9 ICT questions every headteacher should know the answer to

As a senior leader, how well do you know your network?

If your ICT team talk in a language more akin to Klingon than classroom, then it’s important that you ask your network manager to share the answers to the following questions, so you know the potential impact and reach your ICT has on teaching and learning in the school.
What is our disaster recovery plan?

In the unlikely event that you have a complete network failure, you need to ensure that you are in the best possible position to recover your network, and the work of your teachers and students.

A disaster recovery plan is not just a sequence of technical tasks performed by IT staff to resolve a short-term problem; it should also consider:

- keeping people informed of progress and expected time for return to service. For instance, this might mean the return of basic system functionality within four hours and the restoration of large multimedia files within two days.
- long-term network unavailability. This is often termed 'business continuity', and concerns what happens to critical services if you cannot quickly return a system to full use.

The data contained on your network is possibly your most valuable asset, but how well prepared is your school in the event of a major failure? In the worst case scenario, would your students lose a year’s worth of coursework?
2 What e-safety & data security measures do we have in place?

The September 2014 Ofsted School Inspection Handbook states in the section on ‘The quality of leadership in and management of the school’ that inspectors should consider:

The promotion of safe practices and a culture of safety including e-safety.

The leadership and management of the school are likely to be judged to be inadequate if the school’s arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not meet statutory requirements and give serious cause for concern.¹

- Do we have a whole-school consistent approach with rigorous e-safety policies and robust and integrated reporting routines?
- Do our staff receive regular and up to date training?
- Do we teach an age-appropriate e-safety curriculum?
- Do we have a recognized internet service provider with actively monitored, age-related filtering?
- Is our data managed securely and in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998?

You have an obligation to keep your staff and students safe, and to keep data protected. If you don’t have an e-safety policy yet, you can find some useful information at www.rm.com/esafety.


3 What support SLAs do we have in place with 3rd parties?

If you have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place to define how the ICT team will interact with teaching staff, school leaders and learners to provide support and training, then you should understand the levels of support available within your school.

Does your SLA extend to defining the interactions between your school and any 3rd parties? If not, SLAs need not be long or complicated, but they do allow all parties to clearly understand each other’s responsibilities and help to avoid conflict.

Setting expectations and understanding ownership are key to the smooth day-to-day management of your systems. Do you have any documentation in place to show the following:

- Which systems are the ICT team and the 3rd party each responsible for?
- What types of activity do they each support?
- What are their agreed response times to each activity?
- Who is responsible for which activity?
- What are the processes for procuring and testing software and data, including data restoration?

Being clear about the expectations of your teaching staff, ICT team and the third party will help set expectations for the speed and type of service each offers, and helps to reduce incidents caused by misunderstandings.
4 What KPIs do we measure the ICT team on and what are their key competencies?

Key Performance Indicators are a great way to help your ICT team reach their full potential. Does your network manager use any metrics to show effectiveness and reliability?

KPIs aren’t a negative to mark the team down on; they are an opportunity demonstrate tangible improvements and ensure the team works fluidly with each other and the technology they provide.

Key competencies help support the KPIs that your ICT team work to; knowing which member of the team is best at what tasks will ensure that they share the workload most effectively, by allocating the right person to the right job. This will also help when team training or training of a new staff member is required, and it will help you manage the time of both yourself and any staff you have.

You spend a good proportion of your role looking at how you can quantify and qualify improvement for your students. Do you do the same for your ICT support team? If not, how do you know you’re getting the best from your staff?

5 What should our next technological change be, and how does it support teaching and learning?

Thinking about the future of ICT in your school is vital if it is going to support your school improvement plan, and provide the best possible start for your students.

Take a moment to consider how well your school vision and plan has been adopted by your technical team… How do they intend to translate this into solutions, devices and software to support your goals overall?

If your ICT team are involved in the creation of your ICT strategy, then they should be able to articulate what the next technological change should be in the school, and exactly how it will deliver benefits that will meet your teaching and learning needs.

