Future Ready Digital Learning

The impact of teachers' digital devices on education provision

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Background

In 2021, laptop computers provided in 2015 to all teachers in primary, post-primary and special schools had reached end-of-life and were no longer supporting contemporary digital capabilities. Consequently, the Education Authority (EA) advised the Department of Education (DE) that a refreshed fit-for-purpose teacher digital device with contemporary functionality was required. The EA's C2K Education Network service worked with key stakeholders* to identify the potential capabilities and benefits of a modern digital device. The device requirements identified included: portability to enable teachers to carry out all necessary functions regardless of whether they were in or outside school; capability to support delivery of blended learning; and capability to enhance and improve pupils' learning experiences and outcomes.

Throughout the report where text is accompanied by an asterisk (*) this indicates that additional information can be found in Appendix 1.

Following the submission of a business case by C2K Education Network service, the Surface Pro 7+ digital device* was selected as the preferred option. Through a £20 million funding package provided by DE, the EA C2K Education Network service, in partnership with Microsoft Ireland and Capita Education*, provided 20,400 digital devices to teachers in over 1,100 primary, post-primary and special schools between January and December 2022. The roll-out* also included nursery schools and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) centres; these schools and centres were excluded from the 2015 teacher laptop scheme.

The roll-out of the teacher digital devices forms part of the EA's Education Information Solutions (EDIS) ten-year programme which has a number of objectives, including: improving the learning experience and educational outcomes for pupils; supporting teaching using technology and associated professional learning; developing skills for the future; and simplifying school administration.

To inform the roll-out of the digital devices and the associated teacher professional learning (TPL), the EA commissioned the Ulster University to carry out a short quantitative survey on teachers' current use of and attitudes towards educational technologies and professional learning which concluded in a baseline report. The report established a baseline position against which the impact of the device roll-out can be measured at a future date.

The response of both teachers and pupils to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions identified clearly the importance of digital access and digital skills to enable hybrid learning and online collaboration with others. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), digital skills are defined as the use of digital devices, communication applications and networks to manage and access information which enable people to "create and share digital content, communicate and collaborate, and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfilment in life, learning, work and social activities" (UNESCO, 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic, schools and centres responded quickly to provide hybrid learning using digital solutions. However, as digital technology continues to advance rapidly, changing how people live and work, it is worth noting that the continued absence of a holistic digital skills strategy for schools and EOTAS centres, may impact negatively on the pace and quality of digital skills development in education in Northern Ireland.

In light of the significant investment in the provision of a personal digital device for teachers and the importance of digital learning and skills, an exploratory evaluation was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in 2023. The methodology is outlined in Appendix 2.

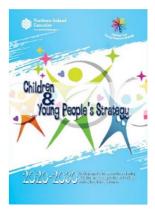The key objectives of the exploratory evaluative work were to:

- ascertain the EA's, schools' and centres' strategic vision and planning for use of the Surface Pro 7+ digital devices in education;

- review the effectiveness of the TPL programme to support the introduction of digital devices in schools and EOTAS centres; and

- identify examples of effective practice.

Policy context

A key outcome in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) is that *"our children and young people have the best start in life"* through having access to a high-quality education which equips them with the necessary skills to make the best life choices. Skills and attainment are a key priority area and require delivery of a high-quality curriculum which improves educational achievement and life chances, addresses persistent underachievement and supports children with specific needs, such as Special Educational Needs (SEN). Importantly, the PfG outlines that digital skills are essential now and in the future.

The Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) 2020-2030 provides the strategic framework for government departments to deliver the PfG outcomes for children and young people in Northern Ireland. A key aim of the strategy is to ensure that "children and young people learn and achieve". The CYPS outlines that an educational transformation programme led by DE should include the best use of technology in education. The most recent framework for ICT policy is the 'Strategy for Education Technology in Northern Ireland' (DENI, 1997).

The Department for the Economy has developed a strategy to support the Northern Ireland Executive's economic vision, with the aim of delivering an economy that is "10x stronger, 10x more prosperous, 10x more resilient". By 2030, it is estimated that 70,000 jobs in Northern Ireland will be automated; this will require transformation of skills, in particular digital skills to prepare young people for a future labour market and economy in which work roles and functions are becoming increasingly digitised.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Strategic planning and vision

- Across the schools and centres there is positive feedback from leaders about the digital device which includes the: ability to change from laptop to touchscreen; ready access to the School Information Management Service (SIMS); integrated camera to capture pupils' work and achievements; Windows ink application (App) and its capabilities; and, further use of One Drive and One Note to share information without the need for printing and to reduce workload.

