

A group of four diverse young children are gathered around a laptop. On the left, a young girl with dark skin and braided hair looks intently at the screen. Next to her, a young boy with dark skin and a yellow shirt is also looking. In the center, a young girl with dark skin and a white shirt looks at the screen with a focused expression. On the right, a young girl with light skin and blonde hair, wearing a pink top, is smiling broadly. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a stone wall.

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# Lessons from Lockdown

# Introduction

The Education sector has gone above and beyond to provide their pupils with the education they deserve. For pupils who were unable to get to school, the school came to them, by making lessons virtual; but it has not been without its challenges. Not surprisingly, many schools were unprepared for the sudden closure caused by the pandemic.

Many of us have been in awe at the resourcefulness of how schools have responded. It was interesting, however, to see how some school leadership teams and their staff used this time to fully exploit their technology and take advantage of the interruption to businesses as usual, to instigate or accelerate change.

Seeking not only to react to the enormous challenges they suddenly faced, these schools also used this situation as a catalyst to strengthen resilience, make overarching improvements and set themselves up for long term success.

This group can consistently deliver enhanced learning experiences for their pupils. As a school community, their culture has evolved to seek continual success for staff, pupils and parents alike. These schools have achieved a position of strategic advantage.

## Points worth considering

If you haven't already had the opportunity, now is the perfect time to reflect on the experiences of 2020-21, and assess your position. If your school was a pupil, what would your end of year report look like? What are the highlights, the gems? Where have you excelled and what needs further improvement?

**“In technology terms we have probably leapt forward further in five weeks than what we could have achieved without the virus in two years. Hopefully, the benefits from some of these new ways of working will become everyday practice.”**

Trevor Taylor, Chief Operating Officer

- Collaborative working
- Work Life Balance
- Have your staff embraced and adapted well to recent changes and any resulting cultural shift?
- Importance of a growth mindset
- Have you reviewed your technology infrastructure recently?
- There will never be a 'perfect' time to introduce the technologies you need, but the best time could well be right now.
- Are you losing time and money by not utilising the integrated software you already own?

# Collaborative working

Your school community has had to develop new skills and created their own methods to ensure that students remained engaged and continued to make progress.

**“The Lockdown period made people realise the fundamental role that technology can play in empowering, engaging, supporting, collaborating and enhancing teaching and learning.”**

Academy Trust, Stoke on Trent

- Have you seen an increase in collaborative working – the sharing of ideas and best practice amongst your staff?
- Do you understand the extent to which these tools will allow you to collaborate? Are you exploiting all the functionality available to you?
- Have you and your staff found the time to share and capture these gems - to explore how these new practices can be embedded in your everyday ways of working?
- Have you and your staff decided on an approach to ensure that you continue to innovate?
- Has your school set up a working party to help collate and share best working practice across your establishment?
- Teachers are increasingly needing to create, incorporate and curate multi-media content from several sources in their lesson. Is this now becoming too overwhelming and time consuming for your staff?



## Hints and tips

There are tools that will help you to collaborate, and you may not realise you already have a few of them! As one school said, **“We made the shift from, how do we, to how can we?”**

- Many hands make light work. Today, there are free-of-charge solutions which make collaborative lesson planning and content creation remarkably simple and effective. Some schools we work with operate in larger teams to design lessons. This significantly reduces the amount of time required to produce content - returning valuable time back to teachers, to be spent in other areas.

**“We knew that parents were key stakeholders, and I am proud to say that liaising with parents has been fundamental to get us to this position. Our next step is to ensure parents can access email summaries to continue to monitor their child’s work in Google Classroom and access an array of materials including self-help videos via the website.”**

Becky Newton, Lead Practitioner

- Moving lesson content and plans into a central online store means that staff do not need to reinvent the wheel. In subsequent years they can concentrate on fine tuning and augmenting existing content.
- Stored online lesson content can also be used as part of a ‘catch-up’ scheme, to support students during holidays, and also enable parents to be involved. For example, this approach is extremely useful for key year groups as they prepare for assessments and exams. More generally, pupils can use the content library to catch-up with missed lessons.

**“While setting up home-schooling activities, it has been useful to have a bank of activities there to download. We would love this feature to continue after lockdown, possibly with weekly homework being available here.”**

Zoe Savage, Parent

- It is difficult to find ‘the right time’ for everyone to join a staff meeting. By creating a virtual staff room and recording the briefings, you can keep everyone up to date and working together.



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# Work-Life Balance

Have you recognised a change in work-life balance? If no, is it important to you?

**“My biggest personal hope is that technology and cloud-based systems can help us make efficiencies and give us back some of the work-life balance we need.”**

Tracey Parsons, School Business Manager

Being able to offer teachers a better work-life balance has never been more important. Staff and pupil wellbeing is rarely out of the headlines. Offering teachers the opportunity to reduce their administrative workload and enabling them to focus on teaching, means you can attract and retain talented staff, whilst improving pupil outcomes.

