

ZOOM SCHOOL AT BRAMPTON ABBOTTS IN COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

“ZOOM SCHOOL GAVE MY DAUGHTER A REASON AND A PURPOSE TO GET UP EACH MORNING. THE HIGH EXPECTATION FOR LEARNING MERELY TRANSFERRED FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE LIVING ROOM! IT HAS BEEN SEAMLESS, EDUCATIONAL, ESSENTIAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.” – A PARENT’S VIEW



Sara Herriott is deputy head and Y6 teacher at Brampton Abbots. During recent months she’s turned into an online editor, educator and broadcaster and has found Zoom to be a vital tool in her delivery of home education. She’s immersed herself so deeply in the technology that “Zoomschool the Musical” is currently in rehearsal in her class. Here is her account of how she did it.

At the time when lockdown was announced, we all knew it was coming. Our head was isolating due to a poorly family member (thankfully not the virus) so there followed a flurry of video calls to come up with the plan about how we could set up a workable home learning plan in two days and roll it out to families. It had to be simple and workable for all families. We knew technology would be the key and that we would have to get up to speed pretty quickly.

These are the steps we went through in those two days:

- Check the insurance status of our iPads (we have about 80 devices)
- Install any apps we needed and train as many children as we could to use them
- Set up school email addresses for all children
- Dismantle the iPad trolleys to release the chargers
- Distribute iPads, chargers and pens to all Y6 children and as many Y5 children who had no access to suitable technology at home (we decided that these were the year groups we would target first)
- Order CGP practice books for all children and send home work packs including books, pencils, codes, instructions etc.
- Set up signing out system for iPads which also sought permission from parents to use Zoom and Seesaw.

The mainstay of our home learning has been two apps:

Seesaw for setting and collecting assignments (most classes had used this app to some extent but in no way were we expert at using it – we are now!)

Zoom – none of us had used this but we had heard it was being used in the business world quite successfully.

My Teaching Assistant and I set up all Year 6 devices with Zoom using school email address and dispatched Louis down the corridor to join a Zoom meeting I hoped I had just set up. What was left of the class (several had left before compulsory lockdown) stared at the interactive whiteboard and gasped as Louis appeared in the meeting – our first Apollo 13 moment! We knew we could make it work.

In the absence of our head, Dan, I took the final emotional assembly, not knowing when we would see these children again, but suspecting it would not be for a long time. Final instructions to my class were that I would send a code on Seesaw and they were to join a Zoom meeting on Monday at 10am.

I'm not sure if I believed that any children would appear on my screen but at 10am Etta appeared on the board and was quickly followed by half a dozen others. We spent the first half an hour working out how to switch on audio, video switch between views so that we could all see each other etc.

By Wednesday we were up to 75% of the class and the first week was mainly spent waving at each other, showing each other cats, changing virtual backgrounds and all talking at once. Children turned up in their pyjamas and tried to play on other gadgets at the same time so I knew we had to set some ground rules:

- Everyone must be up and dressed by 10am
- Microphones must be switched off when the teacher was talking and virtual hands up to talk
- No drawing on the share screen!!
- Faces must be visible during class sessions – no messing with the iPad

We soon made great progress and established a routine:

- 9am – work goes out on Seesaw
- 10am – come to Zoom Meeting
- Start with a good morning and register and some good humour
- Explanation of the tasks for the day

The children were then free to work by themselves although Zoom would stay on with either myself or my TA, Jemma working from home with her own two primary-aged children, there to support them if they needed help

- 2:30pm review of the day and story time using Kindle with audible commentary (this meant the children could read along and hear the book too).

I now trust the children so much that I leave it running for them to chat throughout the day. If they are chatting too much and not working, I just ask them to mute for a while and they do. In the whole of lockdown, there has only been one swear word heard and after discussion, this has not been repeated. Our mantra is “be kind” and they have been.