If the justification for a new MacBook suite is because the network manager is an Apple fan, then it’s advisable to think if this offers your students the best possible future. Do they have access to a range of platforms, devices and software that they are likely to encounter in their future careers?

Are the ICT staff bought-in to the teaching benefits of the proposal? Do teachers feel confident they can deliver effective, engaging lessons with this new solution? How will it be embedded into the school and what training will be required to make it a success?

If your next purchase is made out of a desire for the ‘latest technology’ or because ‘we’ve always done this’, then you may end up with a very expensive cupboard of devices and software that don’t get used.

If you don’t have a vision for your ICT yet, then the free guide entitled ‘7 steps to really successful ICT’ at www.rm.com/bestpracticeICT might be useful.
6 What is our current network availability rate?

How recently was your school network down? How long for?

If you can’t recall when this last happened, then chances are that you have good network availability. If however, this is a regular occurrence on your network, it’s really important to know how much of an impact this is having on the teaching and learning taking place in school and exactly how many teaching hours are lost in a week?

• Do your ICT support team log network downtime, and whether this occurs during school hours, or as part of a scheduled, pre-agreed maintenance programme?

• What are the causes of this downtime? Are there any recurring trends or issues that need to be addressed, either by replacing hardware, or through staff training?

• How long do serious issues take to recover from? Do your support team have an expert partner supporting them to ensure that lost time is minimised?

Knowing how well your network is performing will help your ICT team to provide your teachers with a better service and ultimately, this should result in better results for everyone.

7 What percentage of our ICT estate is under-utilised and fully utilised?

Are you using your current technology to its full potential?

Your ICT support team should be aware of which devices are always well used, like the ICT suite that’s permanently booked out, or the laptop trolley that everyone fights over, but can they also tell you which devices are under-utilised and more important, why?

If you’ve got a collection of old devices that are creaky and slow, can they be refreshed or repurposed to give them a new lease of life? Can your ICT team suggest an upgrade path that might make the devices more responsive, or use them in a different way (such as thin-client or as a device for cloud-based activity) that needs a lower specification device?

Are your teachers confident to use these technologies to bring each lesson to life, enable students to carry out self-directed learning, or further investigation, or do you have hardware gathering dust in a store cupboard because the devices can’t be incorporated effectively into lessons? Can your ICT team help by offering training or workshops to help bridge any gaps?

You need to be confident that every penny you spend on ICT is spent in the right way, and that you are getting 100% of the value out of every item. If something isn’t working hard for you, make sure you understand why and seek to improve it.
Learning inside a classroom is a tried and tested method of organising schooling. However, teachers and learners have always valued the further opportunities for learning that can take place outside the classroom, including activities in the school grounds, dramatic productions and concerts, after-school clubs & groups, sporting activities and educational visits.

When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils’ personal, social and emotional development. ²

• How well does your school ICT facilitate learning outside of the classroom?
• What provisions are made for use of devices at these times?
• Does your wireless provision extend to the end of the school field or just to the classroom door?

If your teachers have an exciting vision for extended learning but your ICT can’t support it then everyone will be frustrated at trying to achieve different things. This is also where your ICT strategy needs to be aligned with your school vision.

As a senior leadership team, what do you want to achieve?

Once you know where you are looking to make changes you can consider how you use ICT to:

• improve teaching & learning
• support learning in and out of school
• offer a range of choice and access
• provide opportunities for disadvantaged students
• offer flexible working
• manage data
• improve efficiency

These changes may require a pedagogical change and how this evolves in your school will depend on your existing expertise and knowledge from both the teaching and support staff to determine how quickly they can embrace this change.

Your ICT vision and strategy should over time, enable you to implement strategies that will enrich or transform traditional classroom practices, however this needs effective change management processes to encourage adoption and a good underlying network infrastructure as a strong foundation for growth.

If you would like to discuss your ICT provision and strategy with a Services Architect experienced in providing transformational ICT in schools please call 0808 172 9534 or email flex@rm.com. You can also book a free ICT audit at www.rm.com/bestpracticeict
RM Education offers a free ICT review of your current plans and review to help you understand how you can add resilience to your ICT solutions.

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