

**ST AUGUSTINE’S NS, CLONTUSKERT BECOMES ONE OF THE FIRST SCHOOLS IN IRELAND TO BE NAMED A ‘DIGITAL SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION’**

**Minister of State Ciaran Cannon presents prestigious national award to local school, for excellence in the use of technology in the classroom**

St Augustine’s NS, Clontuskert has become one of the first schools in Ireland to be named a ‘Digital School of Distinction’, joining a growing group of primary schools nationwide to receive the prestigious award.

Minister for Training & Skills at the Department of Education & Skills, Ciaran Cannon T.D. presented the award to teachers and pupils at the school today. Supported by HP and Microsoft and launched 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.

847 primary schools around Ireland have registered for the programme, with 31 schools receiving their award to date. 47 other schools in Galway have registered to sign up to the programme.

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.

Speaking at the event, Minister Ciaran Cannon said: “*I am delighted to see a school from east Galway becoming one of the first schools in Ireland to receive this prestigious award. The Digital Schools of Distinction programme is an important platform for primary schools which benefit pupils by helping them to gain the skills to live and work in our increasingly technology driven world. I am extremely impressed by all that I have seen at St Augustine’s and I commend the school on their great achievement.”*

The response to the Digital Schools of Distinction programme from primary schools to date has been extremely positive. Kate Murray, Principal of St Augustine’s N.S. said that the programme offers a great opportunity for primary schools to build on their digital capabilities.

*“As our pupils are surrounded by information technology in everyday life, we feel that it is important that those technologies also play a significant role in the classroom. Supported by the Digital Schools of the Distinction programme, our pupils are given the opportunities to become familiar with a range of technologies and to develop the skills to use them in a meaningful way that cultivates their independence, problem solving, communication and collaboration abilities. We know that by using these tools in our everyday teaching, we will empower our students to become the creators and big thinkers of the future. Becoming a Digital School of Distinction is a great honour for our small school and has already brought us significant benefits – the whole school is excited about the opportunities that it offers us.”*

In St Augustine’s, ICT is viewed as a creative tool that underpins the learning environment and is used by students to produce visually appealing projects, essays, posters and other materials using word processing, PowerPoint, film making, podcasting, and blogging. The school also uses ICT to communicate with other schools and the outside world in a secure and protected environment; to share ideas and information; to encourage collaboration between classes and students and to record lessons, events, progress in school through podcasts and film. Clontuskert uses robotics and coding as a tool to enhance curricular engagement and ensure students cultivate lifelong learning skills. The school’s website has won numerous awards over the years and the school is constantly engaged in interschool collaborations both nationally and internationally including a number of Comenius projects in Europe, and cross curricular collaborations with schools in the USA and Canada. For more information on the school’s use of ICT, visit <http://clontuskert.scoilnet.ie>

Gerard McHugh, Chair of the Digital Schools of Distinction Committee and Director of the Dublin West Education Centre said: “*We are delighted by the enthusiastic reception for the programme in primary schools to date. We have ambitious plans to grow the number of participating schools this year and beyond and are looking forward to registering many more schools in the months ahead.”*

Martin Murphy, Managing Director of HP Ireland added: ”*Digital Schools of Distinction has proven to be a very successful programme to date. HP is delighted to support this initiative which enables schools to harness the full potential of technology for education purposes.”*

Cathriona Hallahan, Managing Director, Microsoft Ireland concluded: “*It is wonderful to see schools from across the country seek to secure validation and recognition for the great work that they are doing with technology. We are confident that as more and more schools embrace this programme that students will get a better and more rewarding experience of IT in the classroom. We are delighted to be associated with Digital Schools of Distinction.”*

Schools who register and who are successfully validated through the programme are awarded Digital Schools of Distinction status by the Department of Education.

New digital schools receive a Digital Schools Classroom Kit, to include a HP laptop with Microsoft software including Windows 8 and 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.