



# Putting MS Teams at the centre of Remote Learning for a Primary School in the West Midlands – Maidensbridge Primary

## The Background

Maidensbridge is a small, friendly and caring school with committed and hardworking staff, very supportive parents and dedicated governors. Based in Wallheath, Kingswinford, to the west of Dudley in the West Midlands, Maidensbridge Primary is a one-form entry school of just over 200 children, aged between 4 and 11 years of age. Based on area statistics, the catchment has a higher rate of home ownership than the national average, suggesting it is a relatively affluent area.

The school appointed RM as their technology provider in 1999, as a part of the Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) contract. RM have provided their managed service ever since, supporting the school's hardware and software – including RM Integris (MIS), RM Unify (Identity Management) and Office 365. There is a close working relationship between the school's Senior Leadership Team, the DGfL, and their RM Technology Account Manager to make sensible strategic decisions affecting the future of the school.

## The Challenge

Prior to the Coronavirus outbreak, staff at Maidensbridge were using email and USB pens, with the more technically savvy ones accessing and saving documents to their OneDrive's. They also had CC4Access to operate their server resources remotely. They had yet to get started with Microsoft Teams, although they had the basic system in place, as a direct result of a Strategy and Vision meeting that RM organised for the school. This highlighted the benefits of using MS Teams and they were about to commence staff training, showing how to use it and what it could be used for, when the Prime Minister announced that most schools were closing from 20th March 2020.

## The Response

With barely two 2 days' notice, the school set about resetting passwords for children, and printing log-in cards for them to take home so that they could access RM Unify from home.

Now was the time when they wished that they were further towards implementing MS Teams across the whole school, so that is exactly what they did – in double quick time.

**"It seems ironic, but to set up MS Teams for the school, I had to meet with my RM Account Manager virtually using MS Teams – my very first time on the system, having never used it before. Together he showed me how to add the Teams Tiles to RM Unify for all users, so that the children and staff could access from home."**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead



They then set up separate Year Group Teams for each year group and added all the children into it. All staff were given a quick briefing on how to access MS Teams, so that this could be shown to the children in the classroom. A user guide – with screenshots and links – was quickly produced, to send home to parents so they could see how to access MS Teams at home.

**“The children have really valued seeing their teachers’ faces and hearing their voices in this very strange time for them and for us. We would have never thought this possible only a few weeks beforehand.”**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead



The school also remained open throughout the crisis – for both Key Worker and vulnerable children – staying open through the school and Bank Holidays, supporting up to 10 children each day.

As expected, this has been challenging and stressful as technology always seems to throw out challenges, but it has also been exciting and a fantastic experience for everyone involved.

**“Most children are quick to adopt new technologies, so as soon as they knew what their log-in details were, many were away – getting on to MS Teams and begin learning straight away. It has been particularly rewarding to see how well the children are accessing the technology and how often they are using it.”**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead

The need for careful safeguarding considerations was paramount in what the school did. Ensuring that the systems that the children accessed – and the way they did so – had to be both safe and appropriate for both children and staff. As an example the school insisted on there being two members of staff in all video calls with groups of children, as well as gaining parental consent to communicating with their children in this way.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle to overcome was not being able to see the children all the time, and not being able to explain things face-to-face. Working constantly from a computer/iPad/laptop can be tiring, and technology can sometimes play up. But perhaps the biggest barrier was the variety of devices students were using, as the MS Teams experience does differ slightly depending on the platform – some use the MS Teams app, others get to it via RM Unify – both carrying slightly different features.

That said, the whole school have shown tremendous focus and commitment – going from no staff or learners set up for remote learning, to having all staff and the majority of learners on MS Teams within days, using it for all classes in the school.

**"We have children in both year 3 and year 6, and both girls have enjoyed being able to use MS Teams. I asked what they thought of the app and their reply was "I've liked how I can see my friends and commenting on other people's work."**

**Zoe Savage**, Parent



One aspect the school would call out, is the role that RM played at their side. In answering emails and calls on a wide range of questions and queries, to showing how things work on MS Teams via virtual meetings – all of which has helped to further the school's knowledge.

