If the COVID-19 lock downs have taught us anything, it’s that some things are easier to do from home than others. For example, ordering groceries online and catching up with loved ones virtually has become routine, but finding a way to balance work while helping their children with online schooling remains a challenge for parents around the globe.

Remote schooling is hard for everyone involved. Just like the balancing act is hard for parents, it’s hard for students to stay focused and engaged, and it’s hard for teachers to do their job effectively from behind a computer screen. This is a serious challenge, and one that’s likely to stick around for some time.

Beedle, a software company based in Iceland, knew that there had to be a better way to enable remote learning. The idea behind Beedle began back in 2019 when the team was part of a different learning management system. It offered many different integrations with third party platforms and collaboration solutions, and then the idea struck: What if we just built all this functionality directly into these collaboration solutions rather than requiring complex integrations? This would make it even easier for teachers, students, and parents to access their suite of classroom tools.

“At Kinsale Community School, we have invested significantly in digital technology and we are proud to be a Microsoft Showcase School. Microsoft Teams has increased productivity and promoted collaboration in our school. It provides students and teachers with a platform for conversation, online meetings, shared files – and all in one single and user-friendly app. Integration of Beedle means that teachers can replace their traditional teacher diary with their Teams app. The Beedle Planning module is an innovative tool as it allows teachers to create and share live documents, streamlining how all our subject departments collaborate.”

— Ger Hogan, Deputy Principal, Kinsale Community School
What makes Beedle a compelling solution for Microsoft Teams is how Beedle Class List allows teachers to track, manage and record student behavior in the form of a digital diary. This gives teachers the option to share comments with students which creates a transparent approach to progress monitoring and record writing. Beedle is far more than just a digital repository of content for teaching and learning, this is an iterative space for critical thinking and reflection, that encourages the development of technological, pedagogical content knowledge during each stage of lesson planning.”

— Adrian O’Connor, Teacher / Practitioner Researcher, Kinsale Community School
Adding new classroom functionality to Microsoft Teams

Beedle is a Microsoft Teams app that offers various education-centered modules. It is available directly within Microsoft Teams, and in the Microsoft commercial marketplace through Microsoft AppSource and Microsoft Azure Marketplace. It currently includes seven modules:

1. **Diary**: this enables teachers to make quick comments about students and tag them with a customized category. Comments can be made private or shared with other teachers, the student, or their parents. Comments in a class or per student can be filtered and exported.

2. **Assessment**: this empowers teachers to assess the class against their own mark schemes, in number and text format. Teachers can apply calculations to cells and columns, as well as add assessments against their custom learning objectives.

3. **Planning**: this enables teachers to store their lesson resources in Microsoft Teams and organize them in a way that suits them. The tool provides the teacher with an overview of all stored documents and allows them to link each plan to their class calendar.

4. **Class List**: this provides teachers with an overview of all students in their class which they can export to Excel or Word. The class list includes functionality for the teachers to randomly pick a student and to split the class into random groups.

5. **Attendance**: this empowers teachers to register and manage all aspects of student attendance. Teachers can bulk mark attendance, add comments, schedule future absences, and view attendance history.

6. **Guardian app**: this is a separate app that grants parents and guardians access to Beedle without them needing Microsoft Teams. This allows teachers to communicate directly with guardians and gives them insight into their student’s behavior and performance.

7. **Curriculum**: this module enables teachers to define success criteria, learning goals, and curriculum statements for their class. They can create hierarchies to match their curriculum, link their objectives to Beedle planning, and record assessments against these objectives in Beedle Assessment.

This is just the beginning for Beedle – they plan on enhancing these seven modules and adding new ones.

Securing Beedle

Because Beedle was designed for education, security is a top priority. When asked how Beedle is secured, Axelsson explained, “We use many of the built-in security features of Microsoft Teams to secure Beedle. Things like the Microsoft single sign-on make the Beedle authentication process seamless and secure for our customers.” He added, “We host everything in Microsoft Azure, one of the most secure clouds in the world. Microsoft’s robust security didn’t solidify our decision to build on Microsoft Teams by itself, but it definitely didn’t hurt to know that Microsoft was so committed to security.”

Adding new education modules in the future

Beedle is already seeing their solution add value for schools like Kinsale, but they’re far from finished. They have detailed plans to continue building upon their existing modules and develop new ones in lockstep with Microsoft. Axelsson summarized Beedle’s partnership with Microsoft nicely, “We’re very open with the Microsoft technical team about what we are building… We don’t want to double anything up or compete with each other – it’s all about complementing each other’s functionality to make the biggest impact possible for teachers and students.”

Remote learning is still tough, there are no two ways around it, but with innovative offerings like Beedle, paired with powerful collaboration solutions like Microsoft Teams, teachers can help students keep their education on track and make the most of a challenging situation.