- The increased broadband capability and better connectivity enabled in all schools and centres, and wireless solutions provided in one-third of them*, is facilitating greater use of digital Apps within the classroom.

- Where there is a clear strategic vision and planning for impactful use of the digital devices, for example, a whole-organisation action plan incorporating a well-targeted programme of TPL, this is supporting the development of teachers' and pupils' digital skills. In the more effective practice, the new digital devices are integrated effectively within the school's existing digital technology provision to maximise the impact on learning and teaching.

- Schools and centres were provided, late in the summer term of 2023, with access to the NAACE (National Association for Education Technology) SRF (self-review framework) to evaluate their digital skills provision, leading to more informed strategic planning of their digital transformation journey. As this initiative is at an early stage, it is not yet possible to evaluate its impact on the quality of education provision for pupils.

- The roll-out of the digital device and the associated TPL package aims to support teachers in building their digital skills, and is also a key enabler of the EDIS programme. However, without a clear strategic vision for digital skills within the school or centre, together with effective planning and implementation, the intended EDIS outcomes most likely will not be realised fully. Of the schools and centres that participated in this exploratory evaluation, there were a small number where a digital vision was yet to be established and consequently there was limited impactful TPL on the effective use of the digital device.

- The provision of the digital devices and associated TPL did not include the initial teacher education providers. Consequently, student teachers may not have the same access to a device as teachers in schools or centres when they are on school placements.

- A small number of nursery staff reported that they are yet to be convinced about the benefits of using digital technology in early years settings. More research is needed to inform effective practice in the use of digital devices in this education phase.

- A small number of the primary schools involved in the evaluation were unaware of the Digital Skills Curriculum and Qualifications Framework, developed by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and its application to the primary school curriculum.

Teacher Professional Learning

- The online Educator Hub, 'Olive', a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), represents a significant investment of £20K by the EA to support TPL for the digital devices and is a useful resource to accommodate flexibly aspects of professional learning. Increasingly, the ability to provide online TPL through synchronous and asynchronous online learning rather than via in-person sessions has enabled the EA to manage the allocated funding for the TPL programme.

- Schools reported that the TPL for the introduction of the digital device is not always pitched appropriately; for some teachers it is too fast paced but for others is relatively passive and basic in nature. Consequently, there is a need for the TPL to take greater account of the teachers' existing digital competencies to maximise the impact of any TPL provided.

- Scheduling of the TPL sessions is on a termly basis, resulting in teachers being unsure if further sessions were available to support their development of digital skills in order for them to exploit better the potential benefits of the digital device within their professional practice.

MAIN FINDINGS

Strategic vision and planning

The EA's vision for the teacher digital devices is to provide access to the new EDIS learning environments, deliver tools to improve pupils' experiences and outcomes and support the work and professional learning of teachers. A personal digital device is indisputably a necessary tool to support teachers in achieving these outcomes. Without effective strategic planning, the introduction of the devices may not, however, deliver the associated intended outcomes such as: high quality, dynamic and personalised lessons; increased collaboration; enhanced learning experiences; increased pupil engagement; and high-quality learning for all pupils. Key issues such as policy planning and development; quality improvement and whole school/centre development planning; curriculum delivery and design; planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning; and, monitoring and reporting processes must be considered holistically if the devices are to be embedded impactfully.

As part of the exploratory evaluation, schools and centres were asked about their strategic vision and planning for the use of the device. The strategic planning in schools and centres, including consultation with teachers, to introduce the digital devices has been impacted to varying degrees by the industrial action of the teaching unions. That said, almost all schools and centres used the 2022/2023 school year to prioritise and develop teacher confidence in operating the device.

The digital devices have been positively received across the schools and centres. The reported strengths of the device include: the ability to change from laptop to touchscreen; access to SIMS; use of the integrated camera to capture pupils' work and achievements; inking capabilities; portability; and reliability. Teachers reported using cloud-based platforms, such as Microsoft OneDrive, to work collaboratively on the latest versions of school documents, such as school policies and planning. Across the focus groups that engaged with inspectors, the teachers also reported that productivity tools such as Microsoft Office 365, in particular One Note, are having a positive impact on communication, administrative aspects of school/centre life and are reducing teacher workload. Microsoft Teams is also supporting improved attendance rates at multi-disciplinary team meetings, while also reducing the environmental and financial impact of travel.