**"RM's support has been amazing. From quick and efficient responses to questions we have had about using MS Teams, they have focused on ensuring our technology has worked remotely, whilst also helping us prepare for when the children return to school."**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead

## Adapting to a new normal

[Research undertaken by RM prior to the Coronavirus outbreak](#) suggested that many teachers were historically reluctant to adopt more technology within schools. Maidensbridge Primary School feel this was probably true for them too, but – by being thrown in at the deep end – they have come out the other side much the wiser.

**"Staff and children are so much more confident in using this new technology – simply because they have had to be – they had no choice. I am sure teachers will now be less reliant on printing things out for children/parents to send home."**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead



There is also a genuine feeling that because teachers have had to practise their technology skills during this period, they will be much more ready and open to adapt to other technologies and new pieces of software that the school may introduce in the future.

**"A very strong school/home learning relationship has been built."**

Rachael Fellows, Computing Lead



## The Lessons Learnt

1. **Just go for it.** Do not keep putting it off – embrace the new technology and do not be afraid to ask for help, support and advice from others. Being thrown in at the deep end was the best lesson ever because the school had no other choice – they had to move fast.

**"Believe in yourself and the staff at your school."**

Rachael Fellows, Computing Lead

2. **Teamwork.** You can't do it all on your own. Without the support from colleagues, it wouldn't have been possible, but there are more people offering to help than you think – other teachers, school governors, neighbouring schools, your technology partner etc.

**"We have had very few issues but the ones we have had, we have been able to resolve quickly with the support of others – not least RM."**

Rachael Fellows, Computing Lead



3. **Support from parents and carers.** Both parties have been particularly supportive in all of this – helping to encourage, engage and support their child in their learning.

**"As parents we have found it a useful way to keep in touch with the class teacher, the weekly video calls have been highly anticipated and thoroughly enjoyed. The class message board has been good for the children to share news and opinions, they enjoy praising each other and the feedback between the children has been very positive, not to mention full of emojis."**

Zoe Savage, Parent

4. **Video.** Making video calls with classes has really increased usage, with improved pupil/parent engagement as a result.

- 5. Reward and recognition.** The school's new Headteacher sought to "gamify" the use of the technology by sending home "online star of the week" certificates for children nominated by their class teachers, which has helped improve usage and confidence week on week.
- 6. Focused support.** The reporting feature in MS Teams has allowed the school to target pupils that may not have engaged as much as their teacher would have liked, so that they can identify if there is anything more they can do to help.
- 7. Better communication and collaboration.** MS Teams is great for school meetings, and staff have quickly picked up on using it in this way, improving school communication and collaboration at this difficult time. Staff and children have both worked hard and shown real resilience in utilising a new learning platform that has ensured they continue to receive their education.
- 8. Cascade learning.** The Computing Lead was taught by her RM Account Manager how to undertake MS Teams calls/meetings and how to share their screen. She then set up a meeting of her own with other staff and Teachers, to show them, so they were able to carry out weekly calls with their classes. Very quickly everyone was on board.

## The Legacy

There is a view that schools will now look at things differently. Personal perceptions will change, priorities will be different and things will no longer be taken for granted in ways they once were.

Many schools who have embraced the technology during this time feel they will continue to use it in the future – whether that is MS Teams or something similar. Using it to set projects, to send home weekly homework, weekly spellings and to generally make any announcements of anything fun that might be happening within their Year group or reminders to children.

**"On the whole I would say this has been a positive, useful tool in this most unusual of times."**

**Zoe Savage, Parent**



Technology has become much more important within schools. Senior Leadership Teams need to assess the devices they use themselves, to ensure it can do all that they need. They also need to consider how students from less affluent backgrounds can still access the same remote learning resources as others in their school.

**"While setting up homeschooling activities, it has been useful to have a bank of activities there to download (we are very grateful for the teachers in setting this up on Sundays). We would love this feature to continue after lockdown, possibly with weekly homework being available here."**

**Zoe Savage, Parent**

**“Post Covid, children will be more independent in their own learning online and they will have increased confidence in using computers at school. They will have increased resilience in not giving up and they will persevere if things don’t work first time.”**

**Rachael Fellows**, Computing Lead

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