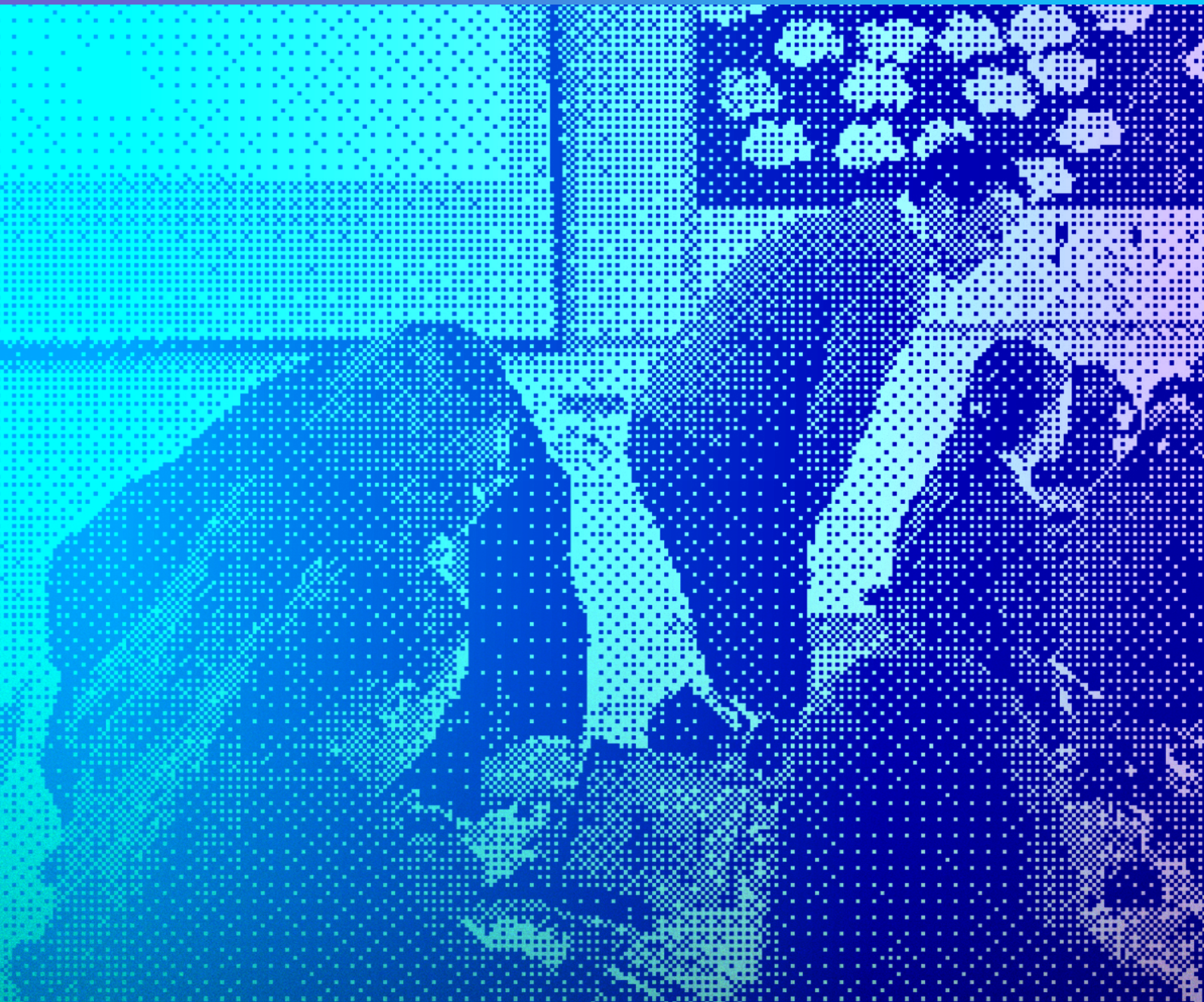


Interactive Classroom Working Group

School strategies for fostering students' digital competences

Practical guidelines for school leaders



Case Study

Dominican College Griffith Avenue, Dublin · Ireland



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Introduction

School digital strategies refer to the plans and frameworks developed by educational institutions to effectively integrate digital tools, technologies, and practices into the learning environment. Sustainable and inclusive digital education strategies require a balanced approach that considers diverse learner needs and promotes equitable access to technology. Rather than simply integrating new technologies in school practices, effective digital education strategies require a well-considered idea of how technology can improve educational outcomes, address inequalities, and support the wider educational mission of the school. It is a continuous process of identifying key priorities, allocating resources for targeted initiatives, monitoring progress, and achieving the different objectives.

