Woodland Academy Trust

Through integrating Apple technology into teaching and learning, students can access the curriculum in a way that supports them individually, with no student left behind.

Context

The Woodland Academy Trust (WAT) was formed in September 2011 and consists of four primary schools, three of which are in the London Borough of Bexley and one in Kent, with a further primary free school currently under construction. All schools within the Trust share the same mission; ignite the spark, reveal the champion. That goes for their pupils, teachers and support staff alike. WAT believe in empowering every child to achieve their full potential and become leaders in their own lives and wider society.

Julie Carson, Director of Education at WAT says: "As a Trust, we recognise that we are stronger together and value the collaboration of all our staff, and are passionate about improving life chances for all of our children and the wider community."

The challenge

Technology is a huge enabler in all aspects of modern life. To equip its students to grow their technological skills and confidence, WAT decided to improve its computing curriculum. Having seen the positive impact of modern EdTech (Education Technology) tools on other schools, the WAT wanted to embrace the opportunity it presents.

To bring teachings more in line with modern standards, and better prepare students for their futures, they wanted to fully integrate technology into every aspect of teaching and learning. Their existing programme did feature technology, but WAT no longer wanted it to be seen as an 'add-on' that was only available in certain settings. Julie and her team decided to increase the number of technology devices pupils used, and also to expand the variety they experienced, introducing a wider range of hardware and software.

Amongst their staff, they wanted to build excellent knowledge of technology, how it could be utilised, and how to guide their students to get the most out of it. After visiting the Apple Headquarters whilst in the United States and getting first-hand experience of how Apple can enrich teaching and learning, Julie realised that introducing Apple would dramatically enhance their use of technology, offering the variation that their existing curriculum lacked, and opening up new EdTech opportunities. She turned to Academia for support in introducing Apple into their environment.

The solution
Upskilling WAT staff

Academia and WAT worked together with Apple Education to design an iPad pilot scheme. They initially introduced 30 iPad devices at each of their four schools to judge performance and identify how best to maximise the technology. At the heart of the pilot, Apple Education guided staff members through 10 days of specialist training.

As part of this training programme, each school appointed an internal digital champion from amongst the staff. These individuals underwent additional training to lead and guide their colleagues through developing their technology skills and pioneer the use of Apple technology within their schools.

A new digital curriculum

The new curriculum starts in Year 1 by guiding children through using iPad in a structured way, providing foundational skills that they can develop as they move through the school. It's also designed to open up areas that WAT have previously struggled to teach, such as coding, which is now able to be taught to all pupils and in Julie's view, is being "taught well". Also embedded is the development of essential digital skills such as staying safe online and responsible device use.

Why iPad?

Using iPad has unlocked some unique benefits for WAT:

- iPad accessibility tools, such as dictation, allow all children to do their work in the way that works best for them, regardless of whether they have SEND, or simply a natural preference to work digitally;
- the portability of iPad lends itself well to the school environment, particularly during the initial pilot phase, where devices were being shared amongst classes;
- manageability of devices in learning scenarios;
- the ability to create iPad-specific workbooks for each year group, which enable teachers to record children's work and track their progression;

- a range of specialist education apps and services, with new versions of software and apps being developed all the time;
- tools such as Padlet aid collaboration and shared learning amongst students, and give quiet children a voice when working with others.

The impact
On the student experience:

Participation — iPad devices in classes have removed barriers to learning such as confidence in writing, reading, and asking questions.

Interactivity — Learning topics have been brought to life for the children using Augmented and Virtual Reality programmes on the iPad devices.

Engagement — The children love learning with the iPad devices, and are noticeably more motivated when lessons involve them. They make learning fun whilst expanding children's knowledge.

Accessibility — The iPad devices increase accessibility to the curriculum both for children with SEND and for those with EAL (English as an Additional Language).

Bespoke learning — Personalised accessibility features, such as text size, background colour, and talk to text have transformed classes for any child that struggles with their writing.

Assessment — New opportunities, such as interactive online quizzing expose children to a wider variety of assessment methods.

Home learning — Where some children have access to similar technology at home, they have been able to use their new digital skills to create and share homework.

For teachers:

Responses amongst the WAT teaching staff have been overwhelmingly positive, with 50% of them having already achieved Apple Teacher status, and the remainder being well on the way.

Creativity — More creativity for teachers in how they teach and what they teach, enhancing learning for all students.

Refined focus — Teachers can spend more time focusing on expanding children's knowledge, rather than on capturing evidence of progression.

Assessment — Quicker, more focused assessment opportunities offered by iPad apps impact positively on their teaching and learning.

For the Trust overall:

The entire WAT community has recognised the impact of the iPad. Julie says: "Everyone from parents to board members have seen how necessary it is for our pupils to have devices and develop their IT skills." Having seen the benefits, WAT is keen to keep expanding its use of technology. As well as investing in the technology itself, they have appointed a computing teacher to work across the Trust, as well as a non-school based Trust technology lead.

The unexpected benefits

One very positive impact has been the closer working relationship between WAT's respective schools. Teachers and students have been collaborating across multiple sites, sharing their own iPad hot tips, and enjoying the natural opportunities for peer assessment that have developed thanks to collaboration tools on iPad.

The impact of COVID-19

Shortly after introducing the iPad pilot scheme, the first national UK lockdown was mandated. This accelerated the need to improve technology provision access across all staff, and ensure all students were equipped for remote study. WAT's iPad pilot meant teachers had both the skills and experience necessary, to quickly pivot to remote learning. When it came to the second lockdown, WAT chose to secure further Apple devices to make home learning accessible for all children that needed additional support. Across the Trust, they provided 313 children with iPads for use at home.

The outcome
Digital equality across the Trust

One hugely positive outcome has been the equality the iPad has ensured. All children can now access the curriculum in a way that supports them individually and no student is left behind. Children who lack confidence in more traditional modes of learning now have an alternative way to explore and complete work. Teachers also now understand how to make the device work best for students and can apply this knowledge to support them in their independent learning.

Looking to the future
Constantly refining processes

WAT continue to monitor the performance of their iPad scheme, testing and refining their approach to eLearning as they go. Via their own internal Apple Impact Tool, they can identify key metrics on the efficacy of their solution such as how teachers feel students are responding to it, and areas in which they feel introducing the iPad has been most successful. These metrics will be used to inform their future digital strategies.

Further technology investments

WAT aspire to a 1:1 iPad pupil ratio across all their schools, a project that they are currently working on. Their goal is to: "close any digital divide and ensure all our pupils have access to the same quality devices to pursue their learning both in and outside the classroom."

What the Trust has learnt

Julie and her team are keen to share their experience and support other schools to introduce Apple and other EdTech tools into their environment. WAT's top tips for any EdTech project are:

1. Visit other schools with EdTech programmes and listen to their experiences.

2. Establish your goals and a roadmap of how you plan to achieve them.

3. Communicate your intentions to your community, including the parents.

4. Identify digital champions.

5. Focus on key apps and develop your EdTech offering gradually.

A centre for EdTech innovation

The proven impact of EdTech within WAT has got them striving for more. Their end goal is for all their schools to become Apple Accredited schools. This accreditation is given to schools that Apple believe are centres of leadership and educational excellence and that demonstrate Apple's vision for learning with technology. We're looking forward to supporting them on their journey.

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