Schools and centres reported that the successful integration of the devices has been made possible by the upgraded digital infrastructure. Enhanced Wi-Fi connection and increased bandwidth now provide faster and more reliable internet access for teachers and pupils and is facilitating better online communication and collaboration. Connectivity is now enabled in all schools and centres and wireless solutions have been installed in one-third of them*, beginning with those who were assessed as being most in need. It is important to note that the provision of a digital device and an upgraded digital infrastructure, in and of itself, does not transform learning or teaching. A key consideration for practitioners is: how effective and impactful is the use of the digital device; particularly to create, design, collaborate and explore ways to improve the learning experiences for pupils? This should extend the potential use of the device beyond simply delivering and sharing information passively, such as through power-point presentations.

The leadership role in a school or centre is pivotal in translating the vision for using the digital devices into impactful action. A strategic digital skills action plan, informed by a digital skills audit and linked appropriately to a programme of TPL, is essential to develop teacher confidence and competence. In more effective practice, the device was complementary to other existing digital devices (such as iPads) and there was a clear strategy to harmonise and maximise the use of all technology available to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Conversely, during the exploratory evaluation there were a small number of schools and centres where a digital vision was yet to be established and consequently there was limited impactful TPL accessed on the effective use of the device.

In an example in a **special school**, the ICT co-ordinator, alongside the senior leadership team, was leading digital learning and there were targets within the school development plan, such as use of One Note, to improve communication and paperless working. There was a blended approach to device management, with the devices and iPad tablets being used effectively to capture evidence of pupils' learning, collaborate with the class team of staff and support digitally pupils who were unable to manage transitions between learning activities.

Example of effective practice

One special school formed part of the EA's National Association for Education Technology (NAACE) pilot group. Their self-review showed that every teacher in the school needed to improve their understanding of the importance of developing pupils' digital skills and the positive impact that digital technology can have on pupils' learning and experiences. This information informed the School Development Plan.

Subsequently, the school focused on assessment and pupil progress by using the device to record, showcase and upload information which can be shared more widely within and beyond the class team of staff. A graphic design App was particularly useful to young people who cannot read or write as they were able to record their voice and make their own visual schedules with the support of their teachers.

In partnership with NAACE, and funded through EDIS, schools and centres have access to the NAACE SRF. The framework provides a benchmark on the impact of educational technologies in schools and centres and the contribution of technology to improving outcomes and engagement and developing essential digital skills. Through use of the framework, staff can identify next steps in their digital transformation journey. Schools and centres were provided with access to the SRF late in the summer term of 2023, it is therefore too early to evaluate its impact in identifying and improving pupils' digital learning and experiences.

Of particular note is the significant improvement work that has been undertaken across **EOTAS centres** to address variation in digital infrastructure and investment, informed by a staff audit on digital resources, access to online systems, and staff skill and confidence in using digital devices. Centre leaders reported that they are very well supported in using the device by the EOTAS Information and Communication Technology (ICT) regional lead. Furthermore, centres which have a partnership agreement with schools reported that the cloud-based system provides staff with quicker access to completed pupil work and a range of resources. This was supporting better outreach work through accessible and on demand resources which was enabling a more individualised and responsive approach to meet pupils' learning needs.

Example of effective practice

A primary partnership EOTAS centre was using the device with pupils who were reluctant writers to motivate, engage and support them to access learning suited to their interests and needs. For example, pupils at Key Stage 2 were using the programme language, Scratch, on a daily basis and, with the support of their teachers, have created, narrated and edited digital talking books.

EOTAS centres and nursery schools have welcomed their inclusion in the EDIS programme, including the provision of the device. The leaders appreciated access to the C2K Service Desk and C2K eLearning consultants who provided essential advice and support in how the technology can be used to support the administrative tasks as well as enhancing the learning and teaching.

In **nursery schools**, the portability and versatility of the device has enabled better communication and collaboration with staff, governors and parents, and reduced time and effort spent on administrative tasks. Where the staff were confident and competent in using the device, they used the camera and built-in microphone to record video and audio clips of the children's learning and used this evidence to assess and monitor the children's progress. In the more effective practice, the nursery staff used the device as a versatile tool to inspire curiosity, foster critical thinking skills and provide active learning experiences for the children through, for example, immersive storytelling sessions, rhymes and songs, and generating QR codes for nature trails and scavenger hunts.

