







BYOD seems an obvious next step on its ICT journey for this school in Ireland

This case study considers the example of how BYOD seems like an obvious next step for an Irish school that already has a clear vision and commitment to using ICT across the whole school.

	Secondary, Upper Secondary		Urban
	iPads, Surface Pros, Kindles and other devices		Mixed

Background, context and drivers

Coláiste Bride is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for girls in Clondalkin, a satellite town around 12 km from Dublin city centre with around 950 students aged 12-18 from mainly working class backgrounds. Around 40% of students currently progress to take third-level (Higher Education) qualifications.

While the school was originally founded in a convent building, it moved site in 1970 and continued to grow in the 1990's. The expansion in student numbers then led to work beginning in November 2004 on a €13 million new school which was completed in May 2008. Staff were closely involved in the new build and on its web site the school emphasises that, "the free flow of people, information and ideas is facilitated by the design of the building". Even the colour scheme for the school was specifically chosen to stimulate learning as, "research indicates that cool colours work best among the 12-18 year old student population."

The most important driver as the school has started to explore BYOD approaches is the fact that, "there has always been a vision for ICT in the school", according to Marie-Therese Kilmartin, the school Principal. The aim from the outset in the new school has been to incorporate innovative use of technology into every aspect of school life including administration, teaching and learning and student support.

The extent to which there is innovative, whole school use of ICT is highlighted in a recent good practice [video](#) produced by the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers) support service which is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The mobile devices

As it is administered by the Catholic church, the school does not receive funding from an Education and Training Board to buy mobile devices or other ICT equipment.

The BYOD strategy in Coláiste Bride allows for the fact that most students have smartphones or access to a variety of tablets and eReaders from different companies including iPads, Windows Surface Pros and Kindles. The school does not feel that it should tell every parent what device they should buy but rather has adopted an approach which involves giving students permission to use the devices that they already own for school work under the supervision of their teachers.

To allow for the fact that a minority of students will not have a mobile device, the school has sets of tablets that can be provided on loan for use within the school. These students also have access to school computer labs which are open during lunchtime and in the evening.

Funding arrangements

Marie-Therese Kilmartin sees the school's BYOD strategy as being "rooted in reality", as it recognises that many parents have already invested in buying mobile devices for their children. She also suggests that it is not up to the school "to make decisions for parents' pockets" by specifying particular devices. From the outset, therefore, the aim has been to: leverage the devices already owned by students; progressively give permission for mobile devices to be used in classes; and make parents aware of this possibility. Hence, there was no set date at which a BYOD policy was 'officially' introduced for the whole school.

An important factor in the use of ICT generally in the school, is the fact that Coláiste Bride was one of the first group of schools in Ireland to be provided with a





100Mbps broadband connection by the Ministry of Education in 2009. Once this happened, teachers started to be presented with new opportunities to exploit ICT via providing students with virtual tours and opportunities to access online courses being offered by American universities.

As a faith school, Coláiste Bride has had to fund its wifi installation itself which has been done in stages and was finally completed in 2014. This involved a major revamp of the school network in 2013 that included replacing all the network switches, installation of a firewall, implementing Office 365 and making wifi available across the school. However, there are still funding challenges ahead as the school looks to further upgrade and future proof its wifi capability by installing additional wireless access points and replacing switches, some of which cost up to €3,000 each.

Participation in BYOD

The Coláiste Bride Board of Management has embraced technology and ICT is an important part of the school's five-year plan. "Every single teacher in the school has technology in the classroom and a desire to make things more mobile", according to Marie-Therese Kilmartin. In 2015, BYOD is increasingly being used across the school with at least 20 of the 70 staff regularly using mobile devices. Fourth year students in their transition year (a one year programme taken after the Junior Certificate in Ireland) are particularly doing a considerable amount of project work using mobile devices.

Even before a BYOD approach had been introduced, the school's 2011 inspection report noted a number of very good instances where "the teacher acted as a facilitator of the students' self-led learning" and "in these instances the quality of students' engagement and understanding of the material was very good". As the use of mobile devices increases, it is anticipated that there will be a continued move from a traditional didactic approach where the teacher does most of the talking to a range of more active learning methodologies that make best use of the mobile devices.

Advice, training and support for teachers

During the building of the new school, a strategic decision was taken to develop whole school use of ICT and Coláiste Bride's approach to continuing professional development (CPD) reflects this. CPD encompasses both formal and informal approaches, utilising grants from Education centres to support training in the school as well as informal peer exchanges between teachers. ICT is always an agenda item in school CPD workshops and,

linked to the BYOD strategy, training in Microsoft Office 365 and OneDrive is a current priority.

The *Bridge21* initiative from Trinity College Dublin has been very important in helping the school to develop whole school use of ICT and its BYOD approach. This innovative education programme is designed to support an innovative 21st Century learning environment within schools and has developed a model for second level education that is team-based, technology mediated, project based and cross-curricula. The school's commitment to CPD is evidenced by the fact that 13 teachers in the school are currently being funded to do a postgraduate qualification in teaching and learning. The teachers' commitment is clear from the fact that they are doing this studying in their own time.

