



How the Coronavirus led to a speeding up of one school's move to the cloud – with an investment in Microsoft Teams – at a Secondary Academy in the West Midlands.



The Background

Ridgewood High School is a co-educational Secondary School, situated in Wollaston, near Stourbridge in the West Midlands, supporting over 660 children from ages eleven to sixteen. Previously a foundation school administered by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Ridgewood High School converted to Academy status in March 2015, and in 2018 joined the Stour Vale Academy Trust. The catchment is generally a working-middle class area, with around 20 percent of students entitled to Free School Meals – slightly below the national average.

RM have supported the school for over 20 years – initially as part of the original Dudley Grid for Learning scheme – providing hardware, software and technology support during this time.

The Challenge

At the time of the Coronavirus outbreak, and the Government announcement that schools would close to most children from 20th March 2020, Ridgewood High School – like many schools in the country – were just considering an investment in cloud-based technology. They had started to move files into SharePoint – albeit that that had largely stalled – and just one teacher – responsible for IT – was using Microsoft Teams with her classes. That said, these early moves proved fortuitous as it meant that the school did have an inkling of what might be to come.

The Response

The Ridgewood High School motto is: “Achieving Excellence Together”, and that was their response to the lockdown. Whilst the school remained open – educating 6 to 10 students each day (their Key Worker children) – for the majority they needed a plan to continue teaching remotely.

They were quickly up and running setting work, using a mixture of Show My Homework (SMHW), SharePoint and other RM Unify applications. Being resourceful, the teachers created guides to help students access their work on SharePoint, explaining how this new way of working operated.

All in all, the School feel that the switch has gone well. Like many, they encountered a few initial teething problems with things like password resets, and with students trying to access SharePoint links from within the SMHW app without logging in to SharePoint first, but these were lessons quickly learned.

The step-change came when they expanded out into using Microsoft Teams – from initially one member of staff, to the entire teaching and admin team, and then to all the students in the school. It quickly became the preferred and normal way of working.

"RM Unify has shone out for me as the central hub for all student applications. The students are now used to using it and by providing the 'Single Sign On' for the network and the applications that they use every day, is a godsend."

Kate Nicholson, Senior IT Technician



Like many schools, not being able to physically show people how to do things has been the biggest thing to adjust to. The School have sought to overcome that, by writing a number of “how to” guides, and have started recording video guides in Microsoft Teams and then publishing them in Microsoft Stream for all staff to access. They are now expanding these for students too.

"I think people are more likely to engage with a video. It could be really useful for new staff and new students too."

Kate Nicholson, Senior IT Technician

Whilst many of their teachers would admit to not being leaders in the use of technology at the start of the lockdown, they very quickly adapted and it has become a way of life.

"We have already implemented Tutor Teams and are looking at using MS Teams for all classes in September. I think it's given us the push we needed. I still think we have work to do as we move towards an era where we use MS Teams and SharePoint as our primary methods of working, but we are making good strides."

Mr. James Cannon, Deputy Headteacher



In helping the school adapt as well as they have, RM played an important role. In accessing workstations remotely when CC4 was proving hard to access, installing and showing how to use elements of MS Teams, setting up SharePoint permissions, passing on training materials, and offering best practice advice, were all things that made a difference to the school being able to respond as well as it did.

"For me, it was the comfort of knowing that RM were there for me – with advice, practical tips, as well as simply being a resource I could call upon. They looked at a load of calls for me – which took a huge load off my shoulders at a really busy time – and even looked at systems that were outside of their remit, but were vital to the running of the school."

Kate Nicholson, Senior IT Technician

Thirteen weeks into Remote Learning, and all the teachers at Ridgewood High School are using the technology on a daily basis, albeit they openly admit that trying to learn new systems remotely can be a challenge. It is clear that some have taken it on board and have really run with it, whilst others are not quite so gung ho, but are taking small positive steps every day. Most recently they have set up “Tutor Group Teams” that allow the staff to have tutor time with their students which at this difficult time, is particularly important.

The Lessons Learnt

1. **Take small steps at a time** – diving into Remote Learning straight away will most likely result in a school falling flat on its face. Ridgewood High School found that 15-minute tutor sessions were a great way to test out how everything works before trying something more complex.
2. **One size can fit all** – Ridgewood believe that using the one platform for all services – for staff and for children – is the optimum solution. In their case MS Teams. It can get complicated if different people are using different technologies.
3. **Stick with it** – once you have got the hang of a platform like MS Teams you will never look back – for Ridgewood they are already planning for how they will use when they all return to normal school (whatever and whenever that is).

The Legacy

Once the virus has passed and schools are able to return to (some form) of normality, there is a genuine desire to build on what has been developed and implemented during lockdown – and in particular to move towards a much more cloud-based IT solution. For some schools – like Ridgewood High School – this was the plan anyway... but the last thirteen weeks have sped this up somewhat.

"I genuinely hope that by engaging in technology platforms like Microsoft Teams, we can offer much more contact and involvement with students who are unable to engage in the classroom environment."

Mr. James Cannon, Deputy Headteacher

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