RM™
Education

Russell House
School

Case Study

Craig McCarthy is the Headmaster of Russell House Independent School and has been in post for the best part of six years. Russell House is a co-educational family school, with a roll of around 200 pupils aged between 2 to 11.

We spoke with Mr McCarthy and asked him about the differences between his IT provision in school, before and after RM.

"Network stability was a big problem for us. We are an old site so there are a number of buildings dispersed on the site and some are old with thick traditional walls. Of course we also want to go wireless because that's what children are used to, and there is also the mobility that wireless brings - we were really keen to achieve that.

"In the past we had always used small, local businesses but they weren't always able to give us the time and attention that we needed. So we were looking for someone to come in and run the whole thing - be a one-stop-shop for our IT needs.

"We spent a lot of time researching and in talking to RM we realised that they were going to be able to provide that one-stop-shop. That includes not only the network itself, making sure that it's stable enough for our needs, but also providing strategic support in terms of the teaching and learning for the children.

"So that was the big focus - to get IT that we could access quickly and reliably and that the children could depend upon right through the lesson.

"With RM, a lot of the work is going on in the background, so we can be almost entirely confident that when we come into work in the morning, everything has been done. All the network updates and backups are completed overnight, so any issues that do arise are very quickly resolved - we've definitely had far fewer issues over the last year!

"It's very much a positive move coming over to RM. It's definitely given us confidence in what we are doing."

And what sort of provision does your RM support provide?

"ICT is an ever changing world and it's a challenge for schools to keep up with the pace of change. What's great with RM is that they always have someone we can talk to. Everybody at RM is happy to have conversations about what we can do next, and of course they've got the latest advice and the latest technical expertise for us to tap into. Whether we choose to go with it or not is our choice, but we're getting plenty of guidance on the pros and cons of particular routes.

"It works really well when we need to use remote support, so if we have any issues on the network it's a simple question of pinging off an email. But we also have a Customer Relations Manager who comes in every two weeks and is on site for the whole day. That's nice for us as a school because we're used to dealing with people face to face.

"He knows us very well and no problem is too small for him. If he doesn't know the immediate solution, he's got support that he can rely on to get the job done and that's what keeps everything stable and working.

"In the past we've relied on self-taught staff, but now we have a well-qualified, experienced RM team at our backs. We see them as very much part of the staff without actually being here."

What convinced you that RM was the best IT partner?

"RM have a reputation already in education, so they were known to me. I'm a great believer that ultimately you get what you pay for and if you go for a well established, respected organisation, you hope that you get a service that is seamless. So it was very much about reputation.

"But what really set it apart was the fact that we have been on a journey to become a Google school providing a Google environment for our pupils and of course RM is an accredited partner with Google in the UK and that was the final clincher for us.

"RM are the people to go with, so that was what we did!"

Where do you see the value in the RM service?

"In any business, getting value for money is really important. Our parents expect it of us when they choose Russell House and they also expect a particular level of service. It's my job to ensure that level of service is delivered and maintained.

"Similarly, when we use third-party organisations to provide services to us, we expect the same. RM has brought us value for money because we're getting confidence, security and integrity in the network, great advice on teaching and learning, moving forward on Chromebooks and continuing that journey to become a Google school.

"So RM has stepped in to provide us with these opportunities, advice, guidance and the implementation of things like Google Classroom, RM Unify and RM Tutor which means that again it's a one-stop-shop. Our staff understand it, the children now understand it and with a stable network, it means that all of our lessons can access our ICT seamlessly.

"We could only do that with the help of RM."

What were your expectations from their IT support?

"What's important for us, and also what our parents expect, is that the network will remain stable. We are only in that position now because of RM's assistance. To have a reliable network so that we can come to school in the morning, expect it to work and it does work! If there are any issues, they are very quickly resolved which means there is continuity for the children's learning. I think that's really important for us to have that sort of confidence in the service that's being provided.

"What has surprised us most about the experience that we have had with RM is just how willing they are to help us out. We're not the largest school in the world, but we still feel as if we're getting the time and attention that much larger institutions might get. We feel like we're valued and that's important because ultimately the children need that reliable network to do their learning."

What were your biggest IT concerns with which you required assistance?

"One of the big worries about teaching IT in schools is what is coming through the filters. We know that RM keep all their security up-to-date so it's one less thing for us to worry about. Most pupils find what they need on the internet, but we now know that only the right kind of traffic is coming into our school so we can be completely confident and reassured.

"Children nowadays want it now and are uncompromising when it comes to internet speed. They are used to that at home, so they should expect exactly the same thing when they come to school. So if it can be achieved, it should be achieved and we're now able to offer that same experience.

"One of the joys of having RM with us is that when it comes to mitigating the risk with IT management, they've got a world-class reputation. Whenever we've spoken to them about the big issues that might affect us, RM are always able to reassure us."

So how are RM helping you best utilise and embed your IT?

"The next stage in our plan is to move to Chromebooks. RM have been helping us with this because we believe that Chromebooks are a very simple 'open up and go' solution. That's what our teachers want and it's also what the children are used to. We now have a network that's stable enough to cope with the demands of that teaching environment.

"We've now had Google Classroom and RM Tutor put on to our network and that's allowed us to use true collaboration in the classroom. The children aren't just using ICT to produce a project, but are actually using it to learn with each other. Children will always learn far more effectively when they are working together rather than just listening to a teacher.

"Whenever schools make a big change in information technology, bringing the staff along on that journey is really important. Because if they don't appreciate what you're doing, they don't understand the vision, there may be resistance. We can only achieve that confidently by knowing that we have a good team at our backs, so of course RM were able to come in and show all the staff how to use the Google environment. They understood that what we were trying to do for the pupils had to be understood by the staff first.

"This meant that there was much greater buy-in and therefore the transition was far simpler."

"So when it comes to planning ahead, we know that RM already know us as a school, they already know what we're trying to achieve and also what we're planning for the future. So they're able to ensure that all the big questions about site security and data protection are all dealt with and then we can just focus on the teaching and learning."

And finally, what would you say to another Headteacher about considering RM as an IT partner?

"Quite often I'll go to conferences and have conversations with fellow Heads, and in the fast-moving world of ICT, we're always looking for the next best thing. It's really important that we are able to find quality providers and I have often found myself saying to colleagues 'Look, if you're reviewing your ICT, you need to have RM at least on your long list and give them a chance to come in and talk to you about what they provide.'

"We did it, I'm really glad that we did it and it means that for now our future with ICT is secure!"

DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUR SCHOOL

your NEEDS

9/10 OF OUR CUSTOMERS CHOOSE TO RENEW WITH OUR FLEXIBLE ICT SUPPORT SERVICE.

If, after reading this article, you think that RM might be the right IT partner to help you move closer towards technological excellence, then please get in touch.

We are happy to carry out a free IT healthcheck to help you understand the risks and opportunities for development with your current IT solutions, and help you future-proof an IT strategy that supports your school goals.

How can we help?

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