Google for Education

St Julian's breaks down barriers to student-teacher communication with Google Apps and Chromebooks

Background
St Julian's School is a secondary school in Newport, South Wales, and serves 1,700 students ages 11 to 18. The school has an outstanding reputation for helping students at all levels of ability succeed in their schoolwork.

Challenge
"We're a forward-thinking staff," says David Beesley, assistant headteacher of St Julian's. Educators enthusiastically adopt new concepts for teaching and learning, but the school's technology was not keeping pace with the latest trends in collaborative learning. This prevented teachers from reaching their primary goal: engaging students in day-to-day studies. With a large student body, teachers and staff struggled to communicate with each other and with students in ways that fostered idea-sharing.

"Our Internet access was slow, and students didn't have devices in their hands in the classrooms," Beesley says. "The computers we did have on hand were sitting in cupboards gathering dust because they were out of date and no one wanted to use them."

The lack of tools caused bottlenecks when teachers and staff tried to team up on administrative projects. "It's the classic story – someone would send out an email with an agenda for a meeting and ask everyone for feedback," Beesley explains. "When one person made changes, the agenda would have to be sent round to everyone again. Or we'd try to pass around loads of paper and add our Post-It notes."

At the same time, teachers and students recognized that they wanted to communicate more often about ongoing lessons. "We constantly monitor staff feedback and we have a very good student voice program," Beesley says. "We heard that we needed active learning outside of lessons. We wanted students to engage in their learning, and our staff to be more engaging."

"Older students work on many independent study projects, and meeting with a teacher only once a week meant that progress was slow. Now they work on projects online on their Chromebooks, all week, while teachers comment using Google Docs."
—David Beesley, Assistant Headteacher, St Julian's School

As one teacher pointed out to Beesley, if she had 60 minutes to teach a class with 30 students, she could only give two minutes of her time to each students – not enough for long-term learning.

Solution
"Our classrooms were very chalk and talk – teachers write on the blackboard, and students copy it down," Beesley says. He and his teaching colleagues

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
• Bring efficiency to administrative tasks
• Increase student-teacher collaboration
• Extend learning outside the classroom

What they did
• Added Google Apps for Education
• Purchased 500 Chromebooks

What they accomplished
• Added flexibility for students and teachers working on independent projects
• Improved quality of student work through ongoing feedback
• Innovated new tools to guide students – like creating videos of student music performances
• Launched plan for joint primary-secondary school projects

knew that better technology was key, but they couldn't simply buy devices and expect them to magically transform the learning environment.

"We've seen other schools get excited about the technology itself, rather than considering what the technology can do," Beesley says. "They thought the devices were the wizard – but when it came to the actual classes, they weren't having any impact."

After vetting several learning platforms, St Julian's settled on Google Apps for Education. "We wanted tools that could be accessed over all kinds of devices, since teachers have different tablets and mobiles," Beesley says. The first step in the Google Apps rollout was creating Gmail addresses for teachers and staff. "We spent a lot of time winning hearts and minds," he says. "Teachers were worried that they'd have to spend hours learning how to use Google Apps – so we sought out advocates in each department to show how easy it was."

After extending Gmail access to students, St Julian's purchased 500 Chromebooks – about 30 for each department, along with 30 "floating" Chromebooks that anyone could borrow. For the 2014-2015 school year, St Julian's also added Classroom, allowing teachers to share assignments with students and easily offer feedback.

Benefits

Students and teachers quickly realized they could use Google Apps to communicate with each other outside of their limited classroom time. "Older students work on many independent study projects, and meeting with a teacher only once a week meant that progress was slow," Beesley says. "Now they work on projects online on their Chromebooks, all week, while teachers comment using Google Docs."

Likewise, teachers enjoy the flexibility of guiding students' projects without having to extend their office hours or give up their break times.

As teachers developed the habit of offering feedback – and students got into the habit of incorporating teacher suggestions – "it had a knock-on effect of making the work of a higher standard," Beesley says. "Teachers weren't simply marking work at the end, when it was turned in."

This engaging and ongoing approach to learning is changing the student-teacher dynamic in classes as varied as music and physical education. In music lessons, teachers record student performances using tablets

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a suite of free, secure tools that includes Gmail, Calendar, Sites & Documents. Use it for collaboration and communication no matter where you are or which device you're using. Over 40 million students, faculty, and staff in schools around the world have gone Google with Google Apps for Education.

www.google.co.uk/edu

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are designed to help students and teachers get things done quickly and easily. Devices start at £159 and are simple to manage at scale through a web browser. With several devices to choose from, it's easy to find a Chromebook that meets your students' needs. You can learn more here:

www.google.co.uk/edu

running Google Apps – then, using the app Explain Everything, teachers add comments and draw guidelines to explain proper hand placement on piano keys, for example. Physical education teachers bring tablets with Google Apps onto the playing field to recording student performance or call up exercise worksheets.

St Julian's has become such an innovator with its Google Apps and Chromebooks program that was named a Google Lighthouse School, sharing its successes with neighboring schools that want to take the same journey. Beesley also has plans afoot to use Google Apps to partner with the area's primary school students on joint projects, so that older and younger students can work together.

"We're seeing the kind of collaboration that wouldn't have been possible before – it's a way to bring younger students into the idea of technology-driven learning before they arrive at secondary school," Beesley says.

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