer term we were delivering weekly lessons to all students in Year 12 through MS Teams (with very little staff training)”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher

All teaching staff had a laptop to work from home, although the quality of some of these devices varied considerably and many staff did struggle with older and outdated devices. Staff were able to access email through Office 365 and could access the school network either through Microsoft Essentials or more commonly through “Frog”. Accessing files did not pose much of a problem for the school during the closure – again down to sensible pre-planning on their part.

Given the specific school context, many students at Hendon had no – or at best – poor – access to IT at home and this presented a huge challenge in terms of communicating with students and setting/receiving work. The whole process of teaching and marking had to shift overnight and staff had very little preparation nor training for this.

Like most schools, Hendon did not issue devices to students and this proved a major barrier to wider remote learning as many students just could not access all of their work. They did loan some older laptops to those students that were in desperate need, and whilst the school applied for – and received – a number of laptops from the government for Year 10 students without home IT access, these did not arrive until a week before the end of the summer term.

Earlier in 2020, [RM undertook research](#) that concluded that many teachers were reluctant to embrace technology in the classroom. This appears to be reflected at Hendon School, with a general acceptance that the uptake of any technology can be slow – no matter what the environment. That said, staff at Hendon feel that technology will play a bigger role in their school in the future, with the pandemic driving this faster than ever.

“A key barrier to adopting technology is often the time it takes to familiarise yourself with new platforms and developing new resources. It took us several years to reach a certain point, but the shutdown has made us all make that next leap – whether we were ready to or not. I think that the adoption of the new platform – MS Teams – will be significantly faster and higher”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher

But best of all, the school feel better equipped for the future:

“With so much uncertainty in how the coming months will map out, we are in a far better place this time round to respond to teaching remotely should the school be forced to close again. Our virtual learning platforms, use of live lessons and remote meetings and assemblies will no doubt continue to evolve and give more opportunities for learning”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher

The Lessons Learnt

- 1. Build an IT strategy into your school strategy.** Hendon were further ahead than most schools when lockdown came, solely down to the foresight of the Leadership Team to recognise the importance of having technology in place that supported Remote Learning – some 8 years before the pandemic even got a name!
- 2. It takes time.** It will take time to familiarise your people with any new technology, so starting early, and accepting that it won't happen overnight will set you up for success.
- 3. Never forget the importance of training.** Hendon responded well because they had taken time to embed the basics of remote learning early on. This enabled them to add new capabilities – including a switch to MS Teams – with the minimum of fuss. This would not have been so straightforward if that initial training had not happened.
- 4. Think in partnerships.** Hendon made the decision early on that their expertise lay in teaching and learning – not in technology management. They selected RM as their partner for this aspect of the school, and openly admit that without a team like RM's being on hand when the pandemic hit, they would have struggled much more than they did.

The Legacy

Whilst the pandemic has been – and continues to be – a sad and awful thing to happen to the world, it is important that we look for any positives and opportunities that come from it. Hendon – like many schools – are determined to retain some of the adaptations to the school set up that they have been forced to make – from the hidden benefits of a staggered lunch break, to using technology for better staff meetings and lessons.

"The use of MS Teams for remote lessons and Inset is here to stay!"

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher



“I hope staff and students have reconnected with what is important in life and it will make all young people more resilient as we move into the future”.

Ron Spicer, Assistant Headteacher

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