



What is the journey to the cloud? For schools, it's digital transformation.

As an educator, it will come as no surprise to you that the way we talk about something has a massive impact on how audiences perceive it. For example, talking about mistakes as a learning opportunity rather than a failure. The framing and the vocabulary we use dictates our mindset and guides our focus.

When it comes to technology advancements and the process of adopting and adapting to new tools and ways of working, this is especially important. Most of us would say we're pretty comfortable with technology these days; our lives are full of gadgetry. However, the digital transformation happening in business over the last decade has been slower to reach schools. For example, Google's simple, secure, and low-cost productivity suites and the evolution of 'Software as a Service' have helped companies make huge strides in workplace productivity and innovation. However, whilst some schools have embraced the benefits of technology, most schools are only now starting to investigate the full potential for staff and learners.

Why haven't schools embraced digital transformation to the same extent as businesses?

The answer to this question is a complicated mix of factors involving the degree of necessity, opportunity and motivation to do so in each sector. However, risk is likely a major contributor. Schools simply don't have the same freedom and ability to flex to new ways of working as businesses do. With children's futures at stake, they must proceed with the utmost care when changing well-established and time-honoured ways of working. The additional pressure of Ofsted and league tables can lead to fear of rocking the boat. And of course, there's the perennial issue of cost: affording a wholesale change of technology, when adding setup, support, warranty and training, has previously been prohibitive.

Furthermore, we know that in busy schools, where every week seems to bring a new challenge, it can be difficult to make the time to take a really strategic look at digital technology. Lockdown accelerated the adoption of digital productivity platforms such as [Microsoft Office 365 for Education](#) and [Google's G Suite for Education](#). For many, this adoption was rushed through necessity, and now is an ideal time to step back and examine the wider picture. And this is where the vocabulary we use becomes important. When we talk about 'migration to the cloud' as an end in itself, the risk is that we ignore the much bigger, much more impactful evolution that is digital transformation.

Digital transformation isn't just about changing tools.



“Digital transformation isn't a definitive result; it's a cultural shift in an organisation as opposed to purely a new set of tools. Some schools equate moving the contents of their server(s) to the cloud with having undergone digital transformation, whereas in fact they are just beginning this journey. The whole digital world is built around continuous improvement and innovation.”

Michael Oakes, RM Product Manager

Getting the most out of technology in a local context

We've written at length about the benefits of using technology to enhance teaching and learning and how even small tweaks and innovations can make a big difference to teacher workload and student achievement. (Check out our blog [Taking tech to](#)

[the next level – small changes that add up to a big impact](#)). But perhaps one of the most significant advantages of technology is the sheer breadth of ways it can be used. In reality the benefits differ from school to school, and even from classroom to classroom, depending on the needs in each context. Digital transformation is about empowering leaders, teachers and other key stakeholders to think

creatively about how technology can help them do things differently and the impact that would have on their school.

We came across one recent example in a small primary school with mixed-age classes. At certain times, pupils used break-out areas and tablet devices to join a lesson for their year group happening in a different classroom. The school reports that this way of working has been a huge success, supporting their strategic aim of ensuring that all children in mixed-age classes are taught the right content. In the same school, a teacher had also recently managed to teach from home while isolating with Covid-19 – taking the register, teaching lessons, checking pupils' work as they brought it up to the camera and so on.

This is a perfect example of the type of blue-sky thinking that schools could and should be doing. Digital strategy means taking a problem-solving approach to IT development. What role can technology play in helping the school achieve the objectives laid out under its vision? What day-to-day niggles could be removed; what processes improved? And it also means separating the school community into audience types and examining what specific communication and interconnectivity they each need to thrive and grow. As Michael Oakes puts it, leaders need to ask themselves: "How do I want my staff, parents, students and governors accessing systems? What do I want them to do? What do they want to do?"

So how do I digitally transform my school?

