



How a rural Primary School has used Google Classroom to become a beacon for Blended Learning for the whole of Norfolk.

The Background

Thomas Bullock CE Primary Academy is a mixed Primary School serving pupils aged 4 to 11 in the beautiful rural Norfolk countryside, mid-way between Norwich, Swaffham and King's Lynn. With almost 200 children, the school prides itself in being small enough to see all pupils as individuals encouraging them to 'Let their light shine' and be their best in everything they do. This is helped by the creative environment within which they are situated – a vast, spacious outdoor and internal space – with a pond, forest, farm and new play area – coupled with a progressive leadership team.

They only recently started working with RM – in April 2020 – when they selected RM to support them as part of [the Department for Education scheme to install a remote learning platform](#). The school selected Google Classroom, and RM got busy installing RM Unify as their central technology hub, before rolling out Google Classroom to staff and pupils.

The Challenge

When the Government decided at the end of March 2020 that schools would need to close their gates to all but vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers, Thomas Bullock Primary – like many schools in this country – had virtually no Remote Learning capability in place. The closest they had was to use their website as a way to communicate (privately) with parents.

That said – in line with the school's underlying commitment to creativity – they had been technology enthusiasts from the start, and were building the confidence to go further. They had in place a structure that used the two technology platforms, Purple Mash and ClassDojo, which they used to communicate within the school. Whilst this gave them some functionality they wanted a more consistent approach across the whole school. As such, when the Government announced that they would be willing to fund a more robust remote learning platform, the school jumped at the chance.

"It has gone very well. Our children enjoy using Google Classroom, their parents have got engaged and love it, and feedback from all of our staff has been very positive."

Shannon O'Sullivan, Headteacher



The biggest challenges were in responding to the uncertainty that swept the country at the start of the pandemic – with teachers forced to move to a model where they had to prepare content that would work online, and then conduct their lessons from home – which took some time to get used to. That said, everyone in the school responded to the challenge, and came together as one.

The Response

Applying for the DfE funded scheme proved very easy.

"It took us 3 minutes to apply on the website, and within 24 hours we had RM on the phone following up. I was amazed."

Shannon O'Sullivan, Headteacher

Everyone in the school made time to undertake the necessary training from their RM Account Manager – something that proved beneficial as they had to cascade the instructions to pupils and to their parents. The school made it clear to RM that they did not want to go live until all the training had been done, but all in all, the timetable worked well – they timed it to coincide with returning from Half Term (of the Summer Term), which gave RM the time to transfer all of their emails onto the new platform.

"It gave us plenty of time for us to get to know what we were getting into. Our RM Account Manager showed us the art of the possible – which is something we probably could not have foreseen beforehand."

Leona Newcombe, Senior Phase Leader



Whilst Thomas Bullock Primary were one of the first schools to apply for the DfE funding, the service they received from RM was no different to any other school going through the process. That said, the school welcomed the level of attention they received.

"Our RM Account Manager was always available on the phone when we needed him – he was knowledgeable with all of our questions – and demonstrated the right level of responsiveness for our school. It was clear that he knew the nuances of the school environment and met our needs perfectly."

Shannon O'Sullivan, Headteacher

The Benefits

Firstly, it enabled the school to consolidate a vast array of different technologies. Before the move, some teachers were using Microsoft, others EasiMaths, Tapestry, Purple Mash and ClassDojo. Whilst all valid in their own right, it made sense to bring everyone together on one single platform.

"We can now do everything in one place – it sounds complicated, but really it isn't."

Leona Newcombe, Senior Phase Leader

Secondly is the simplicity and flexibility that remote working entails. Whether a teacher is working on or off-site, they are able to access their files and documents from anywhere.

Taking that one step further – thirdly – the school now has the basis of true “Blended Learning”, such that whoever is not in school on any one day, can still be taught. Couple that with some of the interactivity that Google Classroom enables, and you start to have a very powerful model.

The Lessons Learnt

- 1. Go for it!** If some of this sounds complicated, really it isn't. All that you need, is quick and easy to implement and learn to use, and the benefits are significant.
- 2. Push the boundaries.** Not all schools are like Thomas Bullock, but all schools do need to recognise that the world of education is changing, and if you do not have technology as part of your roadmap – and “Blended Learning” in particular – you may be missing a trick.
- 3. Google Classroom was designed for... classrooms!** There is so much you can do with it that non-users know little about. It really does help engage children in technology and can make a teachers' life so much easier (and enriched). Thomas Bullock will certainly continue to use it long after the pandemic has become a distant memory.
- 4. Take your community with you.** The pandemic was a new experience for everyone, and many parents and local governors were naturally nervous about their children's education. Communicating broadly and often, made everyone feel part of the journey.
- 5. Invest in the right technology.** Whilst school budgets are always difficult, the more modern your devices are, the faster they will run, and the easier they will be to use. A new Chromebook is not that expensive, and really will make your lessons come alive.
- 6. Reliable partners can open your eyes.** School budget challenges can also make decisions about choosing a technology partner hard, but the value gained from a good partner can be justified from savings they bring you elsewhere – from helping you solve problems quicker, reducing teacher workloads through more efficient operations, and enriching the lives of pupils from the tools that they can unlock for you. Selecting one who has both scale and experience, and truly understands the education market, is therefore critical.

The Legacy

One positive from the pandemic is that it has hastened the move to investigate some of the technologies like Google Classroom and Remote Learning. For Thomas Bullock Primary, there is a very strong desire to build on this, and establish “Blended Learning” within their curriculum in the future.

"We want Thomas Bullock CE Primary School to be a beacon for the whole of Norfolk. We want our pupils to leave our school with the same opportunities as someone who attended a fee-paying independent school in London. We feel that with our new-found passion for Blended and Remote Learning, we can do that."

Shannon O'Sullivan, Headteacher

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