



Case Study

Kirkby Woodhouse School used network and broadband upgrades to engage learners more effectively and move to the cloud.

Kirkby Woodhouse School is a primary school with approximately 440 pupils in the Nottinghamshire village of Kirkby in Ashfield. It caters for children aged 3 to 11 years and is part of the seven-school Aspire Multi-Academy Trust. Its motto describes it as "a 'Take Care' school where we strive to be the best we can be and even go beyond expectations. It's never boring here!".

In 2022 the school upgraded its broadband connection, renewed its wired and wireless network infrastructure and replaced its onsite server with cloud-based data storage arrangements.

Requirements

- Bring more reliable connectivity to the whole school site, including outdoor areas.
- Increase broadband connection speed and capacity.
- Enable the school's strategy of removing its onsite server and embracing more cloud-based technologies.

Challenge

According to Paul Stimpson, Assistant Head Teacher and ICT Coordinator, the school's old network and broadband connections were not sufficiently robust to support a modern school. Teachers could not rely on the infrastructure to support their desire to use technology to enhance lessons for pupils. Despite knowing how to bring enriched learning to classrooms, teachers were reluctant to exploit the potential of online resources. The need to have a contingency plan in case of IT failure meant that teachers avoided embracing those opportunities.

The school had 75 devices for pupil use, but they would not log in or connect to the internet reliably, meaning classes seldom used them.

"If you were amongst the first class that managed to get logged on in an afternoon or morning, you were fine. If you were the second class, it was mediocre, and if you were the third class to use devices, it was impossible."

Paul Stimpson, Assistant Head Teacher and ICT Coordinator

The inadequate network impacted the school in other ways. The only room large enough to accommodate the whole school did not have internet access, limiting what could be done by visitors talking to all the pupils or in whole-school assemblies. There was no connection in outdoor areas which restricted outdoor learning opportunities and holding whole-school or community events.

The school's onsite server was seven years old, out of warranty and its operating system was rapidly approaching end of life. The server's age made it unreliable. During one episode of downtime, which lasted for two days, the school could not access the internet, take class registers, or even manage the demand for school lunches in the usual way. Replacing the server was one option, but that would merely set the school up for similar issues a few years later.

Solution

Paul decided that upgrading the school's broadband connection and replacing network infrastructure were the key to fixing the connection issues and dealing with the server problems once and for all. The cost of renewing the network infrastructure was covered by the DfE's Connect the Classroom (CtC) initiative. Because Kirkby Woodhouse was in one of the CtC-eligible areas, the DfE had sent several emails to the school about the scheme. However, it was only when the school's RM account manager explained it during a service review meeting that Paul fully understood the opportunity to apply for funding and make the much-needed improvements.

With funds secured from CtC for network upgrades, the school could invest its own money in improving the broadband connection safe in the knowledge that every part of the school site would benefit. It chose a fibre to the premises (FTTP) line from RM with speeds of 1Gbps download into the school and 1Gbps upload.

Solution summary

- New ultrafast FTTP broadband connection
- Upgraded network infrastructure with Connect the Classroom funding
- Cloud-based data storage and management with Microsoft 365 and RM Unify

“Connect the Classroom has enabled us to remove the worry of ensuring that the entire wireless infrastructure is future-proof and fully meets the needs of modern use of technology in school. It has also freed up resources for us to improve our broadband and therefore increase capacity.”

Paul Stimpson, Assistant Head Teacher and ICT Coordinator

As long-standing RM broadband customers, the school knew it could rely on the connection's uptime. Paul was therefore confident in discarding the unstable server and moving to cloud-based alternatives. The school now uses Microsoft 365 and manages user access through RM Unify.

Benefits

Network connections across the whole school site have vastly improved. The school now has more than 300 devices for pupil use, plus systems like CCTV which need network access. All can be used across the school with no connection problems.

The improved broadband and network capacity have allowed technology to play a central role in teaching and learning. For example, the entire Year 6 maths curriculum is now cloud-based. The school creates rich lesson content that includes revision pages, instructional videos and online games. Each pupil accesses their work on an iPad, and the teacher can cast their own iPad screen to the large classroom display. Not only does this help keep children engaged with their learning, but it has also eliminated the use of photocopied maths worksheets across the year group.

In science lessons, children now use an augmented reality app to get a realistic look at the human circulatory, digestive and skeletal systems.

One key objective of the upgrade was to bring wireless connectivity to outdoor areas. Following the network improvements, pupils can now use devices outside for guided orienteering and learning in the school's pond area, nature area and woodland walk.

Alongside his responsibilities as Assistant Head Teacher and ICT Coordinator, Paul teaches Year 6 pupils. Since the upgrade, his classes are not interrupted by colleagues asking him to fix their technology not connecting as required.

“Since the installations, the incident count is zero, absolutely nobody's come to me to say that they've had an issue with any connectivity”.



Moving from the onsite server to cloud-based storage allowed Paul to review the school's data retention and management practices. The school discarded several terabytes of unnecessary data, and what's left is managed appropriately in the cloud. From a practical perspective, the school no longer has an energy-hungry, temperamental piece of hardware onsite to worry about.

RM as an IT partner

RM has provided IT support to Kirkby Woodhouse School for several years. This long-standing relationship allowed RM to understand the school's challenges and possible solutions. RM's experience with the Connect the Classroom scheme unlocked the potential of having the DfE fund part of the upgrades so the school could invest its own funds elsewhere for maximum benefit. Thanks to decades of experience serving the education market, RM carried out the installations with minimum disruption.

“We feel that the project is designed around us, we knew what we were getting and that we will get the support to make full use of the installation.”

Paul Stimpson, Assistant Head Teacher and ICT Coordinator



Conclusions

- Kirkby Woodhouse School realised that having devices for pupils will only positively impact educational outcomes if those devices connect reliably to the online resources teachers want to use.

“Our vision was about devices and connectivity and infrastructure before we can even start to look at teaching. Other schools talk about having amazing devices, but without the connectivity, it's futile.”

- Having an IT partner who understands how your school operates and can apply knowledge gained from similar situations will help make change easier.

“With RM as a company, I've never felt that anybody's tried to sell us something that we don't want. I do think we've come from a very low place and now we're in a very good place.”

- The DfE's Connect the Classroom scheme can be genuinely transformational for schools that grasp its possibilities.

“Connect the Classroom came at the right time for us because it paid for that enormous chunk of the infrastructure. Without that we probably wouldn't have been able to push as far as we actually did.”

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