



Embarking on Remote Learning with Google Classroom at an Alternative Provision School in Hull – The Compass Academy

The Background

The Compass Academy is an Alternative Provision School that provided an education to KS3 pupils (Years 7-9) who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion from their mainstream school. A number of pupils have SEND needs, or are under assessment to ensure that they receive the additional support that they need to access education. Many pupils have encountered adverse childhood experiences and are disengaged from learning. Additional social and emotional support is provided to all pupils to ensure that they feel happy, safe and secure.

The Academy is situated on the eastern side of the city of Kingston-upon-Hull – with pupils attending from right across the city, and hence are reliant upon transport provided by the Local Authority or public transport. The number of pupils varies, as new children are referred and/or transition on to other educational settings, but is currently around 71.

The Academy have had their technology needs met by RM for a number of years, providing all of their hardware and software requirements. They operate under a Flex Services contract that ensures the level of support and responsiveness the Academy needs.

The Challenge

The school decided to move to the Google Cloud in October 2019, which did not go entirely without incident, but most issues were swiftly rectified and as time has passed, the staff in the Academy have become more and more confident in using it, specifically benefiting from a whole staff training day organised by RM to assist them with “the launch”.

That said, the school was still in its infancy stage of using the Cloud, when the Prime Minister announced that most schools were closing from 20th March 2020. All staff had been trained, and all had transitioned to Chromebooks by Christmas 2019. At the point of the outbreak, staff were growing in confidence in using the new devices but additional features such as ‘Google Classrooms’ had yet to be used. That said, features such as sharing files and being able to edit ‘live’ documents was becoming standard practice – particularly when input from a number of different staff was required – such as end-of-year reports.

“The school hadn’t had to provide remote learning previously so this was a new experience for all staff members. Prior to the outbreak, if work had to be set, work packs would be sent home.”

Jacqui Thompson, Principal



The school remained open at first; with two pupils attending on site, and two more at an off-site provision; but when a member of staff presented themselves with symptoms, the school closed, and has since taught a small number of students via an off-site provision.

The Response

The Academy feel that the transition has been relatively seamless. Whilst at times some tasks have taken longer than expected as staff have had to navigate around the different platforms, this enforced experience has given those staff the opportunity to develop their own skills and use different features within the technology.

The positives are numerous, and include:

- being able to provide continued support to pupils via Chromebook and the Google Classroom platform
- pupils being able to 'turn work in' for marking/immediate feedback ensuring regular assessment, with helpful alerts sent via email so responses can be timely to continue to motivate pupils
- the ease of using the classroom feature within Google Classroom, and to navigate around it – the Academy felt the loading of assignments has been particularly straightforward
- staff teams being able to edit documents/share documents whilst working at home – tasks such as end-of-year reports, curriculum mapping and planning can all easily be completed remotely
- staff being able to continue to have access to secure information to support referrals to other services etc.
- staff being able to provide emotional support through the 'Google Meet' facility and provide additional support via virtual meetings
- the eradication of portable memory devices, as information is saved automatically, meaning it is more secure and better protected
- that the Chromebooks themselves are much faster than the previous devices the Academy were using.

But it has not all been plain sailing, and adapting to the change – like everything new – takes a period of adjustment. That said, the transition has proved to be relatively seamless – so far.

"Editing tools on different documents has taken me a while to get my head around personally. However, this situation has allowed me more time to use such features, as well as to develop our skills as a staff team."

Jacqui Thompson, Principal

The Transformation

[Research undertaken by RM prior to the Coronavirus outbreak](#) suggested that many teachers were reluctant to adopt more technology within schools. Staff at The Compass Academy agree that this was the case pre-Covid-19, but feel that as a result of the imposed situation, they have become increasingly reliant on this technology and will undoubtedly have 'up skilled' as a result, and in turn be more confident in using it in the future.

"I believe that staff now realise the importance of technology and have become reliant upon it as the only means to be able to complete their daily tasks."

Jacqui Thompson, Principal



For the Compass Academy, they have only touched the surface of Remote Learning, and have selected RM as their implementation partner in the new [DfE scheme to provide technology support for children and schools](#). This – they hope – will allow them to extend their capability, and provide them with the extra support they need to build staff confidence further, and permit them to reach more students who are currently unable to benefit from this opportunity.

The Lessons Learnt

- 1. Organise classrooms (within Google Classroom) into different themes** to help structure and organise the work. Specific pupils may be allocated access rights to only certain classrooms to allow for differentiation/access to different work.
- 2. Make it simple for pupils.** Be mindful when setting tasks online to provide the answers and contain tasks as much as possible within one document so that pupils do not have to open and close different tabs.
- 3. Select a reliable partner.** The Compass Academy had already selected RM as their technology provider before the shutdown, and this proved invaluable – in providing access rights to different features e.g. Google Meet/video access remotely, updating pupil passwords/logins, as well as pushing out applications to all users.

"RM have been extremely accessible in providing support. Following the 'log' of a call, a response is virtually instantaneous and matters are always resolved promptly."

Jacqui Thompson, Principal

The benefit from this being that the Academy has been able to continue to support pupils' learning/additional needs without any further delay.

- 4. "Have a go".** Using online platforms – like Google Classroom – are a lot easier than you may first have thought.

The Legacy

The Compass Academy are confident that there will be a lasting legacy from the Coronavirus shutdown – not least in terms of how technology is seen and used within an education environment.

"I believe that incorporating more online/home learning opportunities will undoubtedly become established in the post-Covid world, with staff more willing to engage in technology and incorporate online learning into their lessons."

Jacqui Thompson, Principal

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