# Digital Schools of Distinction Award Evaluation Report

**School:** St. Thomas' S.N.S., Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24.

**Roll No:** 19765O

**Date of Validation:** 12/06/2018

**Leadership & Vision**

St. Thomas' S.N.S. with a most committed team of teachers and support staff, clearly demonstrates in both written word and in daily classroom practice, that 'exceptional' technology - enhanced teaching and learning, plays a central and fully inclusive role in the students', teachers' and wider community's lives.

Moreover the leadership and vison displayed during the DSoD validation confirm that 21st Century ICTs hold a momentous and 'equalising' position in the everyday lives of the school and wider community as a whole. Pupils and teachers of all classes visited are afforded the openings to become familiar with a vast range of modern and mobile technologies, and to advance their professional and personal skills to effectively employ them in appealing, focused and specialised learning environments.

This was of particular interest, and creatively presented, in such a variety of curricular and other lessons employing the use of ICTs. Students of all ages and abilities in the school are fully enabled and empowered to seek out digital opportunities, possibilities and research interactions by a most committed team of ICT coordinator, Mr. Matthew Campbell, and a very empathetic and supportive Principal, Ms. Eithne O'Shea, and of course, a very welcoming and dedicated teaching staff.

Parental and local involvement is to be highly recommended and the support of the parents cannot but be recognised as fully supportive, formative and excellent. The CPD, peer-to-peer provision and internal assistance and encouragement offered during the school year is also noteworthy and St. Thomas' S.N.S. has the added value of providing its own CPD courses, in-house, with resident experts.

The use of Digital Media is incorporated in the various policies and posters on display and there is no doubt whatsoever that technology plays a central role in every aspect of school life.

St. Thomas' S.N.S. is a true testament to how active, innovative leadership, when combined with a clear and shared vision, transforms the use of Digital technologies to a 'WOW' level! This is the only way, I as validator can express my absolute

amazement at the exceptionality of this school. The school is a modern building and the provision of wired and wireless technologies is excellently structured throughout. Moreover the school along with its expert, local ICT consultant, ensures that the suite of Tablets, Laptops and Chromebooks, Nintendo DS's, available to each student, are at all times connected to the Internet.

The secretary, teachers and students use both an internal Server and various Cloud facilities to save and share their work, related files and documents. The school uses Gmail as part of Google Suite for Education for communicating amongst staff and the DataBiz system for documenting administrative issues. They also use DataBiz as a pupil management system for roll call, which is taken each day before a specific time. Records are kept on each child and there is an easy transition between classes and all details are ready to hand.

A whole-school ICT/Technology Audit was carried out, by Camara, in February 2018 to ascertain the 'needs' of the school and manage an holistic approach to planning for the future of Digital Learning in the school.

Suffice to say that the Leadership and Vision displayed, from class to class and SEN/SET environment to station-teaching, discussed and demonstrated during the validation was nothing but excellent and outstanding.


**ICT in the Curriculum**

St. Thomas' S.N.S., a co-ed, Senior National School, strives, in a truly democratic manner, to ensure that each child, irrespective of his or her background, ability or intellectual challenge, is enabled to leave the school feeling self-assured and confident using modern, digital technologies, having gained a reinforcement of their general classroom work in many curricular areas and in particular, Visual Arts, Literacy, SESE, Animation, Problem Solving, Gaeilge, Oral Skills, Maths and English. Other curricular subject areas are also accessed and explored utilizing a variety of Educational Apps, Websites and ICT tools to enhance learning and wellbeing. SCRATCH and Coding, Blogging, Website Design and Updating were excellently demonstrated and presented in virtually all classes.

Sixth Class cleverly presented 'Coding', 'Blogging', Web Design, Encarta Challenges, Maths Games and so much more. Third to Fifth classes presented projects on France, Problem Solving, Reading Eggs, Google Docs, Mathletics, Write-a-Book and incredible SEN Apps utilizing Tablets and Chromebooks and Laptops. The effective use of Tablets and Chromebooks and Laptops during classes and in various 'stations', is to be applauded and merits special mention, especially in the twelve classrooms and learning environments visited.

The students and their teachers were deeply involved in individual, station, peer-to-peer and group/team teaching with ICTs. Furthermore they also demonstrated their media work with News/project and film/Movie productions. This was absolutely wonderful to observe and discuss with the students. The use of IWB systems is very effective also at all levels of assessment, classroom revision and testing throughout the school, combined with the Google Classroom / Docs / Sheets / Forms and Visualiser systems.