This case study is one of 15 developed from interviews with members of school leadership teams who have contributed to the development of effective, sustainable, and inclusive school strategies to foster students' digital competence. The case studies focus on strategies that have successfully improved digitalisation of school and teaching practices and supported the development of digital competences in their students, in a sustainable and inclusive way. The schools are located in eight countries i.e. Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, and Switzerland. The interviews were part of research carried out by European Schoolnet's Interactive Classroom Working Group on the schools' experiences, the lessons they have learnt and the good practice they have developed. This research has informed the development of the publication 'School strategies for fostering students' digital competences. Guidelines for school leaders'. Find the publication and other case studies here: <https://fcl.eun.org/icwg>

Introduction to Irish Context

Ireland's [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#) builds on achievements and ambitions of its previous strategy. It aims to support the school system to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills needed to successfully navigate the digital world. The strategy was developed following a wide consultation process and it sets out high level objectives under three key pillars: (1) embedding digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment, (2) digital technology infrastructure and policy and (3) research and digital leadership.

Every school is required to have a Digital Learning Plan, which is developed by following a six-step process (image below). As part of the process, the school sets up a digital learning team to lead and support the plan's development.

Digital learning resources and planning supports are provided by Oide Technology in Education (www.oidetie.ie) on behalf of the Department of Education in Ireland. These include bespoke in-school support (approximately 3,000 instances per year), online and face to face professional learning opportunities (approximately 10,000 teacher training places per year), good practice videos, and procurement advice and support. The DL Planning website (www.dlplanning.ie) provides an interactive Digital Learning Framework to help schools to develop their Digital Learning Plan.

Oide Technology in Education also manages the internet safety initiative Webwise (www.webwise.ie) and the national educational portal Scoilnet (www.scoilnet.ie).

GUIDELINES **Digital Learning Planning Cycle**

The Digital Learning Planning Cycle consists of six steps. These steps provide a process for schools and individual teachers to engage in when reviewing and formulating a plan to enhance their DL practices.

The first three steps are the investigation phase while steps 4 to 6 focus on the creation, implementation and evaluation of the DL Plan.

For more information, click on each of the six steps in the Digital Planning cycle graphic.



Introduction to the school

Dominican College, Dublin is a voluntary secondary school for girls aged 12–18 years old. The school is located in the suburbs of Dublin City and students are mainly local to the school, with a small number travelling from areas outside of the locality. In total, it has 769 students enrolled, 50 full-time staff, 4 part-time teachers and usually 5 student teachers. The school has a [school improvement plan for 2023–2026](#) that focuses on differentiated learning, literacy and numeracy, wellbeing, digital learning and sustainability. The school's [Digital Learning Plan](#)

supports the overall School Improvement Plan, and a particular focus is on developing skills and digital tools which support differentiation and inclusion. There is a wide variety of ongoing training and professional development undertaken by all members of the leadership team, for example provided by the school's joint managerial body (JMB) and the school trust (Le Chéile). The school also avails of programmes provided by Oide ([Misneach](#) and [Tánaiste](#)).

Additional training in areas such as leading digital learning, child protection, student support, learning

Why this school as a case study?

This school was chosen as a case study for a number of reasons, including those outlined below:

- ▣ Approach to Digital Learning Planning – in Ireland all schools are required to have a Digital Learning Plan, developed by following the Digital Learning Planning process and using the [Digital Learning Framework \(DLF\)](#). In addition to the Digital Learning Plan, there is an overall school development planning process, which uses the [Looking at our School Framework \(LAOS 2022\)](#). Dominican College combines both planning processes, resulting in the Digital Learning Plan being closely aligned with the overall aims of the school, rather than being a separate process. The focus is on how the Digital Learning Plan supports the school improvement plan.
- ▣ Digital learning team – there is a highly active and diverse digital learning team at Dominican College. They are representative of a broad range of skills and cover a wide spectrum of

support, restorative practice and sustainability, to name but a few, is also availed of by the school.

subjects. They meet twice per term and they communicate effectively with-, and continually gather feedback from the wider school staff and students.

