

## Castleisland Community College -Our experience of remote Teaching and Learning online.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Castleisland Community College, like all schools was faced with a short window in which to prepare to deliver Teaching and Learning remotely, however, we had been preparing for the possibility of school closures. Both, teachers and students are adapting to a new remote way of learning. We were very lucky in that all our students already had a Microsoft 365 account (set up by Kerry Education and Training board) for the past number of years, this meant that all our students and staff had access to all of the Microsoft 365 tools such as TEAMS, Forms, Word, Excel etc. at home, therefore, enabled us as a school to move very quickly. All teachers set up TEAMS for each of their classes which enabled the continuity of effective teaching and learning for our school immediately.

While flexibility was needed to ensure that different learning outcomes could be achieved in a variety of subjects, consistency of approach is important for our students and teachers at this time. Microsoft TEAMS and its key tools provided consistency so that students were neither confused nor rushed into this new way of learning. The use of TEAMS has provided our teachers with an on-line classroom enabling them to create their own class in Teams, add selected students, share lessons, create assignments, collaborate virtually in real-time, virtual face to face connections, assignments, files and conversations, grading and personalised feedback all in one hub accessible on a mobile phone, tablet or PC. Students can chat with their whole class in groups with other students and with their teachers, this has resulted in a huge mindset shift for teachers, students and indeed parents.

Teachers are delivering classes in each subject, this includes all the exam subjects but also content is delivered in subjects such as PE, SPHE, Lifeskills and Career guidance among others. In addition to teachers delivering lessons on line some other examples of effective teaching and learning methodologies that students say are proving very beneficial for them include, Team's Meetings give the students the chance to work as a group online and have a class discussion, voice overs on PowerPoints (teachers voice explaining the content as if in class), videos of teachers teaching the content as they would do in class. Loom allows teachers to record a computer screen to deliver a lesson, it can include voice and camera. Edmodo/YouTube videos recorded by class teacher using a visualizer and the class is then sent on to the students. Audio file attachments created by language teachers recording their own voices, very useful especially for pronunciation. Guidance twitter page updated a number of times a day

However, it is not all work and no play with on line teaching, other fun ways we engage with students our online include:

- [ A 14-day art challenge competition, a fun competition to keep them busy during the holidays and their efforts will be posted on the school Facebook page with a prize for the most creative one.
- [ Football/soccer drills or workouts sent on to students. PE classes are using padlet. They are given one column a week from which they pick a workout to do and then they let the rest of the class know what they did and how they found it.
- [ Cookery competitions, dishes created are put on facebook
- [ Projects (in line with new Junior Cycle) which allows students to think critically and be creative
- [ The drama club is continuing, they practice the script using video meeting on teams, Capturing facial expressions and actions of each scene. Includes video, tone of voice everything really is nearly as good as it would be in class.

### Students

Our care and commitment to our students' learning and growth remain our priority at this difficult time and we want to continue to give them the same energy that we have always given them. Our students have shown great resilience to this challenge and have certainly adapted very well to the situation. The COVID-19 crisis may well change our world and our global outlook; it may also teach us about how education needs to change to be able to better prepare our students for what the future might hold.

Students have the option of multi-modal means of communications and presentation of work; students are finding creative ways, creating you tube clips, project work etc. to present work and have engaged very well in the process. It has become clear to us that our students have developed a whole range of skills during this period, skills such as resilience, self-directed learning, getting to grips with the digital tools very quickly, self-directed independent learning among others. They have also learned through the platform that we are using, how to submit assignments on line, work collaboratively and the importance of adhering to deadlines. Looking into the future, some of the most important skills that employers will be looking for will be creativity, communication and collaboration. When we eventually transition back into the classroom, which we will do, it will be easier to do so and I strongly feel that students will be more adaptable and resilient.

### **Communication**

Regular communication with parents is ongoing, through a phone call, text or email, to offer support and encouragement. Although the school doors remain closed here in Castleisland Community College due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation management and staff are always accessible for students and parents alike to help in whatever way we can. Support is vital in these uncertain times. Teachers communicate with students regularly, parents are also contacted either by the Principal, Year head, SEN Co-Ordinator or Guidance Counsellor.

We felt that it was very important to check in with all our students especially SEN students as well as those who are academically weak to ensure that they were transitioning smoothly into a different mode of learning. The well-being of all our students is and always will remain top priority for us at Castleisland Community College. Parents of students who were not engaging (for a variety of reasons) in the process at the beginning have all been contacted and almost all students are fully engaging with the process at this stage. We are continuing to provide education and support for students with Special Educational Needs. We do this by using a range of online learning websites and learning platforms to support teaching and learning. Using Microsoft Teams, we are guiding the students in their work daily and are offering one to one assistance when required.

