

Harris Group of Schools transforms education with help from IBM



Overview

■ The Challenge

Implement a robust, cost effective ICT platform to help transform the way education is delivered.

■ The Solution

- *IBM Global Services Desktop Management Services provides a standard managed environment of PCs, a managed network and centralised hosting of a Management Information System.*
- *Improved network infrastructure.*
- *MicroSoft Active Directory usability enhanced.*
- *IBM Global Financing provides flexible, cost-per-seat financing.*

■ The Benefits

- *Reduced cost, reliable, scalable ICT.*
- *A technology refresh is built into the contract to keep ICT up to date.*
- *School staff have more time to focus on raising educational standards.*

The Harris Group of Schools, a federation of four schools in the London Borough of Bromley, is undergoing a transformation that aims to free teachers from administrative tasks while ensuring that management systems support staff, pupils and parents. The way teachers, pupils and parents interact is radically changing. Lessons are stored centrally, enabling teaching expertise and preparation to be shared and giving students access to learning in numerous environments, not just when teachers are in the classroom. Real-time access to information means staff and parents can check attendance as well as monitoring performance and behaviour online.

A transformation of this magnitude, however, relies on robust, flexible and cost effective Information and Communications Technology (ICT). John Atkins, Principal of Kemnal Technology College, one of the

schools in the Harris Group, pioneered the use of ICT as a tool for change over ten years ago and was asked by the Department for Education and Skills to lead the Group's transformation. Atkins turned to IBM for help. "Historically ICT doesn't function well in schools and teachers become frustrated if lessons are disrupted," he explains. "We need industry-strength infrastructure, technology and support."

A knowledgeable partner, willing to learn

"By choosing IBM as our partner we can access a wide range of expertise and get the best from the different parties involved in this complex project," says Atkins.

IBM worked closely with the Group to understand its transformation project. A major challenge was completing all the work – from planning and design, cabling, system improvements to transition and rollout over the six week summer holiday, ensuring that everything was up and running for the first day of term. The implementation environments were diverse and were also undergoing a considerable amount of refurbishment.

“Our partnership with IBM is all about raising standards in schools.”

John Atkins, Principal of Kemnal Technology College

"Inevitably not everything went smoothly. This is an innovative project and we encountered challenges along the way," says Atkins. "But IBM's people were responsive and open-minded, developing well thought out solutions to any obstacles."

Cost-effective and scalable

Phase one of the project implemented IBM Global Services Desktop Management Services (DMS), improvements to and management of the network environment and a centralised managed hosting service for the schools' Management Information System. Centralised hosting brings economies of scale for each individual school, and other common services, such as email, can be added later.

The DMS solution initially provides a standard, reliable, managed environment for 1050 new IBM PCs and 580 reconfigured, non-IBM PCs used by teachers, pupils, managers and administrative staff. Help desk support, asset management, configuration management, software distribution, installation and security are provided along with desktop monitoring to offer pre-failure alerts and fault resolution. Schools and teachers can control the desktop environment, locking down or opening up facilities as appropriate to ensure that pupils can only use systems as authorised without interruption to classes.

Working closely with the schools, IBM improved the usability of MicroSoft Active Directory. As a result, unnecessary third party products

providing duplicate AD functionality were removed, saving money. "The work on Active Directory illustrates how a combination of IBM skill and our own experience and enthusiasm combined to produce a first class solution to our needs," says Paul Allen, Vice Principal of Kemnal Technology College.

Through a lease agreement with IBM Global Financing, the schools have better financial terms than for previous ICT projects. The lease turns their capital budget into an operational budget and provides a manageable cost-per-seat. A technology refresh is included to keep the environment up to date.

Enabling ongoing educational improvements

Now that IBM carries out day-to-day management of the schools ICT infrastructure, teachers can focus on teaching while technical staff concentrate on adding value. "Across the federation, I've noticed a positive improvement in teacher morale," confirms Atkins.

The Harris Group of Schools has the flexible, scalable infrastructure it needs to continue its ongoing mission of educational transformation. "Our partnership with IBM is all about raising standards in schools. Reliable ICT transforms the way we work and, as a result, we are all working smarter, positioning each school to achieve greatly improved educational results and standards into the future," concludes Atkins.

For more information

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