Nursery schools have not benefited from the same level of EA strategic planning and support as EOTAS centres, despite similar inconsistencies in digital infrastructure and investment. A small number of nursery staff reported that they are reticent to integrate digital technology into the learning experiences of the children. They cited concerns about children's passive engagements with technology and the potential impact of screen time on aspects of child development, such as physical activity and language development. It will be important for policy makers and educators to continue to take due cognisance of relevant research regarding the use of digital technology in early childhood education, particularly to inform the use of digital devices in the sector and ensure best value from the investment.

Primary schools which have consistently planned for and invested in digital technology, including up-to-date interactive panels*, reported that the compatibility and integration with the device was optimised. Recognising the educational benefits of the device, some primary schools invested in digital pens, detachable keyboards and Surface Go 3 devices to supplement the school's existing resources. With limited financial resources, some primary schools reported facing challenges in acquiring the necessary equipment, such as interactive boards, laptops, tablets, and software, to support and enhance learning and teaching. This highlights the need for strategic planning at all levels and the importance of a well-informed regular technology refresh.

There was a clear vision for embedding the use of the device in a small number of the **post-primary** schools participating in the exploratory evaluation, by aligning the planning for infrastructure and digital resources to the school's curriculum needs. In the better practice, the post-primary schools reported that the devices were transformative for marking, creating a flipped classroom, recording lessons and for providing video evidence, for example, assessment in vocational subjects. Examples of software used for learning and teaching were Microsoft and Google Forms, Python software, Scratch, Kahoot, Quizlet and digital jotters. A small number of post-primary schools reported casting from the device onto smart TVs with a wireless connection as an alternative to aging interactive whiteboards. This was identified as cost-effective in schools where there had been a curriculum audit of digital use.

In a very small number of discussions with post-primary pupils, they discussed the increased job opportunities in using coding and digital technology, fast-growing EdTech industry, and applications and games that their teachers used which motivated them in their modern language learning. This aligns with the findings from the ETI report on Modern Languages at Key Stage 3.

The provision of the digital devices and associated TPL did not include the **initial teacher education (ITE) providers**. Consequently, student teachers may not have the same access to a device as teachers in schools or centres when they are on school placements. They may also benefit from access to aspects of the TPL programme to upskill their digital literacy.

The EA has ear-marked 500 devices for new teachers entering the profession between 2023 and 2026. It would be beneficial for aspiring teachers studying ITE courses to be familiar with the capability of the devices and how they can be used to transform learning and teaching before they begin employment.

Teacher professional learning (TPL)

The findings from the EA commissioned report 'Beneath the Surface' carried out by the Ulster University indicates clearly the need for ongoing TPL. All of the schools and centres involved in this exploratory evaluation also reported that further professional learning and development opportunities are needed to build staff confidence and ensure that the devices are utilised to their maximum potential.

The EA in partnership with EA C2K Education Network service and Microsoft Ireland have provided TPL for teachers by: organising six face-to face professional learning events for teachers prior to device roll out; arranging a face-to-face session for school leaders at the end of the first term to highlight examples of effective practice; and, seconding a teacher (until December 2023) to provide consultative support to teachers, work in partnership with the EA C2K and Capita to troubleshoot any emerging issues, and provide online TPL to support teachers.

Primary schools reported that the EA TPL on use of the device was not pitched appropriately. For some it was too fast paced and aimed at those who were already competent in the use of digital technology. All of the **post-primary schools** involved in this evaluation participated in the EA TPL and reported that the focus has been on how to use the Surface Pro, which was often pitched at a basic level. Schools that reported being at a more advanced level than the training offered tended to have a digital champion or team supporting staff with the use of the device to enhance learning and teaching. The EA online TPL sessions and teacher attendance figures (ranging between 8 and 169 attendees) were shared with the inspectors for term two, 2023. There were specific sessions for all schools, except post-primary, which took place in term three, 2023. The sessions were led by competent and knowledgeable teachers, either working within EA or working in schools, and provided a good introduction. A finding, however, from this exploratory evaluation is that there is a need for various levels of TPL that are aligned more to building progressively on teachers' existing digital competencies. As the EA provided the full schedule for their TPL sessions for term two (2023) only, the structure, purpose and communication of future TPL sessions was unclear. Consequently, teachers were unsure if further sessions were available to help them develop the digital skills they need to exploit more the potential benefits of the digital device within their professional practice.