As time went on, we discovered useful features of Zoom that helped deliver home learning where children were not just keeping busy but were really learning:

- ✓ Share Screen – allowed us to reflect worksheets etc on the screen and could be annotated by teacher and children simultaneously. Whatever is on my iPad, can be on their screen.
- ✓ Breakout rooms – after one parent confided in us that their child was finding the work difficult and they didn't know how much support to give, Jemma and I tried to find a way where she could take a group as she would in the class. I'd seen breakout rooms in the settings. The breakout room allows you to transfer a group of people into another “room” so that they can work undisturbed by others. At 11am, anyone who wants extra support can join Jemma in the breakout room for small group support. The teacher can drop in and out of breakout rooms and they can also be used for small groups to work together on projects and for games – the equivalent of sending a child out of the classroom for guessing games. They LOVE going to a breakout room.
- ✓ Show who is annotating – this is a box you check in the settings and is great for working out which annoying child is drawing on your share screen without permission!
- ✓ Touch up my appearance- makes you look slightly better but don't be disappointed when you look at yourself in horror, go to turn it on and find it's already activated.

Our activities have developed as time has gone on:

- ✓ Birthdays have been celebrated in Zoom parties – great fun!
- ✓ We have filmed a virtual school play party using Zoom screen record and partly children recording scenes and songs themselves at home and sending clips via SeeSaw.
- ✓ Some afternoons we have quiz and games sessions – especially when I could see they were flagging.
- ✓ Children share their work for others to evaluate via the share screens.
- ✓ Now that some children are back at real school, Zoom and real class run alongside each other allowing those at home to interact with those at school.
- ✓ Art lessons are beamed live now that most Y6 are back to school and the few that are at home have art supplies delivered so that they can paint along! Jemma stands on a chair to film and relays my demo via the share screen – my grey hair has been a shock and I'm desperate for hairdressers to reopen.
- ✓ Visitors regularly attend our Zoom Meetings, ex teachers, governors, experts, ex pupils. I recognise that they must get fed up of my ugly mug day in, day out.
- ✓ Children have shown us special moments and skills including a soap-making demonstration by one girl and her mother and chicks hatching in another household.

We made the decision to allow a chat room facility on Zoom. This is closely monitored by three adults and runs 24/7. The pinging drives me mad and we have had to make ground rules about times, private chats, content etc. In 13 weeks, not one child has abused this system. The children have been hugely supportive of each other and have felt able to come on and say they are lonely, bored, sad etc and there has always been a friend or a staff member to boost them when they've needed it.

We have maintained an online presence of at least 90% of the class with most children completing and submitting all the daily tasks set and learning new content, not just revision. We have found, however, that small chunks of learning are best. Our most successful lessons have included content from White Rose Maths, Ninja Word of the Day and Talk4Writing home learning tasks. We have also used Frank Cottrell-Boyce's excellent online Writing Workshops which he has released on Instagram and You Tube. Online drawing tutorials have also been popular.

By using Jamf (formally Zuludesk) I can manage iPad apps from school and have been able to release new apps to iPads as special treats. The children have loved receiving new apps such as Duolingo, Stop Motion, Art Set and Minecraft for special one-off projects. The children have now become adept at screen shotting and screen recording to submit their efforts.

But what of the children who were not joining in and other year groups?

One of our TAs has spent her time ringing households to find out what we can do to assist them. Any gaps in technology have been filled with lending any remaining technology we had. We have not been able to persuade all families to join in but the vast majority have. I am absolutely convinced that without the live online sessions, we'd have lost engagement with many more of the children.

After the initial experiment with Y6, our Y4/5 teacher spent a day observing my class and started running Zoomschool sessions of her own. A slightly different pattern: working mainly from home, (as she has quite a journey to school) she runs three half hour sessions throughout the day – a set up meeting at 10am, a midday catch up and an afternoon story-time. This has worked well for her class.

The younger children have had weekly or twice weekly Zoom meetups. The focus of these had been mainly social. It's a chance for the children to see each other and they have held teddy bears' picnics and show and tell sessions. This has helped those children feel connected to the school community. Our headteacher, Dan, has also run live Samba sessions with key worker children in school and Zoom participants at home bashing

saucepans etc. These have been great fun but extremely noisy and the delay made it painful listening but that didn't put anyone off.

