Success Story No.4 – Using G Suite and Google Classroom

May 2020

I had the pleasure of speaking with Ronnie Laifer from Wolfson Hillel Primary School and he shared the school's success using Google to manage distance teaching and learning.

What is your school context?

We are a 2 form entry Jewish primary school. I am a parent of the school, a year 4 class teacher and the computing lead.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Training and supporting staff remotely has been tricky; it has been important to help everyone understand how Google Classroom and G Suite can efficiently enable a link between home and school during this challenging period. Having enough time to do this is tricky.

Many teachers naturally embraced using the technology, but some were initially hesitant. Not everyone wanted to video themselves or create tasks which utilised Gsuite. Some teachers needed support to understand the differences between the features of cloud based technology and that of traditional file management, where pdfs are left in a shared location for parents to print out. It has been a great success that all staff are now enjoying using Google Classroom in an way that is interactive for children and provides a more personal and immediate back and forth between home and school.

Can you share your success of utilizing the move the school onto GSuite?

We are part of an academy so initially we needed to align with the central approach. We continued with those platforms for the first couple of weeks. However, the school has been fortunate to receive investement in technology. In last year we have recived a fleet of Chromebooks for KS2. We have 1:1 chromebooks. Every child in KS2 has a Google account and we have been using GSuite across KS2 scince September. However, Google Classroom has taken a back seat during this time while we have focused on enabling children to create digital content and understand core concepts of Computer Science. It has really been during the lock-down period that Google Classroom has come into it's own and proved to be an essential hub of communication. We have also activated KS1 Google accounts so that children in the younger years can make use of it.

What we've seen using the Google platform, is that teachers are able to teach efficiently and students are able to learn. Teachers have been creating resources that work effectively and are designed so that children can access them independently. Students are able to complete work, teachers in turn can provide a 'moving on' comment inside of the document and return it to the student. In some cases, a stream of conversation is generated between teacher and student on a particular piece of work.

We have structured the work so that a week of English is in one folder; a week of maths in another folder; a week of Jewish studies and Hebrew in another and then a weekly art and science task. We make videos for the children for some lessons, which gives 5 mintues of teaching to introduce the activity.

In terms of training staff, I stopped writing emails as they were difficult to keep short and became long strings of instructions, and instead I've begun to create screen recordings with an audio narration. These have become 5 minute demonstration videos on how to do things like using the features inside of Google Classroom to make marking and responding efficient; create and organise assignments for classes; create tasks which are interactive, as well as other technical trouble shooting advice and tips I have to share. No one likes a long email to read, but little bitesize videos have been a good way to train staff.

What has engagement been like?

Encouraging parents and carers to access G suite has been a learning process, but now there's much more interaction.

We're calling our students on a rota basis, so I'm encouraging staff to mention Google classroom for those that aren't yet accessing it regularly.

Comments on children's work is private between teachers and students, but on the Google Classroom stream, which is like a facebook wall of notifications, we set up a 'shout out' for any nice pieces of work that students have done. So it's seen by everyone, that's had a positive impact in motivating and acknowledging children and also in developing a class community feel which we have all been missing since the lock-down began.

The way the tasks are designed online makes a big difference to children and parents having a positive experience with the work– you really need to think through what you can ask of students as they may be working independently. Instructions need to be clear and digital worksheets need to be designed so that children can work inside of the copy which you have generated for them.

If students turn their work in on Google Classroom, then it's clear evidence that they've engaged with it. However, not everyone has acess to a device at home, or only limited time as they are sharing within the household. Some parents are printing off work as they are unable to access their children work digitally. We have encouraged 'unplugged' work to also be shared back to school by requesting to receive photographic evidence. For example, students have sent in photos of a cooking task done at home, of a piece of art, or even just

a photograph of the worksheet which was printed out for them because they couldn't get time on a computer. Again, Google Classroom is a great platform to allow students to upload and turn in anything which they like. A few children have even responded to tasks with a video entry of their own which they uploaded. Sports Day was scheduled to happen earlier last week; rather than us pass it by, the Sports Captains of Year 6 collaborated to create a 'keep fit' video and message which was shared on the Classroom stream of every class.

One of the written activities that I have create as an example is that I asked students to look at a picture of a character and asked them to describe the character using particular vocabulary. They then turned it in and I could then comment on individual work. I feel that we are moving many students forwards in their learning but the main thing is to acknowledge their work and encourage them. Feedback from families has really positive.

What are you thinking about next?

Thinking about what is going to happen in 2 weeks time, and what we're going to do. We are going to keep using Google Classroom, I see it going from strength to strength, it provides a good link between home and school. I'm definitely planning Y6 to make their leavers book collaboratively on Google Classroom, we might include a video too to help replace an event.

Any final thoughts?

Depends what day you catch me on! Some days are exciting and some are frustrating, I would like all families to be accessing the work we're uploading to Google Classroom. But it's hard for parents. I'm happy that we're able to support families with home learning.