In addition, Microsoft Ireland is also funding the licensing of the online Educator Hub, Olive VLE. The EA have formed appropriately four teacher device cluster groups (approximately 80 teachers in total), with representatives from nursery, primary, post-primary, special, Irish Medium (IM) schools and EOTAS centres to co-create TPL content and video resources for the Olive platform. The platform has short step-by-step videos (3-5 minutes in length) and 17 courses in English and IM which include how to put on the device case, sign in and do a reboot. Courses in Olive are available for those teachers who use Microsoft Teams and those who prefer to use GSuite. While the provision of accessible training has been a priority, there is a potential risk that this has been too basic, below the level and competency with which some teachers are working and will quickly become outdated. The Olive platform represents a significant investment of £20,000 but data relating to teacher use was not shared with the inspectors. It is important that the EA monitor the use and impact of the Olive platform on TPL across schools and centres.

In a small number of **special schools**, senior leaders were proactive in reviewing the content within the Olive platform so that teachers were directed to the most relevant sessions to support their TPL. Currently, teachers across the education phases are not notified when new content becomes available in Olive and leaders are unable to see the training which staff have completed to provide more tailored in-house TPL sessions.

Increasingly, the ability to provide online TPL through synchronous and asynchronous learning, rather than via in-person sessions, has enabled EA to manage more efficiently the allocated funding for the TPL programme. The EA asked schools that are digitally competent to host a TPL session in August 2023 on using the device for learning and teaching, which all schools and centres in the local area could attend. This approach supports the intent within the DE's Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning of access to "practice-led support within communities of practice."

The EA is aware through data insights that there are instances where the devices were not yet in use by some teachers or that pupils rather than teachers were using the devices. This was also a finding in a small number of schools within this exploratory evaluation. Inspectors requested data analytics from the EA but these were not shared due to acknowledged variation by the EA in their collated data resulting in issues with accuracy. It is therefore important that timely and accurate data is maintained by the EA and with DE to inform any next steps in supporting use of the device and required TPL.

The Ulster University survey found that 73% of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they had never used any assistive technologies. This is of note, given the increasing number of pupils requiring the use of assistive technologies to be able to access fully the curriculum. While some of the TPL provided by EA has shown the potential of the Windows platform through immersive reader and the other features it contains (altered line spacing, a reading ruler which only shows the section being read and translation capabilities), further TPL is required on the use of assistive technologies to provide teachers with the information and knowledge to support more effectively inclusive classroom practice.

There was evidence that a minority of schools and centres were able to prioritise staff professional learning in the use of the device and organised school development days and staff meetings to develop and deepen staff understanding and mastery of the device and cloud-based Apps. **Primary schools** reported that training methods used include: watching live webinars provided by C2K Education Network; accessing pre-recorded training videos available in Olive; and, drawing on expertise within their own school. In the **nursery sector** there was evidence within the schools' development planning of the intention to upskill the governors and parents on digital skills.

Too many of the **primary** and **nursery schools** remain unaware of the range of Apps that are available through the C2K Education network. By raising awareness and providing further training, the EA can help schools and centres make informed decisions regarding App usage, including the availability of free Apps thereby maximising the potential of the C2K Education network.

A number of **primary schools** were unaware of the Digital Skills Curriculum and Qualifications Framework, developed by the CCEA, and its application to the primary school curriculum. Going forward, CCEA should explain and exemplify to schools and centres how digital technology, including the device, is used to support the development of learners' digital skills to be digital citizens, digital workers and/or digital makers. This is a key piece of work given that over 60% of teachers identify only as digital citizens (Ulster University, 2023) and will require ongoing planning for TPL to support them in developing as digital workers and makers of the future.

There were also a number of **post-primary** examples of effective TPL support which included: staff mentoring; working party groups that trialled Apps and disseminated effective practice; and staff members who had responsibility for troubleshooting and reporting to EA. In addition, schools delivered training on a range of Apps and software packages which included: Office 365; transition from using Universal Serial Bus (USB) to the cloud; the accessibility of SIMS from the device; presentation software; OneNote; Olive; Surface Pro 'hacks'; and Photoshop. A number of Microsoft Incubator schools* have received additional training by Microsoft, Dublin. There were a few examples in post-primary where limited TPL had been delivered or accessed and included EA C2K-arranged TPL sessions.