A survey of all parents was carried out, we had a 60% response to the survey and the feedback from this was very positive with the majority of our parents saying that the school was doing everything possible to ensure continuity of effective teaching and Learning. We value the feedback from our parents, we have made some tweaks here and there to improve the learning experience for our students. These included teachers engaging in even more on line meetings with their classes. The main thing that emerged from the survey was that parents are finding it extremely difficult to motivate some students. We have addressed this in that we are looking at ensuring that we have great variety of methodologies in the delivery of lessons. The very strong sense of "we are all in this together" helps support everyone on this journey.

### **Staff**

Staff at Castleisland Community College have demonstrated collegiality and responsibility in providing online instruction, by working together as a community, we have overcome many challenges. Training and tutorials were provided to staff based on the key tools of TEAMS. Students were also provided with guides on how to use the tools. The online learning process has certainly enabled and facilitated even more collaboration among staff. It is wonderful to see staff support and advise each other on different methodologies that they found effective. Teachers will regularly post projects and other new methodologies used, on our Teaching and Learning TEAM which all teachers have access to. Teachers are putting a lot of pressure on themselves to deliver perfect lessons and I get constant phone calls from staff asking if they are doing enough. It has revolutionized the way we teach, and it has given students/teachers the opportunity to learn more about new digital tools and how best to use them.

Covid-19 has certainly drawn out the best from our staff, their commitment to students' [education](#) and [wellbeing](#) shining through the uncertainty over the past few weeks. There has always been a very strong sense of team among staff in Castleisland community college but these past few weeks have shown me how blessed we are to have such a committed and dedicated team of teachers in our school

Castleisland Community College has also taken virtual interaction and collaboration beyond the student as well. We have conducted several meetings over the past few weeks via teams, these meetings include Principals Team, Student Support Team, SEN (Special educational Needs), Teaching and Learning and our Senior management meetings were all conducted online. To date we have had full attendance at all meetings, an agenda is set out for each meeting and we all log on and conduct the meeting, this has proved very successful, these meetings can also be recorded.

### **Challenges**

The online learning process for our school to date has been very positive and teachers have learned very quickly how to make their online teaching more effective, however, this new way of teaching is not without its challenges. When teaching your classes in the classroom, you can look at your students and get a sense of whether they are engaging or not, in online lessons, teachers cannot control the environment, students can log off from the class or not engage at all. You cannot replace the teachers because the teacher provides the human interaction, but I think learning platforms like TEAMS is an effective way for a teacher to reach out to their classes remotely and continue to interact where the student can still see the teacher and hear their voice.

It is a stressful time for all particularly for parents while many work from home when also trying to keep children educated.

Some other challenges we encountered were:

- [ The assumption is that most students have a laptop to engage in online learning, this is not always the case with many households having to share devices.
- [ We also took into consideration factors such as poor internet access, student sharing devices, parents working from home, parents who have lost their jobs, problems with logging on etc. and household responsibilities for many students.
- [ Some students struggled with the lack of structure, parents should try having a routine and structure in place for your child, and work on activities similar in nature to what they are doing in school. Maybe follow their school timetable
- [ Continuing to maintain student engagement and focused learning can be a challenge. In addressing this, Teachers had to build a lot of interactive methodologies to ensure the students continue to engage. Therefore, to enable this we are using a lot of other tools in addition to TEAMS like Microsoft office lens, Voice overs in PowerPoint, Microsoft Forms, Quizzes, etc. to get students to participate in the lesson and increase collaboration. Therefore, we have tried to mix up the day and give students different ways to communicate and demonstrate learning in new and creative ways.

We have addressed many of the above challenges and have certainly taken all of these factors into consideration when we see that a student is not engaging. A certain degree of understanding is required when addressing these issues as it goes without saying that this is a very stressful time for students, teachers and parents and we sense high levels of anxiety.

### **Going forward**

We see that to date what is emerging for best practice is that there is no best practice for remote teaching yet and every school context is different, however it is imperative that we remain flexible and listen to students and parents when they tell us what they need in order to learn. We are very happy with the learning that has taken place to date and Castleisland Community College will continue to support its students and parents through this massive upheaval. The biggest lesson from this whole experience has been the importance of staying united and working together to support

each other in these challenging times. These experiences of isolation and remote learning away from peers, teachers and classrooms will serve as a cautious reminder to all of us of the importance of our human need for face-to-face social interaction. We all miss the students too and look forward to having them back in our classrooms. I also think that online learning will be recognised as core to every school's plan going forward.

All the staff at Castleisland community college will continue to work tirelessly to ensure the delivery of quality education to all our students and support them and their parents in every way possible. In the meantime it is important that we all remain calm and focus on the positives and we will all get through this together if we continue to work as a community.

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