

**SCOIL MHUIRE NA MBRAITHRE, TRALEE NAMED A ‘DIGITAL SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION’**

Scoil Mhuire na mBraithre CBS Primary, Clounalour, Tralee, Co Kerry has has become one of the first schools in Ireland to be named a ‘Digital School of Distinction’. The school joins a growing group of primary schools nationwide to receive the prestigious award.

Launched by the Minster for Education and Skills Ruairí Quinn T.D. in September last year, ‘Digital Schools of Distinction’ is a flagship award programme which promotes, recognises and encourages best practice use of technology in primary schools.

Primary schools around Ireland are being urged to sign up for the programme, to avail of the comprehensive package of support and advice available.

Supported by HP Ireland and Microsoft Ireland, the Digital Schools of Distinction Award aims to help schools to further integrate technology into the classroom. HP Ireland and Microsoft Ireland are providing support to the programme for five years, including a financial commitment of €300,000 in the first year as well as the provision of practical support and resources.

The response to the Digital Schools of Distinction programme from primary schools to date has been extremely positive. Principal Dennis Crowley, of Scoil Mhuire na mBraithre said that the programme offers a real opportunity for primary schools to build on their digital capabilities.

*‘Registering to become a Digital School of Distinction was an obvious move for our school as we are very aware that technology is playing an ever more important role in education and we want to be at the forefront of the movement to integrate ICT successfully in the classroom. The registration and validation process to become a Digital School of Distinction has been seamless with good support throughout. We are excited about the opportunities this programme offers our school.’*

The Minister for Education and Skill Ruairi Quinn T.D. congratulated the schools who have already signed up and called on all primary schools to register their interest in the programme: “*The Digital Schools of Distinction programme is an important platform for primary schools which can help to advance the ICT agenda in the classroom while making a practical contribution to helping schools make the most of their digital capabilities. The effective use of ICT for teaching and learning in our schools is a key policy objective of my Department. It is central to the achievement of the key reforms outlined in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and I would encourage schools who have not yet signed up to do so, so that they can benefit from the support and expertise on offer.”*

Martin Murphy, Managing Director of HP Ireland added: *“We are delighted that the Digital Schools of Distinction programme has been enthusiastically received in primary schools to date. Using digital technology to its full capability in the classroom can greatly enhance the learning experience. HP is proud to be able to support this programme, which I am glad to say has already attracted interest from overseas with a number of other countries expressing an interest in rolling out the programme.”*

Cathriona Hallahan, Managing Director, Microsoft Ireland said: “*Microsoft is passionate about ensuring that young people get the opportunity to become IT literate from as early as possible. By supporting and encouraging schools to embrace technology in the classroom it is enhancing the overall learning experience of our students as well as equipping them with skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. We are delighted with the positive response to the programme to date and would encourage all other schools to get involved.”*

Schools who register and who are successfully validated through the programme are awarded Digital Schools of Distinction status by the Department of Education. A dedicated resource is provided to help schools go through the registration and validation process, including an ICT helpline. The validation process has already highlighted some very innovative and collaborative approaches from schools and teachers regarding the integration of ICT in teaching and learning, which will be an inspiration to other schools.

New digital schools will receive a Digital Schools Classroom Kit, to include a HP laptop with Microsoft software including Windows 8and educational apps and access to education ICT specialists. A new set of “Best Practice” guidelines for schools has also been developed which will shortly be made available on the Digital Schools of Distinction website.

The Digital Schools of Distinction programme is supported by the Department of Education and Skills in partnership with Dublin West Education Centre, the Professional Development Service for Teachers/Technology in Education, the Computer Education Society of Ireland (CESI), the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) and the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN). Digital Schools of Distinction is delivered through a public private partnership in association with HP and Microsoft in Ireland.

For further information and to register online, visit [www.digitalschools.ie](http://www.digitalschools.ie) or follow @digital\_schools on Twitter for regular updates.

**Ends**

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**Note to Editors**

The five criteria under which schools are evaluated in order to become Digital Schools of Distinction are as follows:

1. Leadership and vision: Digital Schools of Distinction will have a whole-school ICT policy that outlines a vision and strategy and conveys a positive attitude towards the use of ICT.
2. ICT integration across the curriculum: Schools will show ICT integration across the curriculum in learning and teaching. Staff will demonstrate a clear understanding how ICT can be used in the curriculum to improve student learning.
3. School ICT culture: Schools will demonstrate an awareness that ICT has an impact on the quality of learning and teaching, pupils' attitudes and behaviour and the wider school community.
4. Continuing Professional Development: Schools will demonstrate a commitment to on-going professional development in relation to ICT, with a mechanism in place to inform teachers of courses in relation to professional development, as well as school-wide support and encouragement.
5. Resources and infrastructure: Schools will have in place appropriate ICT resources, including hardware, software and infrastructure, to support particular learning environments. Schools will also have deployed appropriate ICT resources that reflect the plan for future improvement and development of ICT as outlined in the whole-school policy.