



Whether you are opening a brand new school or are part of an established Trust, the relationship with your technology partner can make a huge difference



The background

Norton Hill Primary School is a new, three form entry free school serving local families in the Midsomer Norton Community in North East Somerset. Facilities include superb sports provision, with two indoor sports halls, a dance studio, two large pitches for football and rugby and a hard surface sports pitch which has basketball, tennis, hockey, football and netball pitches. The school specialises in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), Forest School and Outdoor Learning.

Midsomer Norton sits on the edge of Radstock, an old mining community which to this day still has pockets of high deprivation. Midsomer Norton is slightly better off, being more rural, and has a population structure where 15% of the population are retired. Being so close to both Bath and Bristol many of the residents in employment travel to these cities for work. Over a quarter of the population are economically inactive, with over 23% holding no qualifications, suggesting that much of the employment is low skilled.

Opening in September 2020 as a one form entry with places available for up to 30 children in Reception, Norton Hill Primary School has grown year-on-year, such that it will accommodate 630 pupils by 2026. It has also opened a nursery and after just one year is offering a thriving and successful before-school and after-school programme of activities for the younger children in the community.

Part of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership – which comprises 27 schools in Bath and North East Somerset, Somerset and North Somerset – Norton Hill Primary School's Executive Headteacher Kerrie Courtier is also the Executive Headteacher for School Improvement for the Trust, working with other Primary School Headteachers and staff. With over 10,000 students and over 2,750 staff within the MAT, the partnership is one of the largest employers in the South West.

Against this background it is no surprise to find a strong relationship with technology running through the MAT – seeing it as critical to an efficiently run Trust, as well as acknowledging the importance of providing students with a solid appreciation of how ICT will further their careers. As a result, they have a long-standing relationship with leading education technology provider, RM.

“We’ve worked with RM for over 25 years and benefit from a number of their products and services including support and connectivity. As the MAT Director of IT, my role means I deal with a range of people within RM and I have never been in a situation where I have been disappointed with the level of service or commitment that has been given to us”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



It is this level of partnership that is so important for today's large Trusts – having someone to rely on, people who understand how your Trust operates, and offering the necessary expertise to resolve issues before they become problems.

“There are many occasions when I can honestly say that the employees at RM have gone the extra mile to ensure that we, as the customer, are satisfied with the service that has been provided. The quality of the work and the services they offer are consistently high, and processes are in place for their employees to ensure that the service is the same, time after time, so we know what we are getting and what to expect. I know I can trust them – they do what they say they are going to do, they never over promise and I know that when we get the product or service it is exactly as described and promised”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT

What is also apparent, is the reliance that schools and trusts place on partners who have genuine education expertise. Schools, Colleges and Early Years settings are all unique in the way that they operate, and it takes an organisation that truly understands that, to thrive. Furthermore, a technology partner that works with other schools and Trusts can bring that experience to bear in the way that they support other education settings. The fact that RM works with almost 8,000 schools and has worked in education for almost 50 years, is seen as a strong point of difference versus its main competitors.

“RM understand education, their products and services are engineered to support teaching and learning and giving opportunities to the children in our schools to give them the best start in life possible”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



Choosing a technology partner

Working with the Department for Education, the Trust undertook a competitive tender using the RM6103 Crown Commercial Services framework. The Trust selected RM to support the new free school primarily because RM were able to clearly identify exactly how they would be able to support the school on their journey.

“Their tender submission was clear and addressed all items that had been raised in our proposal. We were keen to work with a partner who had demonstrated a good track record of working with Education, a partner that didn’t oversell their products and services and a partner that could deliver on their promises. RM’s response demonstrated all of this”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT

Whilst this was a competitive tender, the Trust knew what to expect from RM, having partnered with them for many years.

“I have to say that the long relationship with RM has helped transform the way our MAT of 27 schools has developed”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



A true partner is one who can stand side-by-side with its customers – can challenge and question without fear of sanction – but who shares the same vision and goals as the customer – to enable the improvement of educational outcomes for all.

