

## Press Release

16<sup>th</sup> February 2021

### Local Businesses come together to deliver the 'Draperstown Digital Inclusion Project'

A number of businesses in the Draperstown area have come together to launch an initiative to help schools tackle digital exclusion for children in the Draperstown and surrounding area.

The Draperstown Digital Inclusion Project was developed when a principle in the area highlighted that some children were at risk of falling behind in their education because they do not have access to the technology to take part in online lessons during periods of school closures, due to the pandemic.

Responding to the need, the Workspace Group established a consortium of some 18 local business with the aim of raising funding to purchase digital devices for the 8 local schools in the area. The aim of the project was to enable the schools to identify those children who didn't have access to or had limited access to a suitable digital device to undertake home schooling work. The devices would be gifted to the schools who would then distribute them to children/families as necessary.

With many parents trying to juggle home schooling with everyday commitments during these already challenging times the local businesses involved welcomed the opportunity to work together and play their part in supporting efforts in making a difference to the local community.

Mr Laurence O'Kane, Chairperson of the Workspace Group, said: "It's clear that digital exclusion is real issue for many children, not just those who attend schools in our community. Children have been widely affected by school closures and the lockdowns and with the support of many local businesses this project has allowed us to try to limit the amount of digital exclusion in our community and prevent many children from falling behind their peers.'

The initiative has raised over £27k in funding and as a result has, to date, been able to provide digital devices to over 140 children/families in the area via the 8 local schools, both primary and secondary.

Mrs Georgina Grieve, Chief Executive of the Workspace Group, said 'We were delighted with the response from all the local businesses who were keen to contribute and work in collaboration with each other to provide vital support for children and help break down the digital barriers so that they can continue their education remotely."

With schools not expected to re-open until March, at the earliest, the Draperstown Digital Inclusion Project has been a welcomed support for the local schools and is helping to bridge the gap for those households that don't have access to the technology and resources they need.

Responding to the success of the initiative, Mr Pascal Diamond, Principle of St Eoghans' Primary school, added "I am very proud of the amazing response from our local business community to my request for digital devices. The families in St Eoghan's P.S. that benefited from these devices have asked me to extend their gratitude to each of the businesses involved. These are very challenging times for everyone in society, and it is heart-warming to see the response from local businesses to our families needing support".

The 18 local businesses involved in the project include: ASM Chartered Accountants, Ballinascreen Credit Union, Bloc Blinds, Cloane Construction, Corramore, Draperstown Surgery, EDS, Four Dee Ltd, H&A Mechanical, Heron Brothers, MJ McBrides Construction Ltd, NMK Steel Ltd, O'Kane Holdings, O'Kanes Pharmacy, Sperrin Galvanisers Ltd, Sperrin Metal, Yard Master and the Workspace Group.