**“Sometimes I feel like Rick Wakeman – one computer to the left of me, another to the right of me, and here I am – all whilst stood at the kitchen table.”**

Paul Hamilton, Director of Operations

- Are your staff able to seamlessly transition their work between school and home? Providing you and your staff with the opportunity to work effectively in both environments, brings a welcome degree of lifestyle flexibility.
- Are your staff able to use the same services, software, and data wherever they are, and on any device?
- Are you confident that your data is secure, and your staff and pupils can operate safely online?
- In your quest to make content more accessible, are you leaving gaps in your security? Alternatively, is content becoming inaccessible due to overzealous security measures? Have you struck the right balance?
- Are your staff frustrated with multiple log-ins and having to remember different passwords - taking up valuable time?
- Do your staff have access to technical and software support when they need it e.g., so they remain in the classroom and minimise lesson disruption?



## Hints and tips

- Having a joined-up, secure, cloud-based solution, will enable staff to be more productive and work flexibly.

**“Technology will help us make life easier for teachers. It was not so long ago that we were all talking about the burdens from excessive teacher workloads. With some of the technology we now have we are able to give them a much better work-life balance, helping reduce the time spent on creating and sharing lesson plans, on setting work, and on marking what comes back.”**

Eliza Hollis, Executive Head

- Allocating lesson plans and content to pupils via an assignment tool allows the staff to spend more one-to-one time with students during the lesson.
- Getting all the students logged on and using the same piece of software or work can cost valuable time when using multiple passwords. Single sign-in solutions mean fast access and help keep passwords secure.
- A solution provider that gives your staff support outside the normal teaching hours means their problems could be resolved on the same day, rather than having to wait until they are back in school.
- Marking is every teacher’s bane. With, for example, Quizzes, in Google Workspace, you can set your students quick assessment quizzes that mark themselves. You can view graphical reports to see which areas students struggled with, as a guide of where to focus for catch-up work.



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# Have your staff embraced and adapted well to recent changes and any resulting cultural shift?

**“Don’t be scared to embrace technology and reach out to other schools/Trusts for support. Technology is crucial in the future of education, and now is the time to embrace it.”**

Callum Corrigan, Beacon Hill Academy

Staff adapt to change at differing rates. To continue to build on and exploit new working, teaching, and learning practices you need buy-in and engagement from everyone.

- Have you considered the personal impact to users?
- Has the school implemented a training program to help make staff aware of what is possible and how they can make best use of the software tools and features in the classroom and office?
- Have you reviewed skills gaps?
- Have you been pleasantly surprised at how well staff have adapted to hybrid teaching? Even those you may have pinned as resistant to change may have risen up to the challenge. This should give you confidence to embrace further change as needed.



## Hints and tips

**“I have no doubt that incorporating more online and home learning opportunities will become established in the post-Covid world, with staff more willing to engage in technology and incorporate more online learning into their lessons.”**

Jacqui Thompson, Principal

- Understanding training needs often breaks down reticence to adopt new software and working practices.
- Just like students, we all learn in various ways, audio, visual and kinesthetic. Tools available in the online platforms can offer staff different ways to learn and embed the new practices.

- By understanding how changes will assist them in their role, you will help to sell the benefits to your staff – it sounds obvious, but it does not always happen. “What’s in it for me?” is an important question that needs answering for everyone.
- Every staff member will be at a different starting point on the knowledge journey. It’s key to understand everyone’s current skill level by running a quick assessment, to identify what training is most appropriate to their needs.



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# Importance of a growth mindset

Training is as important as your selection of technology. Any technology you invest in will be ineffective if staff do not receive the right level of training. It is a well-known fact, that unless what has been learnt on a training course is then used daily, up to 70% of what has been experienced will be forgotten.

**“Unless we provide adequate support and training and move forward decisively, with a clear plan and direction, we will always be faced with some levels of resistance.”**

Tracey Parsons, School Business Manager

- Did your last technical project include staff training?
- Do you struggle to fit all the training your staff need into your allotted training days?
- Do you find time to revisit training in your school calendar?
- Do your staff have the confidence to implement new tools and features in the classroom?
- Do you find staff quickly reverting to their old ways, or not making the most of the new tools and features they have been supplied with, thus limiting the impact of your investment?



## Hints and tips

- Having ongoing support and short, frequent training sessions can ensure your investment in technology is used effectively.
- In a busy school environment, finding the right person to answer a specific question can be difficult. Providing self-service online training will go a long way to ensuring your staff will continue to engage with new ways of working and feel confident using new software and tools.
- Online training acts as a resource for new starters and enables teachers to learn and revisit at their own pace, when and where they choose.
- If your staff are still stuck, having an internal or external expert available to answer those complicated (or sometimes even simple) questions, is invaluable.
- Why not include self-paced adaptive training in bite sized video formats, which staff can access when it's convenient to them. This brings them personal and professional development, and arms them with the skills they need to embrace this better way of working.