“RM understands the school as an organisation and they understand that schools work in a different way to commercial organisations. As a result, the products and services are tailored to make the most of limited budgets in schools. They take their relationship with us seriously and know the key aspects that worry us as education establishments. They understand the education workplace and the concerns teachers have around safety and safeguarding. Their values are congruent with ours”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



In the education sector, a technology partner should also be able to leverage their own ecosystem of expertise to help improve the learning environment. Individual schools – even large Trusts – rarely have this level of access, so being able to benefit from it as a partner, is a huge plus point.

“We work with RM because of their vast experience of working in the education sector, and the leverage they have with organisations like Microsoft and Google in helping to influence what their products might look like in the classroom, and ultimately helping teachers to transform the life opportunities of the children that we teach”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



Working with a technology partner – the first 12 months

Norton Hill Primary was a brand new school, whose build schedule was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic alongside some more local planning issues. This meant that the school had to open in September 2020 in temporary accommodation. To minimise deployment costs, RM supplied and installed wired and wireless infrastructure, classroom AV and client devices into the new school building in time for its full opening in January 2021. In addition, given the school’s specialisms of STEM, Forest School and Outdoor Learning, its sister company – RM Resources – provided a range of engaging peripherals including the Bee Bot® programmable floor robot and data loggers.

The first 12 months have certainly been interesting. As the first 4 months were in temporary buildings, the students struggled to get used to the cramped surroundings, but when they came to the new building in January 2021, everything changed.

“The technology that has been integrated into the build that supports teaching and learning has been great. Staff are able to walk the site and benefit from not just the fantastic technology but the other resources they now have at their disposal including superb sports facilities”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



Inevitably with a project of this size there are always things that do not go as well as expected. The school are pleased that on the whole the IT has worked as expected and this was down the large amount of planning that went into the project – both by the MAT but also by the project and contracts manager at RM before any equipment was purchased. Where there were some snags, these were addressed quickly, and because they were software or cloud based, many were completed remotely.

“Looking back at the last year I feel that we made the right decision to partner with RM for our journey. Their experience of dealing with the DfE (not easy at the best of times) helped us focus on what we needed to do and help to structure our bid in such a way that the completed paperwork met the DfE requirements first time. Their understanding of the education market also helped us to put in technologies that would support the learning of the students and the fact that RM has subsidiary companies we were able to draw on these technologies to help us to deliver the STEM curriculum”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



Technology in schools – the future

Despite technology being integrated into education for some time, its use for teaching and learning is still an evolving focus for many schools and Trusts. New technologies are emerging and the key is often having to make them usable in a seamless way without wasting limited financial resources. The pandemic made everyone realise that the investment in time and equipment was the right one such that the MAT were able to deliver daily online lessons for all students that incorporated quality and stretching material and students were able to make progress in their learning, albeit at a slightly slower rate that would have been expected in the classroom.

“By embedding technology in schools, we seek to engender a pedagogical change that can help to address fundamental issues that affect learners with additional needs. Technology can be seen as a tool to support every learner in their individual learning journey”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT

At Trust level, having a common approach across all the schools is important as it provides clarity and the ability to easily support teachers. Issues identified by one teacher are likely to have been seen somewhere else so giving them the ability to resolve the issue more quickly. The use of Chromebooks, for example, has given a stable and consistent platform across many schools – being able to roll these out without the worry of additional security that you would get with a PC or Mac device.

“Our aim was to use technology that did not get in the way of teaching but supported its delivery by using a common and recognised interface”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



For Midsomer Norton MAT they chose Google as their common platform – such that so long as parents had access to the internet at home, they knew that all students would be able to engage to some extent with the learning each school in the trust provided.

“We have used the additional Pupil Premium funding to purchase Chromebooks for students to use at home so that they are able to fully engage in their home learning without being disadvantaged. Parents are able to be involved in the various steps of learning because Google Classroom (the main mechanism for the delivery of lesson and homework) gives parents and carers the option to have summaries of work that has been issued via Google Classroom”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT



The pandemic has further helped to foster a better link between parents and the students' learning. Going online has enabled the learning resources to be more widely shared and feedback from parents has acknowledged the benefits of the process and has made them more informed about what is being learned.

“The return to normal working will not change some of the newly adopted processes – for example with virtual parent’s evenings which have been a phenomenal success”.

Mark Lynch, Senior Assistant Headteacher and MAT Director of ICT

Find out more about our services

Visit: rm.com/services

Email: supportservices@rm.com

Call: 0845 3077 832