



How a small Primary School in rural Essex benefited from the DfE scheme to introduce Microsoft Teams in order to continue to teach their pupils remotely during lockdown.

The Background

Clavering Primary School is a village school built in 1973 to serve the needs of the local community, not far from Saffron Walden in Essex. With a tradition of being a caring and friendly environment for children – an ethos that stems from the high calibre and commitment of staff and governors – the school currently serves around 200 pupils, aged from 4 to 11 years of age. Clavering School is part of a cluster group with other local schools, attracting a number of pupils from villages outside its priority area.

The school have been working with RM for technology support for a number of years – following the decision to move their Management Information System from SIMS to RM's cloud-based MIS – RM Integris – 10 years ago; adding RM's finance system (aptly known as RM Finance!) 5 years later.

Responding to the challenge

Like most schools, Clavering Primary remained open from the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, physically supporting between 1 and over 50 children of key workers and vulnerable students on site each day – as well as the rest of the school, virtually, via remote learning.

At the start of the outbreak, whilst the school had not yet moved to the cloud, their administrative team were able to access most of their systems remotely; and teachers used ParentMail and their website as a way to send out lessons and classwork to pupils (and their parents) who were no longer able to come into school.

Shortly after lockdown, the [DfE announced a scheme](#) whereby the Government would fund expert technical support for schools to set up an accredited digital education platform. In the case of Clavering, this was something that their RM Account Manager brought to their attention, as a way to go beyond what they were currently doing, once it became clear that remote learning would be a necessity for some time to come.

Clavering Primary applied for the DfE scheme at the end of April, and little more than a month later, they were up and running with Microsoft Teams – organising classes online, distributing and receiving assignments, as well as holding virtual face-to-face conversations with pupils, their parents, fellow teachers, and even full Governor meetings.

"Signing up for the scheme was very easy, and whilst we had a few problems at first, RM were there to help us address them, trialling the system fully before go-live. I knew a remote learning platform like Microsoft Teams would be beneficial to the school, but it has exceeded all my expectations"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant

Practical implications of remote learning

Whilst no-one could have planned for what subsequently happened, Clavering Primary feel that their teachers, parents and governors embraced what was required, from the very beginning.

"A central belief within the school is that we will get more if all parties – children, parents, staff, governors, our community and responsible authority – collaborate to support the process of learning. We took this same principle into how we responded to the Coronavirus lockdown"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant

Clearly the school had to work through what they needed to do, but once they had confirmed the order of how it was going to work, they feel they took it all in their stride.

"Initially it was a daunting task, but as we started to roll it out, it did get easier"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant



The benefits

This new way of teaching has meant that some people's roles within the school have had to change and evolve – for example, when users (whether pupils, parents or teachers) had problems, they turned to the admin team for help in solving them. But it also brought new benefits in the way that people look at technology.

"One benefit has been that everyone has re-appraised the role that technology can play within a school, and how valuable it can be for us all"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant



This is just the tip of the iceberg. Once a school has embarked on a technology transformation, it opens doors to new ways of working.

"As a secure platform, our teachers are all fully comfortable using it to dispatch end of year school reports"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant

The Lessons Learnt

- 1. Go For It!** Even though Clavering is a small Primary School, the benefits have been immense, and whilst the DfE continue to fund this scheme, it really will make a difference to all schools – large and small, rural and urban.
- 2. Trial it first.** Change is always difficult, but Clavering benefited from trialling the new system with a small group of teachers and parents first. This enabled them to understand how it worked, and what they needed to do to train their new users.
- 3. Share the tasks.** This was new to everyone, so it made sense to bring everyone in on the solution, and allocate tasks accordingly – it was too much – and too all-encompassing – for one person.
- 4. Find a partner.** Clavering already had a technology partner in RM, and as they soon realised, having someone on hand who had experience of these systems made all the difference.

"We really could not have done it without RM at our side"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant



The Legacy

Whilst no-one knows what schools will be like in the future, Clavering – like many schools who have taken this leap into remote learning and a more technology-enabled establishment – feel strongly that their staff will embrace this new technology, and build upon it in the future.

"Should we be faced with another lockdown, we would immediately instigate remote learning – we have the technology, we have the skills and we know that it works. Better still, we will look to how we can include this within our standard teaching model"

Heather Smith, Administrative Assistant

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