- ▣ Leadership support of digital learning – the senior leadership team in the school is supportive of digital learning and regards it as a key component to effective learning, teaching and assessment practices within the school. With a dedicated deputy principal who leads digital learning, the school ensures that key decisions are made and supported at the highest level in the school.

By effectively combining the school development and Digital Learning Planning processes, the school has simplified and streamlined its planning approach, whilst also ensuring digital learning is a key consideration in the school's teaching and learning objectives.

School leadership team



The role of the principal is to lead learning and teaching, manage the school, lead its development and to develop leadership capacity. The principal of Dominican College is supported by two deputy principals, who take specific responsibility for the junior and senior school respectively. They also take responsibility for additional areas of focus, such as leading digital learning, leading the induction of newly qualified teachers, school communications and other areas.

Specific to the area of digital learning, the school has a digital learning leader, which is a post of responsibility held by a teacher in the school.

The digital learning leader is responsible for the coordination of the digital learning team (DL team) and the development of the Digital Learning Plan, in consultation with staff, students and other stakeholders and with the support of the senior leadership team. The digital learning leader coordinates the work of the digital learning team, which has a current membership of 10 teachers, including the deputy principal with responsibility for digital learning. The team meets several times during the school year and is responsible for the ongoing development and implementation of the Digital Learning Plan.

Vision-values of the school digital education strategy

The school describes itself as a progressive learning organisation, taking part in innovative learning initiatives and prioritising areas such as digital technology and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

In 2018, the Digital Learning Framework was introduced to schools in Ireland, alongside the new Digital Learning Planning process. At this time, secondary schools were also working to embed the new [junior cycle curriculum](#). A key component of this new curriculum was the requirement for students to complete classroom based assessments, involving independent research and presenting their work to peers, often in the form of digital presentations. The school, like many other schools, realised that to engage effectively with this new curriculum, the

digital skills and competences of students would have to form a key element of any new Digital Learning Plan for the school.

The overall vision for digital learning in the school at that time therefore was that all students must have access to digital technology to support their learning and they must be able to use digital technology confidently, safely and ethically.

The current school mission statement and vision are:

'Inspired by our motto Veritas we strive to realise each student's individual potential in a Catholic environment.' Dominican College aims to integrate digital technologies into the student experience and foster an environment of differentiated support and innovation for all students. School leadership will provide resources and cultivate a supportive and collaborative teaching and learning environment for integrating technology as a meaningful and effective part of the educational process. Students will leave our school as confident, creative and productive users of new digital technologies and understand the impact of those technologies on society.

Actions to support this vision for Dominican College included introducing a specific digital media literacy class on the wellbeing curriculum for 1st-4th year students; investing in a school online platform (in this case Google Workspace); procuring devices to enable all students to access digital technology; and importantly, investing in the skills development of teachers, special needs assistants and the school administration team so that they are able to confidently engage with digital technology to support student learning.

Focus and aims

The focus and aims of the Digital Learning Plan originated with the development of the Department of Education's Digital Learning Framework in 2018. The school received training from the PDST (now Oide) on using the framework to progress their digital learning. It also spent time consulting with other schools and consulting with wider school stakeholders to see what areas of focus it should choose. The school focused mainly on infrastructure, specifically improving the wi-fi throughout the school to enable multiple devices to connect to it. As stated above, the procurement of just one learning platform was also a key aim of the school's plan, to simplify the learning curve and streamline the rollout to staff and students. The purchase of devices (trolley sets of Chromebooks) was also prioritised so that every classroom would have opportunities to engage with digital learning at every level and across every subject.

The school received assistance from PDST (now Oide) in developing its initial Digital Learning Plan and setting targets. A key piece of advice given was to be aspirational in the setting of longer-term goals, and to take small incremental steps to get there. This advice contributed to the school being able

to transition very smoothly to fully online learning when the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in March 2020, as by that time all teachers had a teaching device and the school platform was fully operational. All teachers had experience using the school platform for planning collaboratively and sharing resources, and this proved to be of benefit for remote learning. More recently, the plan has been closely aligned with the school development planning process, so the Digital Learning Plan is designed to support the School Improvement Plan. A current focus of the School Improvement Plan is on differentiation and inclusion, so the Digital Learning Plan specifically focuses on the use of digital technology to support differentiation, and for example, includes a planned focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

By combining the Digital Learning Planning process with the school development process, the school has been able to gather feedback on digital learning as part of the school development planning surveys, rather than gathering this information separately. This has made the process more streamlined. Feedback from stakeholders is generally very positive on the use of digital technology in the school.