# Have you reviewed your technology infrastructure recently?

- Whether you have made a recent technology investment or not, are you getting the most out of it? Is it simply running, or is it flying?
- Tell-tale signs that you need an expert to assess what you have in place today and whether it will enable you to achieve future goals:
  - Do you experience connection Black Spots around the school?
  - Are connections slow at certain times of the day?
  - Are you paying for a large internet connection, but staff complain about slow access to systems and resources?
  - How do you know whether your broadband gives you the capacity you need to really deliver outstanding teaching?
  - Do user logins take a long time to connect?
- Can your current technology support enhanced ways of working?



## Hints and tips

- Having devices and a wireless solution where 'it simply works' gives staff, and especially teachers, the confidence to go outside their comfort zones and not spend time just trying to get students 'on the same page'.
- Be honest and open with your school community about upcoming technology changes. Updating everyone about what you are doing, and what the result will be for education within your school. People are more likely to be supportive if they feel part of the journey.
- Review what your wireless solution offers, look for features like airtime fairness and mesh technology. This means that those closest to the access point are not the only ones to get the best signal and everyone can enjoy the same experience.
- Look at where you don't have access. Can outside spaces have access added, so you can become more flexible with how and where lessons are delivered or work is done? For example, there is no reason why the PE department should not be able to get the most out of the IT systems.

# There will never be a ‘perfect’ time to introduce the technologies you need, but the best time could well be right now.

**“I think that because teachers have had to practice their technology skills during this time, they will more readily adopt other technology and software that we introduce in the future.”**

Harj Mahey, Assistant Principal

- There will always be some disruption when implementing anything new.
- Managing change is a critical skill: sharing what is changing; explaining the reasons behind change; describing and communicating the scenarios if there is no change, and making it clear to stakeholders what’s in it for them. Just because change is challenging doesn’t mean you shouldn’t make it. Waiting until you have no choice but to change can mean a rushed decision, which might not be the right one.



## Hints and tips

- Consider what will cause more disruption in the long-term – transitioning to what you need now or sticking with outdated technology that will be increasingly clunky and slow in the future?
- You may already be part of the way there. The longer you keep your hybrid systems (part server, part cloud), the more work it will take to ultimately transition systems and users to off-site, cloud solutions.
- Physical technology ages. Whether you buy a whole new system outright, or replace it bit by bit, you will eventually end up with outdated systems. By shifting to a model with far less physical technology onsite, relying on always-up-to-date cloud systems and utilising kit refresh schemes, you will have ever-ready technology that will never fall behind future technological developments.
- Today, transitioning to a new infrastructure doesn’t need to result in major disruption.

# Are you losing time and money by not utilising the integrated software you already own?

Cloud platforms now come with several industry standard tools which have a number of uses in the Education sector.

- Have you recently audited what software and tools you are paying for and how they are being used by your staff and pupils? Are you paying for products that are no longer required?
- Whether you are a Microsoft or Google establishment these powerhouses of the IT world have developed efficiencies to make your life easier. Have you taken the time to explore the benefits?
- Are you still using email to communicate everything? Do you know how many of your staff read emails, and how often?



## Hints and tips

**“Technology enables us to push our gifted children and to look out those pupils who need more support, such as those with slight visual impairments. It really does level up the playing field.”**

**Dan Lister**, Chair of Governors

- The Immersive Reader in Office 365 or the In-screen Reader available in Google can both be used in several ways to help pupils, especially those with special educational needs.
  - For example, with Foreign Language studies – learners can read or dictate in multiple languages, helping pupils practice.
  - Comprehension skills can be tested using self-marking quizzes, to monitor pupil progress.
  - Pupils can dictate notes for exams, saving considerable preparation time.

- Parents' Evenings - teachers and parents alike have embraced virtual Parents' Evenings. Conversations are kept to time and are not overheard by others, so they remain confidential. They are convenient for those participating, limiting the need for travel and long evenings at school. They can also be recorded for parents who are unable to make the appointment. Additionally, parents and teachers can re-watch appointments later; enabling both parties to focus on their conversation and not be distracted by making notes.

**“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.”**

**Zoe Savage, Parent**



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## Who are RM?

With a heritage dating back 48 years, RM supports thousands of schools, teachers and pupils across the globe – from pre-school to higher education – including examination boards, central governments and other professional institutions. Through our innovative use of existing and emerging technologies we have one purpose – to enrich the lives of learners.

Specialising in the education sector, we can add a huge breadth of expertise and market insight to your unique knowledge of what your school community needs to give you the best results.

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