

<u>Remote Teaching and Learning – what Bloxham School have learned to date</u> <u>Matt Buckland, Deputy Head (Curriculum) 16.03.20</u>

Technology

All our students in First to Fifth Form and the majority of the Sixth Form are issued with a school owned laptop. This made it easier to ensure that all machines had access to the various remote learning packages that used. Those on 'Bring Your Own Device' had to access Microsoft Teams via Office 365 which has slightly less functionality.

One of the major packages that used was Microsoft Teams. It took a considerable time for the IT technicians to set up the various groupings (although much easier to have these centrally set up rather than by each individual teacher). It is vital to consider exactly what groupings need to be set up; classes, form groups, teachers, House groups, Heads of Department, leadership etc. Remember to give your IT team a lot of love!

Training

Tutors were asked to walk through with students to locate Teams on their laptop. Beyond that, students pretty much self-taught. For teachers, there were a few key staff who practised in the few weeks prior to students being off-site. They were very happy to share and to invite colleagues to learn from them which proved useful.

Students and staff that could link screens together found this beneficial for having a number of windows open at any point in time. Those teachers with write on screen technology found the whiteboard in Teams invaluable.

Laptops with 'inkable' touchscreens are a real advantage for teachers as they can use the whiteboard facility in Teams. This really needs to be used with a stylus. We are considering swapping our First Form touchscreen laptops with teachers who have older machines.

Remote Teaching

Teachers need to plan in a different way and well in advance. Students need to have resources before the lesson so that if they need to print, they have already done so. We asked teachers to provide students with a brief lesson plan including the learning objectives, the resources that they would need, a brief chronology of what the lesson would look like and what form assessment would take. Those teachers that were most prescriptive had success. Firefly was a much better vehicle for allowing students access to resources rather than through Teams, as this slowed things down and students can move the cursor on a PowerPoint if using that method.

We moved to registering all students in all lessons and those not logging in (and their parents) were sent an email from the Headmaster's office. We did not experience any problems with students and a lack of access to internet at home, but this may be an issue for some.

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Students learnt how to use it quickly how to interact from home, although teachers less so. From the teaching point of view, it was all about having a variety of different tools. Microsoft Teams worked well, especially in audio (although some video safety concerns from teaching colleagues) but not as an audio-visual link into someone teaching a normal classroom lesson. Neither the sound nor picture is good enough quality for this. A few students were off task especially when they worked out they could private message each other within Teams, however they largely they policed themselves. Where teachers kept tight control of the work being done in the lesson (photo of their books, instant submission of an assignment or even holding it up to the camera), they were kept well on task.

We needed to produce an Acceptable User Policy for remote learning for students and in time will need a Remote Learning Policy for staff. I suspect that going forward we will now have to look in greater depth at using these technologies for student (and staff) absence – recording of a lesson would be very useful for those absent. Teachers need to have all resources at home and at school, which is easier if these are electronic, less so textbooks. Will teachers be able to teach from school or will they be at home? If at home are there any safeguarding considerations? We told staff that they could not be in 1 to 1 chat with students – however, this proves tricky if you are a tutor for example.

Once students had logged in most teachers found that the first instruction is for students to mute themselves, they can unmute to ask questions or do so via Chat facility. Teaching colleagues reported that they were having to give a lot of clear micro instructions as they could not operate from visual clues or from students looking at what their peers were doing. This worked well with small groups in the Sixth Form.

There was a real sense of the 'Dunkirk spirit' and staff were keen to create their own discussion groups -generally around a cup of tea in the common room but this proved very effective. As a member of the SLT, I largely based myself in the common room to learn from their experiences and on a daily basis I summarised this in a central email to all teaching staff. A lot of the staff training was about the changed way that they needed to plan their lessons, rather than their use of the technologies.

SEND students

SEND students still need to be differentiated for. This will need to be done at an individual basis and the SENCO, if not the subject teachers, really need to understand how each student normally works and how this can be best adapted for remotely. This is probably best done by speaking to every student on the SEN list.

There is a myriad of questions that this opens. Students will need equipment for their normal way of working at home and at school – this may need a policy change, what about support assistants who work 1 to 1 – can they work at the child's home? What is the advice from specialists about specialists, what specific staff training is required?

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For dyslexic students access to teaching materials in the form of Word documents / worksheets is an advantage as they can use 'Dictate', 'Speak' and 'Immersive Reader' to access text and write answers. Those with reading pens appreciate this as well. The students also suggested that it was helpful to have lesson content to read through in advance - taking 'prep' literally - so they were not having to read and assimilate while negotiating the complexities of an online conversation; several of them felt this would mean they got more out of the lesson. The timescale of remote learning should give increased opportunities for this without the pressure of sport/activities/PE.

One issue raised is that a teacher who can't see the class is unable to tell whether they have completed an answer or written task, so students have to say aloud if they need more time - not the easiest thing to do with everyone else listening in.

There is also an issue with the potential that dyslexic students have to misread instructions; this is going to need action from students rather than teachers, but if we are to rely heavily on Firefly/remotely set tasks, it may need flagging up as something they should be aware of - reading instructions twice should always be the default.

Communicating with students off-site

Student feedback was vital and they were keen to be in touch with the school. They were also very quick to shout when the teacher had not set things up for them to access. I sent out a central email each day to ensure that they knew their feedback had been noted and acted upon.

Parents' perspective

Because we were forced to operate a hybrid system, i.e. about ¾ of the school population in school and the rest learning remotely, we decided to retain the normal school timetable and structure to the day. If everyone were remote, it may be worth tweaking that. However, either way it is vital that parents know when, where and what their children should be doing otherwise they rely on the students to tell them.

Parents were very interested in what was taking place and this created a lot of email traffic (both positive and negative) but the feedback was very useful. Again, regular communication with parents as a collective group kept this traffic at a minimum.

Students found that they had a lot of more "unallocated" parts of the day and that work needed to be set for these times. This meant the need to set lots of tasks and prep for the students but also specific targeted revision for those with external examinations or even those with internal examinations.

Students need to be clear about what remote teaching is and isn't and the fact it will by necessity mean the students taking greater initiative and ownership of their learning. Brief them that:

Classrooms are unlikely to be dedicated audio-visual conference rooms.

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- It is likely that remote learning will take place via the camera and sound on a teacher's laptop.
- There will be mistakes (early on) and accept feedback, for example if the teacher forgets to start the Teams session on their laptop and the off-site students can't hear it or see what is happening.
- There is an expectation of how off-site students are expected to interact, e.g. via chat or via audio and how they get the teachers attention.

Practical subjects

Those teaching practical subjects have had to be far more creative in what they asked students to do. Initially this may have meant flipping the order of their Scheme of Work so that they were doing any theory work or revision of theory for examination classes. However, students and parents of examination classes were increasingly worried about completing coursework.

For Art / Photography planning for this eventuality has meant students beginning to gather resources to take home and many of them saw a block of time as an advantage. For Technology and Textiles this is more of a problem and access to the workshop space is a problem. We aimed to get blocks of time pre-Easter to counter this and to act as a contingency for what may happen in the coming weeks and months. Similarly, Theatre Studies have aimed to get assessed performances done and in the bag.

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