Hopefully, we've convinced you that digital transformation isn't simply a question of moving your server to the cloud, buying more devices or making sure your wifi reaches into every corner of the school (though it helps!). Digital transformation starts with strategy – a look at where you want to go and why. Your strategy should include timescales, plans for change management, support for staff, communication to all stakeholders regarding roll-out and so on. Because digital transformation is as much a culture shift as a material one, communication is a vital part of strategy, building a case for change and generating enthusiasm and buy-in. Here are our top tips for getting started with digital transformation:

1. Stay aligned to your overall school or trust vision

Your technology strategy shouldn't be a question of starting from scratch; rather it evolves from your strategic priorities and the needs and wants of your users. The importance of involving stakeholders in the strategic process cannot be overstated.

2. Form a working group that represents all perspectives, including pupils

Listening to your stakeholders isn't just about background research and scene-setting for your digital strategy. It's also hugely important when it comes to setting realistic goals and objectives, establishing priorities and ensuring that change is effective. Not only will this ensure that changes are user-centred, but it can also win over hearts and minds and make change more palatable.

3. Survey staff to build a picture of skills and confidence

39% of teachers described themselves as 'not confident' using the technology provided by their school, according to research carried out by RM in 2019. However, [a DfE research report](#) published in January 2022 describes several 'unexpected positives' that emerged from the pandemic. One is the "rapid skill development of staff and pupils in using digital platforms, software and of resources." However, understanding the level of digital competency you have internally

is an important aspect of change management. By identifying your experts, your explorers and your novices you can see not only who needs support, but who you have in-house to help provide it. Ultimately, the more you can build staff confidence, the better your strategy will work, and it's crucial to know where the gaps are.

4. Audit your current hardware, software and subscriptions

Identify areas for standardisation, redeployment, decommissioning and investment. From there, you can build a set of requirements and decide upon what you want to keep, what you will throw out, what's needed and in which order. This helps build a budget and timetable for the upcoming changes.

5. Make sure your must-have EdTech foundations are in place

There are some big things to get in place to ensure the success of your digital strategy. They include choosing a consistent platform to support your strategy (Google or Microsoft, and how this fits with your MIS), implementing fast and resilient internet and network infrastructure, and safeguarding your data, systems and students.

6. Don't skimp on change management

Spending time embedding behaviour and working with staff is the way transformation sticks. Your strategy needs to allow for spending time and

effort on change management and CPD. As a rule of thumb, we recommend that 20% of your project be allocated to this. The success or failure of your digital strategy rises and falls on the engagement of your whole school community and the empowerment of all stakeholders to leverage technology in exciting and innovative ways.

7. Supplement in-house expertise with a technology partner

With almost 50 years' experience in education, RM is uniquely placed to provide schools and trusts with a tailored, affordable and comprehensive technology solution that will continue to evolve with your needs.

RM's new service, RM Vantage, offers schools a one-stop, end-to-end support package encompassing digital strategy, software and hardware procurement and installation, and training and development. In addition, you'll benefit from ongoing support from your dedicated service manager, along with our vast team of experienced educationalists, technology designers and engineers.

Find out more and arrange a free technology proposal for your school or trust at www.rm.com/vantage/contact-us



Who are RM?

Whether you have in-house IT support, or contract out to a local supplier, the consultancy team at RM will work alongside and support you, using our almost 50 years of experience to help you develop your IT capacity and strategy. We offer the expert, practical, detailed advice on how you can use educational technology to best effect in your school and can help you develop a vision for technology as part of school improvement.

Wherever you're at in your journey, we can help make the whole process as easy, effective and efficient as possible. We'll help you get the foundations right, recommend the best devices for your needs, and help you find the best suppliers with the best financial terms. We can help you manage a cloud migration from start to finish, and work with you to help embed a new culture and ways of working throughout your school.

Because we specialise in the Education Sector, we understand how schools really work, bringing our breadth of expertise to your unique setting, so that you always remain in charge, because we – more than many – recognise that no-one is better placed to know what your school community needs better than you.

Further reading

[Taking tech to the next level](#)

[What is the cloud and how does it help schools?](#)

[Before you buy another school server: Is now the right time for you to migrate to the cloud?](#)



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