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All schools to receive digital mapping software under initiative

Esri Ireland's software aims to address 'evident Stem skills shortage' in country

Ciara O'Brien



Esri Ireland's Joanne McLaughlin with St Kevin's College Finglas students Casey Farren Colloty and Nathan Furlong; and Aideen Croasdell. Photograph: John Ohle

A nationwide initiative from mapping software company [Esri Ireland](#) will see digital mapping software made available to every school in Ireland free of charge.

Up to 900,000 students in 4,000 primary and secondary schools will get access to Esri's online digital mapping platform, ArcGIS Online, along with supports such as tailored lesson plans and mentorship for teachers.

The cloud-based ArcGIS for schools programme has been piloted with 12 schools in Ireland, and Thursday marks the official rollout to other educational institutions. The lesson plans open up interactive projects on Irish history, climate change, the designing of cities and towns, and demographics, among others.

Gathering data

The application can be accessed through browsers on internet-connected devices, meaning schools do not have to get specialist equipment, and students can use their own smartphones and tablets for gathering data for projects.

Esri Ireland's head of marketing Joanne McLaughlin, who is the ArcGIS for schools sponsor, said the company had been encouraged by the reaction of teachers and their students. "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.

The move is an expansion of an existing programme already successfully rolled out in other countries, including the [United Kingdom](#), [Canada](#), the [United States](#), the [Netherlands](#), [Germany](#), [Spain](#), [Portugal](#), [Australia](#), and [New Zealand](#).