The study of Problem Solving, Literacy and 'CODE' and its progression from class to class, was a joy to behold! The integration with other curricular subjects, utilizing such a variety of Apps and hardware, was expertly introduced and as a validator, it was a privilege to see such 'innovative and advanced' integrative work. The Internet Research projects, in the classes, was an excellent way to introduce and explore active research strategies and methodologies.

In catering for pupils' needs especially in Learning Support and Resource: They use a variety of mobile media and adaptive technologies, e.g. Nessy and Touch-Type, Read & Spell to support Dyslexia, as per ability and needs of individual students, as they present themselves and the SNA support is to be commended. This was observed by the validator during the visit to various settings.

A number of classes throughout the school have subscriptions to various online educational platforms. Students access these platforms on their media and through the various apps, in school. Teachers also assign tasks for the students to complete at home. The pupils from Third to Sixth Class take part in Mathletics and Stop-Motion technologies are also widely used.

Finally, St. Thomas' S.N.S. has two Chromebook trolleys that are used extensively on a daily basis. Station teaching is a key part of their approach to literacy and numeracy. These combined with the suite of Tablets and Laptops allow for a fully enhanced Digital Learning environment. Apps are carefully selected to enhance the subjects being taught and the teachers include apps for all age and ability levels. The aim is for a balance between skill-based apps and those designed to create content. There is also a Reading Eggs and Mathletics subscription for all pupils. Teachers can access the management section of the school's website to check for formative and summative assessment of each student's usage and progress.


## School ICT Culture

There is clear evidence that ICT is ever present and visible into the cultural fabric and daily life of St. Thomas' S.N.S. Posters on Coding, Cyberbullying and safe internet practices are also clearly noticeable in the school. Throughout the school, the effective

use of various hardware is unmistakable. This is also effectively used for SSE (School Self Evaluation) with teachers/students/parents/community. The school's website is very informative (www.stthomas.ie) bringing together a variety of classroom and community based projects, school events, school policies, blogs, musical renditions, old, new and current information, awards, parents' area, active schools, a myriad of projects and classroom activities. This is fully maintained by the ICT co-ordinator, staff and Student Bloggers. Moreover, the provision of regular Newsletters and the emphasis on the Ethos of the school and the importance of inclusive, democratic, child-centred activities, greatly enhances the website. The website is a 'mine' of past, present and future events, portraying St. Thomas' S.N.S. as an active, vibrant school in after-school clubs, coding, Google for Education, educational websites, photos and videos, clubs and activities, etc.

Each class regularly updates the school website/blog to reflect activities in the classroom and beyond. The Green Schools, Active Schools and Clubs all have their own website spaces also. Both teachers and students take photos and videos which are uploaded to the website. Pupils can access a range of educational platforms from the Kids' Zone on the school website. Digital photography is used throughout the school and each class level has its own digital camera/HD Visualiser or similar hardware.

The daily use of the internal server and DataBiz system to organize and share school policies, plans and documents, reports, testing and attendance related activities was evident. It clearly shows a commitment to promoting every aspect of the school's professional life and work as a central part of this community. This is all moderated by the ICT coordinator and staff. The Principal is fully supportive and encourages all teachers and students to participate and be active.

All students are comfortable utilising a variety of mobile technologies with excellent learning to learn tools. Finally, the parents work together with the school to enforce its cyber safety policy for the school. The school has a school Facebook group for parents where important information is sent. The school Facebook group also directs parents to the school website, for more information about school events and drives. The school website also has an ACTIVE warning Notice Board for 'at-risk' Apps and Websites that are accessible, but deemed unsuitable for students. Webwise and Newsletters are also utilised to keep parents up-to-date with developments in cyber security and safety.

In summary, the culture of ICT is clearly visible in every aspect of the St. Thomas' S.N.S. professional and community presence.

Iontach ar fad. Thar bharr!

**Professional Development**

At present training requirements are adequately catered for by in-school, peer-to-peer and Summer CPD attendance at various courses and ICT Support evenings at Dublin West Education Centre. The ICT coordinator and other expert groups, (e.g. Camara after the Audit) provide opportunities of one-to-one CPD, with interested teachers, in identified areas of ICTs. There is also noticeable Peer to Peer collaboration going on when teachers find new ideas and practices.

Individual teachers have undertaken courses like SCRATCH, coding (using SCRATCH), Movie Editing, Google Classroom, Data Processing, Animation, SEN and Google Suite for Education to enhance their professional lives and those of the students.

