



How Brooke Weston Trust used the Connect the Classroom scheme funding to upgrade networks in its schools and benefit its pupils

The Brooke Weston Trust (BWT) is a family of twelve primary and secondary schools in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire, providing education from pre-school to sixth form. RM is the trust's long-standing managed service IT support provider.

During the academic year of 2023-2024, the trust upgraded network infrastructure in four of its schools, with funding from the Department for Education's Connect the Classroom scheme.

The trust's objectives

Among the trust's driving principles is collaboration to share best practice - to maximise the use of resources and work together to drive improvements for the benefit of students.

An assessment of the network's operation and infrastructure across the trust revealed that upgrades would benefit Corby Business Academy, Thomas Clarkson Academy, and Peckover Primary School.

In addition, the due diligence process for onboarding Thrapston Primary School to the trust demonstrated that the school's network infrastructure was not up to the same standard as that of other trust schools. With inadequate connectivity, realising the benefits of the trust's work in different areas of the school's operations would be difficult. The trust decided to add Thrapston to the list of network upgrade projects.

Connect the Classroom provided an opportunity to pay for the upgrades, which would release funds to invest in other infrastructure projects.

"I think it was an excellent example of partnership between the DfE, the multi-academy trust and its different professional functions, our schools and our third-party managed service provider. An example of how all of that working together delivers something that's a real benefit on the ground."

Michelle Wenham, Chief Operations and Resources Officer, Brooke Weston Trust.



Working with RM to gain maximum value from Connect the Classroom

RM had worked with other schools and trusts on projects funded by the Connect the Classroom scheme. This experience enabled RM to contribute to the successful bids that funded the upgrades at Thomas Clarkson Academy and Thrapston Primary School. RM also helped the trust secure retrospective funding for projects already underway at Peckover Primary and Corby Business Academy.

The trust's finance department, RM and the individual schools established a joined-up process to manage the claims submitted to the DfE and minimise administrative effort.

“A special mention of [RM Account Director] Richard Saunders, who along with colleagues really provided huge support in terms of making sure we were able to access the funding that was available, very proactive.”

Michelle Wenham, Chief Operations and Resources Officer, Brooke Weston Trust.

Positive outcomes for Brooke Weston Trust

- Providing a consistently high level of connectivity at all its schools delivers on the trust's desire to provide all students and staff access to high-quality provision and opportunities.
- The trust's single M365 tenancy underpins much of its operations. With improved connectivity, all schools can experience the benefits of acting together, reinforced by central trust operations.
- Staff across the trust work more effectively. Reliable and quick connectivity provides access to shared files and lesson plans. Even something as apparently mundane as the ability to see others' calendars saves time for busy teachers and administrative staff.
- Peckover Primary and Thomas Clarkson Academy are in Wisbech, an area of high deprivation. The trust works to build children's digital skills in those schools to overcome limited local infrastructure and online access. Connect the Classroom has provided a firm foundation for that work.

- Thrapston Primary and Corby Business Academy have specialised SEND units. Improving network connectivity has helped the schools offer teaching that allows local children with special educational needs to access an appropriate curriculum and learn wider skills. As a result, the unit at Thrapston Primary has doubled the number of places available in its SEND unit.
- Reduction in workload, especially for early career teachers who can share planning and resources with colleagues in other Brooke Weston Trust schools.
- Following a trust-developed curriculum to drive school improvement becomes far simpler when every school has routine access to the tools required via upgraded connectivity between the schools and central functions.

“They've got fully connected classrooms; they're able to have interactive screens and use them. The difference that's made for their lessons and the children's behaviour because they're engaged, it's really helped.”

Sharon Webb, Senior Vice Principal, Thrapston Primary School, Northants, speaking about the impact on the school's SEND unit.

Connect the Classroom – partnership in practice

The benefits to Brooke Weston Trust from the Connect the Classroom scheme demonstrate the power of well-managed partnerships to deliver positive student outcomes. The trust's Chief Operations and Resources Officer, Michelle Wenham, had read about the scheme. RM knew about it thanks to its close links with the DfE and education settings nationwide. For its part, the DfE contacted eligible schools by email.

The installation processes went smoothly because RM has a long-standing relationship with the trust as its managed service IT provider. Regular progress meetings kept the projects on track and helped to resolve issues as they arose, especially when scheduling work alongside other technology projects.

RM's experience working with HPE Aruba Networking hardware ensured the projects met the relevant DfE networking standards and provided the resilience needed in school environments.

Installed solutions:

- Aruba AP-515 indoor Wi-Fi 6 Access points
- Aruba AP-575 outdoor Wi-Fi 6 Access points
- Aruba modular PoE+ switches with redundant power supplies and Smart Rate ports
- Aruba multi-port PoE+ edge switches
- Aruba Central cloud-based network management

Conclusions

- Having a functioning network to connect a trust's central team with its schools - and the schools with each other - will help the schools and their pupils flourish.
- The DfE's Connect the Classroom scheme can make a big difference for trusts that grasp its possibilities.

"All of us are looking for ways to maximise income and funding and make sure that students have the facilities and equipment that they need. This was a great example of a direct impact front-line that you could see and feel."

Michelle Wenham, Chief Operations and Resources Officer, Brooke Weston Trust.

- Having an IT partner who understands how your school or trust operates and can apply knowledge gained from similar situations will help you take advantage of the opportunities offered.

"The pre-installation process, all of that was really positive around RM because they work so well with us and internal stakeholders in terms of dates and deliveries."

Michelle Wenham, Chief Operations and Resources Officer, Brooke Weston Trust.



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Email: getintouch@rm.com

Call: 01235 645 316