Infrastructure and funding

Although the school is well equipped with technology, the leadership team feels that the most important element of equipment is the wi-fi infrastructure. The wi-fi network is currently being upgraded as the school is moving from shared

student devices to a one-to-one approach in the next school year. Currently the school has five trolleys containing Chromebooks (30 in each). There are also 10 Chromebooks in the school library.

The Chromebooks are booked for use by teachers via a Google sheet which is shared weekly by the digital learning leader. In addition to the Chromebooks, there is a computer room with 30 desktop PCs and a laptop trolley.

While each class has a desktop PC with a connected digital projector, most teachers now have their own Chromebook, or laptop, which they use. The school also has two mobile flat panel screens which can be moved to different locations as required, for example for guest speakers or to communicate important announcements to students in various locations of the school.

The digital learning leader's role, while mainly to support the pedagogical use of digital technology, inevitably also involves the day-to-day management of devices, as well as the provision of hands-on technical support, supported by members of the digital learning team. In addition, the school avails of the services of an IT company which maintains and repairs equipment when necessary.

More recently, a newly established student digital learning team is beginning to take responsibility for the day-to-day management of devices and infrastructure. The team is led by the digital learning coordinator and comprises transition year and fifth

year students. The student digital learning team also undertakes training in new tools e.g. Edpuzzle, and then provides support to other students and staff on the use of these tools. Members of the team have also presented at digital learning events for schools across Ireland e.g. the Back to School Google For Education event last October. As stated above, the school will transition to a one-to-one approach in September of this year (2024). This will be implemented for the incoming first year students initially and will require a managed service for devices which will be provided by a private company.

Infrastructure funding comes from various sources. The main source is a Department of Education grant, and it also receives generous contributions from Parents' Association fundraising initiatives. Most recently the school received a donation of 30 refurbished laptops from a private company. In the decision to move to one-to-one devices for incoming first year students, it has been agreed that parents/guardians will pay for the devices. The school's decisions concerning the purchase of devices are led very much by their overall learning objectives, in line with the aims of their Digital Learning Plan.

Role of AI and other emerging technologies

The school has been experimenting with some digital tools which incorporate AI, such as [Google's practice sets](#) to assess learning across a range of subjects, and an updated version of [EdPuzzle](#) as well as some generative AI tools for teacher planning.

The practice sets are used in maths to provide a personalised learning experience. The teacher creates exercises for students, and they engage with them individually, availing of additional support videos and resources if required. The teacher dashboard provides data on student engagement with the exercises, indicating how many attempts have been made, whether the student availed of additional support, and indicating to the teacher immediately if there are areas of individual support required or topics that need to be explained in more detail to all students.

In a similar way, EdPuzzle is integrated within the Google Workspace platform and is widely used by

teachers across different subject areas. Students can engage with the new live version, providing responses to questions within educational videos. While their identity is not visible to other class members, the teacher sees individual responses and can provide feedback and individual support as needed.

Generative AI is used by many teachers in their planning and in generating resources such as assessment rubrics. The digital learning team is experimenting and trialling some tools, but they are very much in the evaluation phase and have not yet implemented any GenAI tools formally in the school.

Other tools observed in the school visit that are used by students include [Kami](#), [Canva](#) and Google Slides. The deputy principal and digital learning leader describe the school's approach to implementing new tools and software as a careful process. The digital learning team evaluates the

tool, and if it is seen as something beneficial to the school's overall aims, it is introduced gradually to staff and continually reviewed as part of the DL planning process.

The use of the Google for Education tools above is included in the schools 'Acceptable Use Policy' which is signed by parents at the start of every school year. When students enter the school in their

Added value and impact

The school leadership team feels very strongly that students are motivated and engaged through the meaningful use of digital technology within their learning environment. Feedback from students and parents when evaluating the implementation of the DL plan is overwhelmingly positive and the move to one-to-one devices has been strongly supported by all school stakeholders.

Teachers report that having digital media literacy on the wellbeing curriculum for 1st -4th year students makes it easier for them to use digital technology in their subject areas, as students come to class with the skills required to create presentations, digital posters and other resources to support their learning.

first year, parents sign up to allow a school account to be set up.

The school's AUP is included in the [policy section of its website](#).

