

**ST PATRICK’S DE LA SALLE B.N.S CASTLEBAR BECOMES ONE OF THE FIRST SCHOOLS IN IRELAND TO BE NAMED A ‘DIGITAL SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION’**

**An Taoiseach Enda Kenny presents prestigious national award to local school, for excellence in the use of technology in the classroom**

St Patrick’s De La Salle B.N.S Castlebar 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.

An Taoiseach Enda Kenny 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. 28 other schools in Mayo 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, An Taoiseach Enda Kenny said: “I am very proud to see a school from Castlebar becoming one of the first schools in Ireland to receive this prestigious award. The staff and pupils of St Patrick’s deserve great credit for all the hard work that they have put into achieving their Digital School of Distinction award. This programme positively impacts upon pupils’ motivation to learn as well as recognising achievement by teachers and schools in advancing the integration of technology in the classroom. I am extremely impressed by all that I have seen at St Patrick’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. Joseph Carty, Principal of St Patrick’s De La Salle B.N.S. said that the programme offers a great opportunity for primary schools to build on their digital capabilities.

*“Becoming a Digital School of Distinction is a tremendous honour for our school and has already brought us significant benefits. Our focus is on the continued integration of ICT to enhance our curriculum and benefit the pupils, getting the most from technology and providing opportunities for our teaching staff to develop their ICT skills. The whole school is excited about the opportunities that becoming a Digital School offers us.”*

St. Patrick’s has been an early adapter of technology since it was introduced to the school many years ago. Integration of ICT in the curriculum is meticulously planned, incorporating the use of interactive whiteboards in each room and a computer room. The school uses many online resources such as Mathletes and Brainpop, while middle and senior classes undertake to create project blogs for display on the school website and for presentation to parents on Technology Night. For more information on the school’s use of ICT, visit [www.stpatsbns.eu](http://www.stpatsbns.eu).

Ciaran Cannon, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills congratulated St Patrick’s De La Salle 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 benefit pupils by helping them to gain the skills to live and work in the increasingly technology driven world. I encourage schools who have not yet signed up to Digital Schools of Distinction to do so, so that they can benefit from the support and expertise on offer.”*

Mayo native 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 concluded:”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.”*

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**

**For further information, please contact:**

Martha Kavanagh / Maria Hynes, Drury

Tel: 087 646 2006 / 087 123 3088

**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.