



How a small Junior School in Surrey benefitted from the Government scheme to deliver high quality online learning for their pupils

RM™



The Background

St Jude's Church of England Junior School is a two-form entry Junior School in the relatively large village of Englefield Green, approximately 20 miles west of central London. The school has a strong vision centred around Learning, Responsibility and Happiness, which permeates all parts of the school environment. With almost 250 pupils, St Jude's caters for a wide catchment of students, from both social housing and high-end private dwellings.

Recognising the importance of technology in the delivery of their goals, the school has worked with RM – as its IT partner – for over 13 years – looking to RM to provide everything from the school's identity management system (RM Unify) to their broadband and connectivity.

The Challenge

The school had had a solid technology focus for many years and had been talking about the benefits of “the cloud” long before the Covid-19 virus hit in March 2020. Both admin staff and some teachers were able to access some school systems remotely (via Logmein and then Splashtop), but that was as far as they had got. They still had on-premise servers for their files and systems and had not contemplated anything such as Remote Learning, when the Prime Minister announced that schools would be closing to all but the vulnerable and children of key workers from the end of March.

The Response

As a resourceful school, St Jude's quickly looked at what was possible during those early weeks of lockdown and were soon posting homework for pupils on their website, which could be downloaded and worked on at home.

“It was a steep learning curve for us all – we just had to adapt our ways of working”.

Emily Stanton, Deputy Head/SENCo



Teachers were able to plan work that children could carry out at home, and the strong relationships that they had with parents meant that they knew which pupils needed further support and/or printed work delivered by hand.

That said, it was not all plain sailing, and being unable to directly support pupils with their learning was perhaps the biggest hurdle the school faced. Even when classes returned – like many schools – they struggled with the ever-changing central guidance, the constant refreshing of risk assessments and the increasing level of cleaning everywhere. To compound matters, they had to cope with self-isolating individual year groups and classes as pupils and teachers awaited Covid tests etc.

What was clear – however – was that the virus was not going away anytime soon, and the school knew that they needed to provide more face-to-face teaching and a consistent platform for sharing and giving feedback on class work. As such, they discussed their options with their IT partner, RM.

RM made them aware of a [new scheme that the Department for Education launched](#) in mid-April 2020 – offering schools fully-funded support for one of two free-to-use digital education platforms. The school applied almost immediately, finding the process very straight forward, selecting RM as their implementation partner, and Microsoft Teams as their platform.

“We were looking for something that would enable us to deliver better online teaching for our children, and we have been delighted with MS Teams. It has been really effective – all staff members have quickly learnt how to use it, especially with our 3 isolating year groups. Parental feedback so far has been positive and the quality of work from pupils has been better than we had seen previously”.

Emily Stanton, Deputy Head/SENDCo

Whilst the process to sign up was relatively straight-forward, the school acknowledge that having a technology partner to help them, was invaluable.

“RM were great at assisting us in applying for the DfE funding, in helping us understand the process, and all the administration that went with it. Whilst it wasn’t hard, having them there took some of the pressure off us”.

Caroline Edney, School Business Manager

Whilst there is evidence that many schools remain reticent about a greater use of technology in the classroom ([RM did a survey at the start of the year that highlighted this as a hurdle in many schools](#)), this is not the case at St Jude’s.

“Our teachers have always been quite willing to try new ideas, and they have all been much more confident in using technology since lockdown has made this is a necessity”.

Emily Stanton, Deputy Head/SENDCo



The Lessons Learnt

- 1. Be Brave!** This was a new experience for everyone, but taking small, yet decisive steps was the only way to get through of it. Moving to Remote Learning was daunting for many people, but those who have made the leap have not looked back.
- 2. Practise and preparation.** Whilst no-one could have foreseen what happened, taking a few preparatory steps makes a big difference down the track. As an example, ensuring that all children have their emails set up, and have practised logging in to MS Teams – perhaps by setting homework through it – will make Remote Learning so much easier when it is needed.
- 3. Ask for help.** In the same way, no-one could really prepare for this period, but by having people on hand who have experience from working with other schools, have people they can call upon when they don't know, and have access to all the experts within Microsoft and beyond, takes a lot of pressure off you – especially if you are a small Junior School in rural Surrey. This freed up the staff at St Jude's to focus on what they do best – teaching.

The Legacy

The pandemic has created many heroes in this country – in the NHS and in vital sectors such as Education. It has also moved us forwards at a pace that few could have envisaged beforehand. It would therefore be very sad if we regress in any of these areas or forget the lessons we have learnt.

“I would like to think that we will continue to use this technology for homework and setting work for those unable to be at school. Teachers and pupils now have the confidence to use it, and I am hopeful we can build on that – not least in moving more things into the cloud”.

Caroline Edney, School Business Manager

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