



Whether you are opening a brand new school or seeking to enhance the ICT across a Trust, you need to select your technology partner wisely



CHRIST CHURCH
Church of England Secondary Academy

The background

Christ Church Secondary Academy is open to girls and boys of all backgrounds who value education and apply themselves to the best of their ability. A Church of England Academy, Christ Church provides an excellent education for children in the Yardley Wood area of Birmingham which is currently heavily underserved by Secondary education.

The Academy opened in September 2021 with 180 students and will have 1,150 students by 2025.

“The establishment of Christ Church Secondary Academy is an opportunity to create a truly exceptional school where young people will fulfil their potential and live life in all its fullness”.

Mark Bowman Dalton, Headteacher



Part of the Birmingham Diocesan Multi Academy Trust (BDMAT), Christ Church CofE Secondary Academy is the Trust's first Secondary Academy and joins 18 Primary Academies. BDMAT offers those schools who wish to become academies an environment where they will be supported and challenged within a Christian context.

Technology is at the centre of the strategy for both the new school and the Trust as a whole, and RM – the leading educational technology provider – has been selected as the Strategic ICT Partner for BDMAT for an initial 5-year period. The initial focus has been on setting up Christ Church Secondary Academy, whilst working together to improve the ICT capabilities of the existing Primary Schools within BDMAT where they acknowledge that technology has been under invested in in the past.

“We have had a fantastic relationship working with RM. Our Account Manager has been excellent – from the outset she listened to our aims, preferences and plans, providing meaningful insight throughout and working with our team to deliver a first-class solution. The whole process has been managed in such a way to take the stress away from the BDMAT central team despite the tight turn around between tender award and the handover of the building. I cannot praise her enough”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations



Choosing a technology partner

Working with the Department for Education, the Trust undertook a competitive tender using the RM6103 Crown Commercial Services framework. After a procurement that resulted in nine tender responses – all undertaken remotely during the pandemic – the Trust selected RM as its preferred partner, entering into a five-year contract worth up to £2 million over the five years.

“We are excited to be working with RM on the creation of Christ Church C of E Secondary Academy but also on bringing the technology within our existing schools up to date. Technology has a key role to play in supporting teachers in delivering excellent education for the children and young people in our care as well as enhancing the learning opportunities we can provide. RM demonstrated a strong understanding of our needs and values during the tender process, particularly around sustainability – both of the technology solution and the environmental impact. We are looking forward to all of our pupils being able to benefit from this new partnership”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations

The technology contract between Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust and RM not only covers IT infrastructure, computer devices and classroom audio-visual equipment for the new Academy, but more importantly it calls upon RM’s proven expertise in helping schools get the most from the technology they have in a modern school setting.

“The BDMAT Head of ICT has been extremely pleased with the work our RM Project Manager has delivered in completing the ICT implementation at CCSA with great customer service to go with the technical skills to get everything done”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations



Working with a technology partner – the first 12 months

From contract award, RM has worked closely with the Academy and Trust SLT to ensure that the technical solution empowered teachers with the right toolset. This included arranging software and technology demos for the Headteacher and incorporating changes to the solution as bid. Balancing the IT installation with the advanced build schedule, hardware orders were placed in advance of contract signature using a letter of intent.

“The relationship to date has been excellent. RM has delivered everything requested and ensured strong communication throughout the process. We have been listened to throughout and solutions have been presented that show a clear understanding of our vision whilst also providing excellent insight from their work and experiences over the many years of working in the sector”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations

Whilst in many respects this is how RM has built its reputation over almost 50 years, the reality is that every school and Trust is different, and whilst RM only works in the Education sector, the company recognises the need to listen to customers’ individual needs and specific priorities.

“Put simply everything has gone well. I am used to projects having delays and unforeseen events however RM have handled the challenges of implementation in a pandemic with global supply issues superbly and always come with solutions. Everything feels like a genuine partnership. I cannot think of anything that has gone less well”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations



It is this long heritage – coupled with a breadth of expertise from working with so many educationalists across the UK and increasingly, globally – that allows the company to listen – but also to advise and recommend. A true partner is not someone who always says yes – especially when they have experience to share of how something has worked elsewhere.

“RM’s support has been even better than expected. We had high hopes that we had selected the right partner through the tender process but our experience has been second to none. I cannot praise the team highly enough and I am looking forward to the next stages both of the implementation at Christ Church and delivery across the wider MAT”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations

One aspect of a true partnership is playing to one another’s strengths. RM has worked with schools for almost 50 years, but they are not teachers... any more than Trusts like BDMAT do not try to implement complex technology solutions on their own, when their expertise lies in great teaching and learning for their pupils. Together, it is a powerful team.

“Without the dedication and expertise that the team from RM has shown I do not believe we would be in such a strong position going into the start of the first year of Christ Church. RM has helped to ensure our ICT Team could remain focused on our existing schools, setting them up for the new year and really supporting the MAT in being successful. We are also excited about how our partnership will contribute to our aims of achieving carbon neutral buildings by 2030”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations

Sharing best practice

1. **Have your own vision for ICT** – the more you know what you want the more likely you are to be happy with the end result.
2. **Focus on what will make a difference to teachers everyday** – screens and staff devices are used more than anything else so make sure they are high quality and reliable so they are never noticed by staff or pupils. ICT at its best makes people's lives so easy it goes unnoticed.
3. **Plan for the future** – how long will things last? What is the plan to refresh and refurbish devices and how will you afford this? Thinking about this before you open a new school will ensure you are sustainable and always have the best equipment for staff and pupils.
4. **If you're in a MAT have a vision beyond an individual school** – the more integrated you are the easier it is to support and evolve. Collaboration also becomes much easier.
5. **Ensure you have your own expertise** – a strong Head of ICT (who is technical – not a teaching lead) will help ensure you get the most out of your partner relationships.

The future

One thing that has come from the COVID-period is a much stronger understanding of the role that technology can play within the education environment. Pre-pandemic, what kept headteachers awake at night was teacher workloads. That concern has not gone away, but there is a growing appreciation that technology can help in addressing some of the bigger issues that are impacting the work/life balance of our teachers, and that has to be a good thing.

Something else that has come from the pandemic, is a newfound level of confidence, coupled with a strong undercurrent of "hope" – a hope that we do not revert to the old ways, coupled with a hope that we will learn from the – albeit painful – lessons of this period.

"We hope that Christ Church will be a beacon of strong education that will also be a key part of the local community... we hope that 20 years from now, the school will be in even better condition than it currently is... and above all we hope that ICT will support excellent teaching and learning across all our schools and enhance teacher's work whilst also improving their life/work balance".

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations



Within all of this is a recognition that whilst our sector has been ever-resourceful in overcoming adversity, it is those schools and trusts who recognise that this is a "team game" – where working as a partnership with others will lead to a better outcome.

“We would recommend RM to any Trust that was embarking on the type of journey we are on – opening new schools and enriching technology across a Trust of schools. Of all the tender responses we received, there was one that demonstrated they understood us, and gave us confidence from a 30-minute presentation – and that was RM. They have since delivered what they promised and communicated well with us from the outset”.

Chris Manning, Director of Finance and Operations

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