Staff within **EOTAS** centres were working across different systems with EA and C2K which are not compatible with one another. The communication issue was compounded as some centres share DE numbers which means that staff in fourteen centres may not receive C2k e-mails and consequently may not receive the information relating to TPL sessions. Currently, all of the primary EOTAS centres share one DE number, and it is anticipated that EDIS could provide a solution to this issue.

Conclusion

The provision of the Surface Pro 7+ digital device and upgrading of the digital infrastructure as part of the EDIS digital transformation programme, represents a significant investment in digital provision within education. Overall, it is noteworthy that the EA has successfully distributed digital devices to the teaching workforce in NI, enabled broadband connectivity in all schools and centres and provided wireless solution in one-third of them* where required. Consequently, successful integration of digital technology within and beyond the classroom to enhance education provision appears achievable, with much potential for further innovation and benefits to learners.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

- To optimise the potential benefits of digital technologies in education, DE should continue to work in partnership with key stakeholders to develop and implement an agreed system-wide digital skills strategy.

- For CCEA to inform and exemplify to all schools and centres how digital technology, including a teacher's personal digital device, can be used to support the development of learners' digital skills to be digital citizens, digital workers or digital makers.

- For EA to make better use of available data analytics to monitor and review digital device usage across the C2K Education Network to inform future planning for TPL in order to support successful integration of digital technology in education.

- The provision of specific TPL support for the nursery school sector aligned better to the teachers' starting points and particular professional learning needs.   It will also be important for policy makers and educators to continue to take due cognisance of relevant research regarding the use and benefits of digital technology in early childhood education, particularly to inform the appropriate use of the digital devices in this sector and ensure best value from the significant investment.

- For EA to continue to work with the Teacher Device Support Groups to ensure that the Olive VLE provides the TPL support that teachers require to optimise best value from this investment.

- For EA to work alongside schools and centres to evaluate and disseminate the extent to which the digital device and associated applications (Apps), particularly those relating to assistive technologies, can be used to engage pupils and improve their learning experiences and outcomes.

Appendix 1: Notes

Page 1:   Stakeholders refers to Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS), Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and a selection of schools.

Page 1:   Surface Pro 7 Plus devices is referred to throughout the document as device(s).

Page 1:   Microsoft Ireland is located in Dublin and they provide software development, Microsoft International Operations, Finance HR and Digital Sales for Europe, Middle East and Africa and Ireland sales and Marketing.

Page 1:   Capita is a consulting, transformation and digital services business which partners with clients to provide insight and technologies and deliver innovative solutions.

Page 1:   Roll out refers to the distribution of the devices and the associated programme of TPL to support teachers in using the device.

Pages 3, 5 & 11:   This figure has since risen to 50%.

Page 7:   Interactive panels have touch-screen capabilities and are stand-alone display panels, while interactive boards are large surfaces that require a pen or stylus for interaction.

Page 10:   Microsoft Incubator Schools is used to describe those schools beginning their journey to become Microsoft Showcase Schools and demonstrates their commitment to exploring new approaches to learning and teaching and recognise the power and impact of digital transformation.

Appendix 2: Methodology

Within the constraints of the current industrial action by the teaching unions, evidence was gathered from a restricted range of sources (Appendix 3) and included: focus groups with a selection of leaders from schools and EOTAS centres, a number of face-to-face visits to or online meetings with school and centre leaders, a small number of face-to-face meetings with pupils, a desk-based review of EA TPL and meetings with representatives from the EA, Microsoft Ireland and DE. There were no lesson observations. In addition, evidence from an ongoing evaluation of the digital skills curriculum in primary and post-primary schools which was relevant to this exploratory evaluation was included, bringing the total number of schools and EOTAS centres involved to forty-six.

Appendix 3: Evidence base

Focus group meetings

Three meetings with four special schools
Three meetings with five EOTAS centres
Two meetings with five post-primary schools
One meeting with four primary schools

Visits

Six nursery schools
Two EOTAS centres
Four post-primary schools
One online special school meeting.

Digital skills evaluation

Ten primary schools
Five post-primary schools

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