Keyworker children have completed their home learning tasks on Seesaw and joined in with their class Zooms in the morning before accessing outdoor learning and sport in the afternoons.

Other benefits of Zoom School and online learning:

- The children have become more self sufficient in their learning which should stand them in good stead for high school and beyond.
- I've got to know the families a lot better
- I've learnt to become more clear and concise in my instructions – if I go on too long, they disappear!
- I've given so much more praise than ever before. If children don't feel their work is valued, they'll not bother submitting more.

We've had hilarious times. The children have played tricks on us. We've been joined by parents, siblings, dogs, cats and even a chicken. We've lost contact and had very many Apollo 13 moments. I've forgotten to switch my microphone off on a few occasions and I've had to request that children turn theirs off to save their families blushes.

As an avid participant on Twitter, I have heard many objections to using Zoom and indeed there are academy chains and LAs who have banned its use. Here are some of the chief objections and my responses:

It's not safe because of Zoom Bombing (people gaining access to the Zoom codes and accessing meetings with nefarious motives including showing porn).

Obviously a worry but since these reports Zoom have tightened their securities but:

Only publish codes on closed platforms, Facebook groups etc.

Don't use your personal meeting code

Use a waiting room

Use school email address for signing up to Zoom

What about safeguarding children?

Zoom has actually highlighted safeguarding existing concerns rather than causing them. Every day I see and speak to my children, I know they are ok. The ones I don't see, I can phone.

Children should not be Zooming from their bedrooms.

I agree in theory that a common family room is best but many of our families don't have these quiet spaces so a bedroom is the only option. For some of our families the sleeping and living room are one and the same place The children use virtual backgrounds if needed.

Staff might abuse children.

Try to have two staff members present but this is not always an option. As teachers we are trusted to be with our classes in school, often alone. I try to ensure I am never in a Zoom meeting with just one child. In most cases, the parents are around and pop in to meetings often.

What if I see a child in their pyjamas?

Ever been on a residential? I have and seeing children in pyjamas is inevitable. They've even seen me in mine. However, on Zoom, if I've seen a child in their pyjamas, I've asked them to get dressed but to be honest I probably couldn't tell.

I can't Zoom and manage my own children at home

If you have toddlers or small children, fair point and hats off to you for just existing in lockdown! Live Zooming will not work for everyone.

Lots of my children don't have the device or internet they need to join.

I suspect many more do than don't, but this is a tricky one and obviously our investment in suitable tech has made this easier. Could tech be loaned? Could meetings be timetabled so that they don't clash? I had one lad join from a garden as he was using next door's internet, but he still came to listen to the story, in his coat, with the hood up if cold. That's sorted now.

I don't like looking at myself.

Neither do I, I'm 55, haven't had a haircut in 3 months and have more chins than I did in February but after a while, I really don't notice I'm there. I'm looking at the children.

Mark asked me for parent views of Zoom School:

- *Zoom School gave my daughter a reason and a purpose to get up each morning. The high expectation for learning merely transferred from the classroom to the living room! It has been seamless, educational, essential for mental health and well-being. Classroom interaction has been maintained throughout as has social interaction. Whole class learning and bespoke learning take place daily supporting those children who need it whilst challenging those who do not. Story time at the end of the day is a staple part of Zoom School diet too. The children have shown kindness to each other every day.*
- *I don't know how I would have survived doing home learning with 4 boys without all help and support you have both given L. It has been lovely each day hearing the children laughing and having fun while learning.*
- *For a mother who's first language isn't English, Zoom School did a very good job, because I wouldn't be able to help my child with learning that much by myself.*

After 31 years of teaching, lockdown teaching has been a new and often exciting challenge. Necessity is the mother of invention and I would say that all our staff have gained skills in using technology. Staff meetings are held by Zoom and all staff have been responding to posts on Seesaw to relieve the teachers who have often been trying to set and support home learning whilst teaching Key Worker children.

I know lots of school have offered other options which are working just as well but, if you think Zooming might help your class, I'd be happy to help. My class would be happy to have you join a Zoom Session and answer your questions.

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