Having resident 'expert' teachers on the staff, to provide such formative and on-going CPD opportunities, is indeed a big advantage for St. Thomas' S.N.S., but it is also clear from the validation that school management has a deep desire to continue 'pushing out' the boundaries of CPD on both personal and professional levels to enhance their daily, conscious, mindful working environment.


**Resources & Infrastructure**

Excellent resources are evident throughout the school, offering an engaging, technology-enhanced environment for all students. Each classroom is equipped with a laptop and an interactive whiteboard as a minimum provision. These are used constantly throughout the day. Each class has access to (if required) a wireless mouse and keyboard, a visualizer and a VGA adaptor to connect to all mobile media. There are also two suites of Chromebooks constantly on the move.

Each teacher has a laptop and there are two trolleys of Chromebooks, which can be used throughout the school.  These are kept in charging trolleys in the corridors. Google Suite for Education is available to all media. This is used for presentation, word processing, research and educational games also.  These pieces of work are saved either on the internal server or Google Drive so that students and staff can access them from any computer in the school or at home. The staff also utilise the server for sharing plans and a comprehensive library of resources.

Suitable apps for each class level have been acquired and organised into folders on the various media. Station teaching is included in every classroom and one or more of the daily stations involves the use of the Chromebooks. Apps are carefully selected to enhance the subject area being taught. There are a number of Laptops and Tablets assigned specifically to SEN students in the school. These contain apps carefully selected for the pupil's specific and identified needs. There is a

wealth of licensed software and other related educational tools and Apps available throughout the school. Excellent print facilities are also available throughout the school. There is absolutely no doubt that the evidence of ICT availability, fusion, synthesis and usage both seen and witnessed during the validation is exceptional and highly commendable. Broadband is provided through the NCTE.

**General Comments and Recommendations**

St. Thomas' S.N.S. is living evidence of what is being achieved, on a daily basis, in the effective and innovative integration of ICTs and Digital Technologies, in a 21$^{st}$ Century school. The validator was given a detailed timetable and a guided tour of the school facilities, classrooms and associated ICT / SEN provisions by the ICT coordinator, Mr. Matthew Campbell. The expertise, proficiency and consideration displayed and demonstrated by all involved in their use of modern technologies was absolutely outstanding.

The standard of Maths / English / Gaeilge / SESE and SEN support and integrated management tools and administration, utilising all aspects of Digital Technology, was superb.

St. Thomas' S.N.S. meets every criteria for Digital School of Distinction Status and I have absolutely no reservations whatsoever in recommending them for this prestigious award. I believe St. Thomas' S.N.S., its teachers, students and community leads the way for all other schools to follow. What was observed and experienced during this DSoD validation was nothing short of exemplary and I would especially like to thank the príomhoide, Ms. Eithne O'Shea, all the teaching staff and students of the school for giving the validator a glimpse of what a superb and dedicated school is achieving in the area of ICT when a clear vision is defined, managed and implemented on a daily basis.

It was my absolute privilege and pleasure to feel totally inspired after my visit to St. Thomas' S.N.S. Finally, the ICT coordinator, Mr. Matthew Campbell has put together a 'daily', living, 'Digital' system, which I can only say is to be lauded, celebrated and extoled. His passion for Digital, Technology-enhanced teaching and Learning is a major driving force behind the school's success and the support he receives throughout the school, with the full backing of the senior management, is enviable. Comhghairdeas!!!

*Bhí sé de phribléid agam, an obair fhiúntach theicneolaíochta a bhí faoi lán-seol sa scoil, a bhlaiseadh. Go leana an sár-obair seo.*

**Please outline any good or noteworthy examples of ICT integration in this school:**

Google Classroom for Classroom Projects / Tasks / Assignments
Nintendo DSs for Mathematics, Strategy and Problem Solving
Scratch Coding based around Themes such as Storytelling
All aspects of Numeracy including Mathletics
All aspects of Literacy including Reading Eggs
Nessy and Touch-Type, Read & Spell for Dyslexia
Go Noodle and Wellbeing
Stop Motion Videos
Student Portfolios using Google Drive
Educational Apps for SEN
Posting to the School Website Blog
Research using Encarta and the Internet
Pupils' Projects and Presentations

## Scoring

The visit more than validated the statements on their Self Evaluation Review.

## Validator

Dr. Daithí Ó Murchú