Teacher professional development has also been a key part of the schools' participation in the recent European Schoolnet *Living Schools Lab project* which was focussed on developing whole school approaches to innovative use of ICT. In this project, involving 12 Ministries of Education in Europe, participating schools were supported through peer exchanges in regional hubs, pan-European teams working collaboratively on a number of themes, and a variety of both online and face-to-face opportunities for teachers' on-going professional development.

Technical support

Sarah Jane Carey is a teacher and the school's ICT co-ordinator. She has established an e-learning team consisting of other teaching colleagues who work together and with a team of student 'digital leaders' who can provide ICT support and mentoring.

Generally, most students are required to load apps onto their devices at home that will be needed for specific learning activities.

In order to better support whole school use of ICT, including BYOD, the school has negotiated a contract with a commercial, managed service provider. This has resulted in teachers having more trust in the reliability of the ICT infrastructure and given some teachers more confidence in adopting a BYOD approach. It has also meant the e-learning support team in the school "can focus more on pedagogical issues as someone else is dealing with the technology."



Benefits

Moving to a BYOD approach has been a natural progression for how Coláiste Bride is committed to using ICT across the whole school. It is seen as providing “an affordable option” that allows students to be involved in self-led learning activities which increasingly include recording interviews, making videos, searching for information on the web, participating in online courses and communities, and much more.

Seeing girls getting interested in ICT and STEM and being comfortable with using a diverse range of technologies has been particularly gratifying for teachers and the school Principal. The fact that they are allowed to use their own devices has helped girls to grow in confidence and there are signs that more girls are going on to study ICT at third level.

In terms of the school’s long-term ICT journey, Marie-Therese Kilmartin says that implementing a BYOD approach has been an important step in helping ensure that “innovative use of technology can be embraced not just by one or two teachers but by virtually everybody.”

Challenges

There are on-going challenges that the Principal sees as common to many other schools in Ireland: for example, funding challenges related to on-going upgrades to the school’s wifi and devices; and the fact that there are a small number of teachers who remain suspicious or still lack confidence in using ICT. In the current economic climate, parents may also not be able to upgrade their children’s’ devices as often as they would like and there may be limited central funding available that would enable the school to buy extra devices.

So far, there has been no negative reaction from parents about students being able to use their own devices in school, mainly because BYOD has been seen as a normal and in some ways expected next step in Coláiste Bride’s commitment to using ICT.

Lessons learned

The Principal feels that the school has benefitted by adopting a “bottom up” approach and “by not making a big deal about introducing BYOD”. Because it had already taken a conscious decision in 2008 to embed ICT in teaching and learning, a progressive move towards allowing students to use their own devices in school was something that teachers, parents and students could take in their stride.

A number of important lessons, however, were learned from schools that were early adopters of tablets and from observing the experiences of teachers in various pilots and projects. Marie-Therese Kilmartin suggests that it is extremely important for any head teacher implementing a BYOD approach to explore how other schools have integrated this within their ICT strategy and vision.

As the head of a school which has been developing a whole school approach to using ICT over the last eight years, she also strongly advises that, “time is needed to properly embed ICT and this means investing in and making a serious commitment to on-going CPD.”

She recognises, however, that the BYOD strategy adopted at Coláiste Bride may not be suitable for all schools, particularly if they are at an early stage of adopting ICT. Specifying a particular mobile device and having a more top-down, closely managed approach to introducing BYOD may be more appropriate for a school that is “just putting its toe in the water” in terms of trying to use ICT across the whole school.

Monitoring and evaluation

Teaching staff ensure that the schools’ ICT acceptable use policy is properly observed along with its more general code of behaviour. The Principal feels that there is little need for a close monitoring of the BYOD strategy as there is already an “unwritten expectation” that all teachers will use the computers and data projectors that are already in every classroom and it is very obvious how individual teachers are making use of the school’s E-Portal classroom management system.

Because day-to-day use of ICT is such a part of the school ethos, the Principal is also confident about getting regular feedback from students. Students frequently compare what different teachers are doing from class to class and also increasingly have their own expectation and volunteer their own assessments of how ICT should be used to support teaching and learning.

Looking to the future

Given the pace at which technology is changing, the school Principal and e-learning team believe that it is more important than ever to continue to observe and watch what is happening in other schools and pilot projects and to continue talk to parents and students about the feasibility of different devices. As public sector spending slowly starts to improve in Ireland, the school also hopes that some central funding will become available so that it can buy some more spare sets of devices that can be used to support its BYOD approach.

Although it is still quite a new school building, the aim is also to “design to the future” and to change some existing computer labs so that they become much more flexible, multidisciplinary spaces with multi-function docking stations where BYOD devices can be easily used and recharged.

A principal's advice to other head teachers

Principal Marie-Therese Kilmartin's key messages are:

“You either decide as a school to prioritise use of ICT or you don't. But, if you don't, at some point you will be playing ‘catch up’ and that may mean that you try to implement BYOD or some other part of your ICT strategy too quickly.”

“You have to be a bit of a risk taker at the beginning and be prepared to make mistakes. Do things step by step and build capacity at a pace that makes sense for your school. It's very important not to alienate staff. Give them some targets but bring them with you and start with a small group that is prepared and willing to experiment. It's better to move at a slower pace than try to go too quickly which may simply demotivate many teachers.”

