

ArcGIS for Schools

Building skills for life through creative projects

Highlights

- Students develop GIS skills through diverse and creative projects
- ArcGIS builds project management and decision-making skills
- Story Maps help students deliver effective presentations
- Teacher receives training and teaching resources

Transition Year students at St. Kevin's College on the north side of Dublin have used ArcGIS in an incredibly diverse and creative range of projects, from searching for Hollywood film locations to exploring the viability of 'no-fry' zones. The students' use of professional GIS technology has helped them develop the decision-making, team-working and presentation skills that will be invaluable in their future lives.

Why GIS?

For geography teacher Andrew Horan, ArcGIS for Schools was the perfect solution to an unexpected challenge. He discovered, quite late in the summer, that he would be teaching Transition Year students from September and, as he had not taught Transition Year for four years, his previous teaching materials were outdated. With limited time available, he needed to come up with a new programme that he could put into place quickly and that would engage and inspire his students.

"A colleague mentioned the ArcGIS for Schools programme and it ticked all the right boxes," Horan says. "I wanted to offer something new and exciting. Straight away, I could see that ArcGIS would encourage a more active learning approach, incorporate ICT into geography and allow students to explore local, national and international issues."



St. Kevin's College

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Benefits for students

During the course of the school year, over forty Transition Year students had the opportunity to use ArcGIS in a geography programme that was based around a series of creative projects. According to Horan, "ArcGIS helped the students develop critical project skills, from how to gather, analyse and reflect on data, to how to work as part of a team and present your results."

One group considered if it would be possible to establish a new school anywhere in Dublin, without it being within a ten minute walk of a fast food takeaway, and discovered that it was impossible to find a 'no-fry' zone. Another group conducted a nationwide search for remote locations that could be used as Hollywood film sets and might prove as successful as the island of Skellig Michael, in Kerry, where filming took place for Star Wars, The Last Jedi. "I was quietly impressed by the range of project titles that students selected and the way that they went about exploring data with ArcGIS to support their ideas."

ArcGIS was particularly effective in helping the students to develop skills in analysing information and finding evidence to support decision-making. In one block of lessons, the Transition Year students were asked to find the best site to locate a new business, in their choice of industry, in Dublin, in an empty building or on a parcel of land available for development. Using ArcGIS, the students were able to take into account a wide range of factors, including transport links, local skills, the locations of suppliers and the distance to Dublin airport, to inform their decisions about the best sites.

Students were also able to hone their presentation skills, by creating ArcGIS Story Maps to present their projects. One group created a Story Map to share its findings about accident black spots in the local area. "All the project skills our students developed during their Transition Year will be invaluable for them in their future careers, particularly if they go into engineering or town planning roles," Horan says.

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Andrew Horan, Geography Teacher, St. Kevin's College, Finglas



The teacher's perspective

Through the ArcGIS for Schools programme, Horan was able to access free training, ready-made lesson plans and hand-outs which helped him prepare for his Transition Year class in a matter of weeks. “I can't speak highly enough of the help I received from Esri Ireland, right from the start,” Horan says. “Any fears I had about not being prepared for teaching Transition Year were wiped away.”

During the course of the year, experts at Esri Ireland were always on hand if Horan or his students had any queries, and this was very reassuring and helpful. Now, Horan is looking ahead to another academic year and will be using ArcGIS with Transition Year students for the second year running. Esri Ireland has provided a GIS mentor to provide ongoing support to the staff at St. Kevin's College and is helping Horan to fine tune a 10-week Transition Year programme. Without hesitation, Horan reports, “The ongoing support has been amazing”.

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