

# Digital Technologies - Primary Case Study A

## Linking Home & School

### School Context

Rowan NS is primary school with 16 teachers, situated in the midlands of Ireland. There are 19 mainstream teachers, 6 Special Education Needs teachers, 6 Inclusion Support Assistants (ISAs) and an administrative principal in the school. Rowan NS has an ASD class within the school catering for a number of children with varying needs. They also have a number of children with high and low incidence SEN in the school.

The importance for continuous home school communication was recognised by all staff, especially those with SEN. Up until now they had always used a special home/school communication notebook to facilitate this. Entries in the notebook captured records from the school day. Parents were contactable via text message for urgent messages/school alerts.

### Approach to Developing Increased Home-School Linkage

Following school support from the PDST Digital Technologies team, the school explored a number of options to increase the use digital technologies for effective home school communication. Staff felt it was important to inform parents of how things were being done in school. The Parents' Association parents held a focus group session on the matter and concluded that wanted to know more of what their children were achieving in school each day.

To this end, all stakeholders looked at different options that could combine home school communication and digital portfolio functions. This approach would allow for record-keeping to be improved, progress to be celebrated in the home and school and a more efficient line

of communication from the classroom to the home to be established. After looking at different systems that could be used, and contacting other schools in similar contexts, it was decided that the school would use the SeeSaw platform as a communication and digital portfolio tool. School leadership ensured that teachers all had access to laptops and a tablet device when needed, allowing them to use the platform effectively.

European Union privacy laws (known as the GDPR) and the Seesaw Terms of Service require that schools get parental consent before using Seesaw with students. To facilitate this, Rowan NS sent a consent form home for parents to sign up to. The letter used was a variation of [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gRkQREpR-r1\\_O7hUn33nr\\_CiP-WyvDA0FxDHFv3oxEA/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gRkQREpR-r1_O7hUn33nr_CiP-WyvDA0FxDHFv3oxEA/edit). The school also added this permission letter to the Junior Infant enrolment pack for all parents going forward. This ensured that use of the platform was fully compliant with all regulations.

Once permission was granted for children to be on the platform, SeeSaw was set up in school. The SEN teacher 'set up' a class on the platform, with each child having their own folder in this class. The SEN teacher agreed to have the settings on the platform set to pupils 'only being able to access their own work'. Pupils would use QR codes to sign in to the class, allowing them to upload their work to the class account without needing an email address. This QR code was only visible on the wall of the classroom, and not sent home.

Meanwhile, the teachers sent home family access QR codes and steps to guide them to download the SeeSaw app on their phones/ tablets. Once 'signed into' the app using the QR code, they would be able to see their own child's work and also anything else that the teacher uploaded to their own child's folders. Examples of such records included photo and video footage of the children doing particular tasks in class as well as notes captured during the school day.

## Impact of Initiative

Teachers now feel that parents understand much more of what goes on in school each day. Parents are more aware now of the techniques and activities that children encounter and can reply to notes that the teacher uploads. Pupils have been empowered by being able to show their parents what they're doing in school. There is now much more continuity of approach between home and school. Both parents and teachers have been surprised by how much more pupils are capable of in the different environments of home and school. There has also been an environmental impact, with the teachers reporting less waste of paper/resources as was the case with the traditional reporting approaches.

## Future Plans

At the minute the use of SeeSaw has been confined to those children with SEN but now that the school have started to use it they are beginning to use it with all classes. Teachers have seen the number of benefits to having an eportfolio and home-school communication tool in one digital platform. Parents and families are playing a more active, engaged and informed role in their children's education as a result of improved communication.