

# SHAPING YOUR SCHOOL'S DIGITAL FUTURE

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## Shaping Your School's Digital Future



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**W**hat does a school built for the digital world look like? It is where pedagogy, experience and outcomes come first. It is where education technology (edtech) is not a discussion but an integral part of the school day — and is only used when appropriate, rather than being forced into every class or subject. Teachers have the confidence to use existing tools and are not afraid to try new ones to enrich learning and achieve their pedagogical goals. It is where students are taught and encouraged to be confident digital citizens, and where e-safety is at the heart of any technology decisions.

In a digital school, middle leaders are trusted, empowered and supported to innovate with technology — and, crucially, IT managers are at the heart of the digital discussions, not just simply informed of meeting outcomes. Everyone works together on their shared objective of using edtech in an impactful, effective and productive way — and to reduce the digital divide.

### **Preparation pays off**

So, how do you get your school to this point? With remote learning now a reality, the more digitally prepared your school is, the more your students (and teachers) will benefit from the carefully considered technology that has been trialed, evaluated and selected for its pedagogical merits — and, importantly, ease of use.

Forming a cohesive and inclusive digital strategy for your school or district is the key — and measuring the impact of all the elements is a fundamental part. Keep in mind, though, that edtech is not the solution to everything; it is the empowerer that supports all key areas of the school and underpins and enhances great teaching and learning.

Edtech projects rarely are effective if all you want to do is add to what you already have, so sometimes you need to look back to move forward. It is important to reflect on what has worked well for your school so far, noting what initiatives have been successful and have subsequently become embedded.

### **Knowledge is power**

Being informed and in control of all the technologies, devices and software your school owns or subscribes to (and knowing where they are all located) is a good base to work from as you begin to form your digital strategy. Most importantly, you will need to take stock of your school's infrastructure and decide whether it has the capacity to run whatever future technologies you choose to implement and, if not, factor into your budget the improvements required. After all, there is no point in trying to implement ambitious edtech plans if, at some point, the foundations will crumble beneath them.

The more you are informed about what you have (and also what is not being used), the more you will be able to save and spend effectively, as well as provide the flexibility to do more of what works well.

### **Confidence is your launchpad**

A digital school can only be successful if everyone is confident using technology, and knowing the digital strengths and weaknesses of your staff and students is critical to ensure everyone can interact with it in a frictionless way.

Confidence is the key to edtech becoming embedded in the classroom (and across the school), and therefore, it is important that schools invest time into providing regular, informative professional development sessions to help teachers move from survival mode through to mastery. It is only with this innate familiarity that they will be able to innovate and be creative in its use. Including your IT team in these training sessions is also valuable. This way, they will not just understand exactly how the curriculum apps function but will also learn what the teachers' pedagogical aims are, which could help with collaboration further down the line.

### **Team talk**

Working together on a whole-school digital strategy can only happen successfully if everyone is able to collaborate on an equal footing. Everyone's input is valid and plays its part. Every segment of the school needs to be

involved — from teachers and students, parents, the IT team and school administrators to leaders with responsibilities for finance, data privacy, e-safety and more — and your digital goals will need to consider them all.

It is worth enhancing your school's communications with tools that will help achieve this wide reach, for example, using solutions like Teams, Google Meet or classroom.cloud (my company's software) across the school or district makes communication quick and easy for everyone. Developing your school-to-home communications using dedicated tools and/or social media is also important and can contribute to greater engagement and participation, as well as broader community cohesion.

A key part of effective team building is to provide support, which is particularly important for those with the steepest learning curves to overcome. I have seen schools have real success with "champions" — people who are experts in their field and are prepared to mentor, support and encourage others to get to where they need to be.

### **Making it work**

If you aim to progress at a reasonable pace, you are more likely to achieve success than by doing too much at one time, and measuring the impact of what you are doing (from everyone's perspective) is essential. Regular checkpoint meetings will keep you informed and on track, because if something is not going as planned (and this is only to be expected in such a complex journey), you will be alerted early in the process so you can make the appropriate decisions.

In a school with an inclusive culture, if something is not going well, staff will feel comfortable saying so and, most importantly, will not be criticized for that being the case. Look at things together, work out the reasons, and do not be afraid to try a different route to realize your strategy — it's all about achieving what works for you in your context. On the other hand, when something is working well, be sure to celebrate this success with an acknowledgement of your combined efforts!