Guidance on Acceptable Use Policies (including an AUP generator tool) is provided to schools in Ireland by the Department of Education's Webwise initiative, which is part of Oide Technology in Education <https://www.webwise.ie/aup-2/>.

The annual review cycle of the plan ensures the school is continually reflecting on its practice and feedback from teachers and students can be considered. It is evident the school values the voices of all and strives to improve its digital learning practice by listening to opinions both within and outside of the school which are gathered through the use of surveys and meetings with stakeholders. Using the Google Workspace platform for assessment has made the process of analysing student performance over time a lot easier and this has been welcomed by teachers. It also allows them to intervene in a timely fashion as they see live trends, rather than collating these at the end of a school term or year.



Challenges

While the school is benefiting from its implementation of digital learning, the deputy principal and the digital learning leader both identified challenges with its

continued success. The school circulates regular surveys and seeks feedback from stakeholders on digital learning. Issuing and analysing the surveys

can be a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. However, it is seen as a key element of the Digital Learning Planning process.

Keeping momentum and enthusiasm going for digital learning was identified as being very important in the school. Balancing this with the busy schedules of teachers and the lack of time during the school day can be challenging. Providing informal support for teachers where possible and also allowing teachers to engage in outside CPD has worked well. The principal also outlined the importance of knowing when it is not a good time to introduce a new tool to staff and allowing time for things to bed down, rather than continually asking teachers to take on new initiatives and try out new tools.

Buy in from staff and commitment to effective digital learning has been particularly good in this school. The digital learning team's approach is to

Sustainability and improvement of strategy

The sustainability of the Digital Learning Planning process in the school is very much connected to the effective operation of the school's digital learning team and digital learning leader. Key support is also provided by the senior leadership team, while the digital learning team supports teachers to embed digital technology in their practice.

The Digital Learning Plan is created in line with the School Improvement Plan and has a three-year cycle, with annual reviews and updates. As stated previously, feedback on the implementation of the Digital Learning Plan is sought regularly as part of the school improvement planning process, with focus groups and surveys of staff, students, parents and other stakeholders. Each year, the updated Digital Learning Plan is introduced in a staff meeting at the commencement of the school year and it is followed up with workshops and support to individual staff provided by the digital learning team.

In addition, the professional development of staff is prioritised with various opportunities provided both within and outside of the school. A particular factor in the success of the digital learning implementation to date has been availing of sustained support from PDST (now Oide) in the development of the original plan, as this enabled the digital learning

show staff members how using a certain tool can help improve their teaching and learning practices rather than how to use a tool for the sake of using it. Finally, funding was outlined as a challenge. A recent ICT grant from the Department of Education is earmarked by the school for upgrading teacher devices and classroom screens. While this grant is welcomed, it is not an annual payment and much of it goes towards the wi-fi system in the school and digital projectors. The school is reliant on Parents' Association fundraising, for example, for the upgrading and purchase of Chromebooks. Going forward with the one-to-one device approach means that devices will be purchased by families, allowing any additional funding to be spent on ensuring that the wi-fi meets the needs of the additional connectivity load, and further ensuring that other students in the school continue to have access to devices.

team to confidently engage with the process, set realistic goals and to explore ways to support all staff in buying in to the plan. The sustained support model involves bespoke school support in digital learning provided by Oide on a number of occasions throughout the school year. According to Dominican College's leadership team, this process ensured that they remained on track with their planning process and enabled them to set effective goals for digital learning in the school.

Another factor in the strategy's sustainability has been putting digital media literacy (DML) on the timetable for 1st to 4th year students. This has helped students to gain skills in content creation, online research, and the ethical and safe use of digital technology in the classroom.

By ensuring that students have these skills, it has made it easier for teachers across other subject areas to seamlessly adopt digital technology approaches to learning in their classrooms.

The school's more recent involvement with the Oide Formative Assessment using Digital Portfolios project has further enhanced the staff's understanding of how digital technology can support learning and has enabled the school to link with other schools to share experiences.

Dominican College looks forward to further developing and exploring areas of innovation, including AI. The introduction of one-to-one devices with the first-year students in the 2024-25 school year will be another step forward in its vision to ensure that all students have access to digital technology and have the opportunity to develop key skills and competences to support themselves in their learning and equip them with digital skills for the 21st Century.

The case study complements the European Schoolnet's publication 'School strategies for fostering students' digital competences. Guidelines for school leaders'.

Find the publication and other case studies at fcl.eun.org/icwg



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