

# Irish Independent

 Business Technology

## Geography lesson: Schools map out digital future with tech giant Esri



*Pictured announcing Esri Ireland's ArcGIS for Schools programme are (L-R): Joanne McLaughlin, ArcGIS for Schools Sponsor, Esri Ireland; St. Kevin's College Finglas students, Casey Farren Colloty and Nathan Furlong; Aideen Croasdell, ArcGIS for Schools Programme Team, Esri Ireland; and Andrew Horan, geography teacher at Saint Kevin's College Finglas.*

A nationwide initiative to give every classroom in Ireland free access to an online digital mapping platform has been launched.

Esri Ireland is making its €500m worth of software on 'ArcGIS Online' available to more than 900,000 students in almost 4,000 schools.

The software firm, which specialises in the application of geographic information systems (GIS), has rolled out the initiative in other countries worldwide, including the UK, Canada, the US, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Australia, and New Zealand.

By using the platform, students can learn the skills required for working with GIS, can collect and analyse data on a range of topics; and the application can help them study climate change and demographics - among other disciplines - in new ways.

Some 12 pilot schools across Ireland are already using ArcGIS for Schools, including a primary school and gaelscoil, and at a junior cycle, senior cycle and transition year level.

Geography teacher at one of the pilot schools, St. Kevin's College, Finglas, Dublin, Andrew Horan said "the functionality and applicability of the platform to so many different subjects means it has huge potential as a teaching tool".

"My students are really engaged with the technology. It's simple to use and allows them to study topics in new ways, enhancing both teaching and learning in my classes," he said.

Any device connected to the internet including school computers, tablets and students' smartphones can access the cloud-based application.

Students at an Australian school using the technology recently developed solutions to alleviate local school traffic congestion, while students in Virginia have been using the technology to analyse police and fire coverage in four major US cities.

Esri Ireland said that the group will provide ongoing support including tailored lesson plans and mentorship for teachers.

Joanne McLaughlin, ArcGIS for Schools Sponsor, Esri Ireland said that the key to the "successful adoption of the programme is the provision of support for teachers through workshops, lesson plans aligned to the curriculum, and a huge variety of online training resources".

"We believe this initiative can help address the evident STEM skills shortage in this country, by developing key spatial analysis, and critical thinking skills at a grassroots level," she said.