

DIGITAL TECH IN SCHOOLS

Thilo Engelhardt is the principal of Heidelberg's Waldparkschule, which is navigating the Covid-19 waters well – thanks to its digital setup.

The school closures caught us off guard, too," says Thilo Engelhardt, principal of the Waldparkschule in Heidelberg. In contrast to most schools in Germany, however, the Waldparkschule had a decisive advantage. This comprehensive school has been using digital technology in its lessons for years as an important component of its progressive school concept. It relies on individualized timetables and independent learning, and was awarded the German School Award of the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

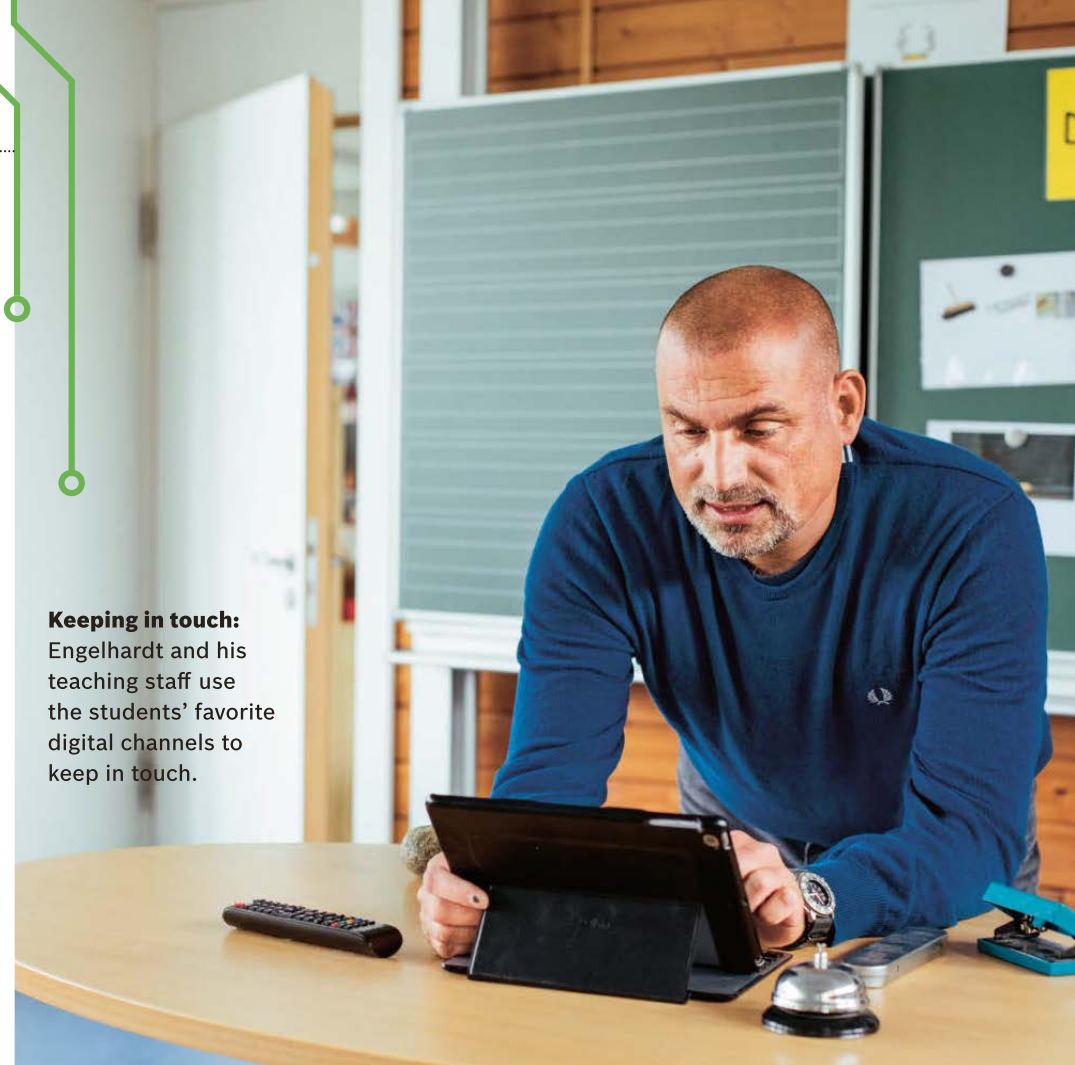
The sudden switch to distance learning due to Covid-19 was like jumping into the deep end for many schools. A representative survey conducted by the Robert Bosch Stiftung showed that two-thirds of teachers in Germany did not consider their school's IT to be well-prepared. Many resorted to worksheets. For this reason, teachers think there is a lot of catching up to do in terms of digital learning formats.

"The real challenge when implementing distance learning is to ensure that there are as few barriers to communication as possible." The school is located in a socially disadvantaged area, and the number of students in need of additional support is higher here. Engelhardt and his teaching staff took a pragmatic approach when the school was closed down. They kept in touch with the students via a messaging app popular with the online gaming community and used by many students. The school is now developing its own software that works in a similar way. Learning materials are shared on Learningview, a learning platform the students already know.

On the other hand, there is one experience of digital homeschooling that is new to everyone. Sometimes communication is even more efficient because much more is being presented in written form. It helps students and teachers approach the regular meet-ups via audio or video chat in a structured and well-prepared manner. "Often, lessons are more effective," says Engelhardt.

Jan Abele

Keeping in touch: Engelhardt and his teaching staff use the students' favorite digital channels to keep in touch.



"WE WILL REMAIN A RELIABLE PARTNER"

— **Dr. Joachim Rogall**, chairman of the board of management, talks about the impact of the coronavirus outbreak for the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

ZÜNDER: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the foundation's work?

JOACHIM ROGALL: We had to react quickly and flexibly in this situation. Many projects cannot take place as planned. This places a great strain on our partners and fellows. For this reason, we have adjusted the conditions for grants, extended their durations, and made it possible for our partners to pay their staff, even if an event had to be postponed or a grant delayed. In this way, we can maintain the structures with which we plan to continue working after the crisis. We will remain a reliable partner. That we have already digitized many processes and are constantly developing them further is helpful.

Was the foundation able to help out quickly?

JR: The charitable work of our foundation is geared towards developing medium- and long-term solutions to challenges in society. Humanitarian aid is not one of our core tasks. But naturally, we want to help contain the current pandemic and mitigate its effects. To this end, we are supporting the Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which was set up by the World Health Organization in cooperation with the United Nations Foundation. Also, we want our donation to Médecins Sans Frontières to help improve medical care in Greek refugee camps where an outbreak of Covid-19 would have dramatic consequences.

Will the Covid-19 pandemic change the foundation's issues in the long term?

JR: The crisis we're experiencing due to the Covid-19 pandemic shows the importance of some of the issues we have been working on for a long time. These include our commitment to a sustainable health-care system and the further development of nursing care. For many years, we have also been promoting communication in the sciences in order to strengthen the general acceptance of science. At the same time, we are continuing to pursue the issues for which we have developed a long-term strategy. These include climate change, education, and democracy, for example.

Through these issues, we can act as an independent foundation and contribute to the development of sustainable solutions.

Has the pandemic changed the way in which the foundation and company cooperate?

JR: As a majority shareholder, the foundation secures a stable ownership structure and independence from the capital markets, even in difficult times – a central factor for development and growth. The foundation finances its charitable activities from dividends it receives from the company, thereby fulfilling the legacy of Robert Bosch. This model has proven its worth and will also guide us successfully through the current crisis.

