

How does a server support IT at school?

Fundamentally a server is just a powerful computer that historically has run at the heart of the network, 'serving' the network. A server stores, sends, receives and processes data, which includes setting access control and rights of users on the network.

In schools they traditionally also perform functions such as managing client devices (laptops and desktops), printers and user profiles (including passwords) as well as storing data (including shared teaching files, MIS and finance data) and physical access control and security, such as the school gates and CCTV.

What limitations does having a server bring to a school or Trust?

Increased costs and decreased flexibility

When you buy a server, you'll do so with the future in mind and over-spec for what you need today, knowing that in a few years' time you'll likely need this. What that means is that you'll either be overpaying on day one and may not even have enough storage or power in year 3 as it can be difficult to predict the growth in usage. Alternatively, as server usage declines, you'll be paying for a server which over time becomes too high spec for modern requirements and therefore be over-paying in the future. In addition, running one or more servers is inherently complex and so a highly technical individual is needed, either in-house or through a support partner, meaning that running costs are much higher. With the cloud this can all be done remotely and, in some cases, in an automated manner, meaning lower ongoing support and maintenance costs.

Challenges with file management

Linked to the decreased flexibility are the challenges that a physical server has with file management. With a server, schools will often have multiple versions of the same file, which not only causes confusion about which version is the, but also adds to the fact that storage space becomes a significant issue over time. Schools will end up needing to delete files in order to either save money, or simply just continue at the same cost. This is not only time consuming but can also be a challenge to work out what is and isn't needed.

In addition, if the onsite back up is not set up properly (or being physical rather than virtual, breaks) then there is the added risk of losing critical files. This really comes to light for admin teams when trying to collate feedback and responses by tracking potentially hundreds of files (or even physical

paper), for example for consent forms or a school trip. With Microsoft or Google Forms, all of this information can be stored in the cloud and manipulated via spreadsheets instantly, with no manual work required.

Increased carbon emissions

Servers and associated hardware consume vast amounts of power, costing more money in running costs, as well as being much worse for the environment. With the Government's push for greener schools, a server is one of the first things that should be removed to improve the school's carbon footprint.

Decreased ability to work flexibly

One of the biggest issues with having a physical server and not utilising the cloud is the requirement to physically be in school to continue working on the same documents. This means that staff are often forced to spend more time than necessary in school, on top of an already busy day, doing work such as planning and non-paper marking that they could easily be doing at home. Whilst there are options, such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that allow users to access files from home, this comes at an additional cost to the school, which would be lower with a cloud set up.

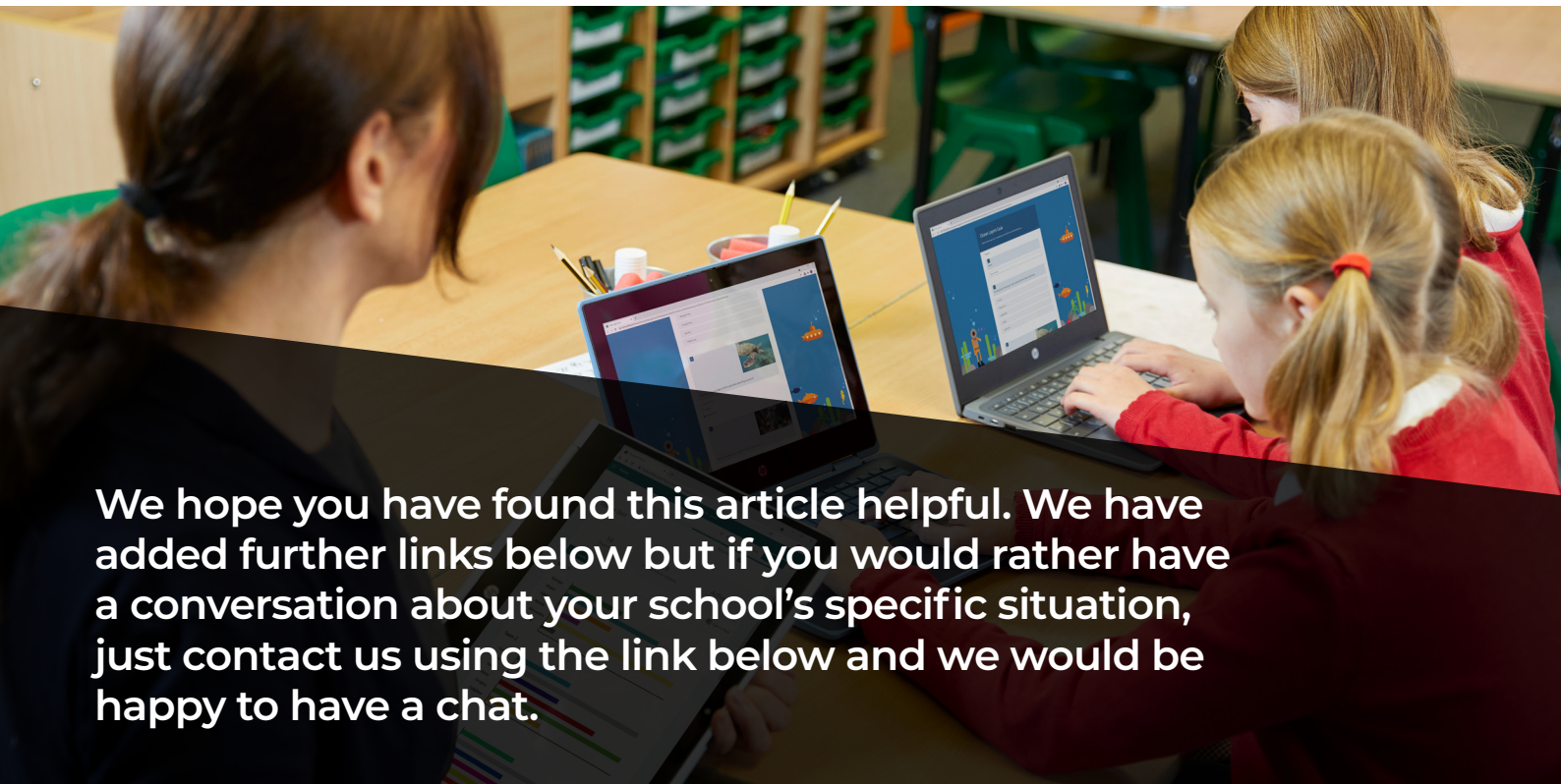
Physical space

Running a server requires the right physical space in a school; server rooms require proper ventilation and air flow to avoid over-heating and most schools will struggle to find an appropriate place. Add to this the growing requirements of schools to have more students (and at the time of writing, socially distance) and physical space is becoming more and more of a commodity in schools.

Potential security risks

The general maintenance of a server is time consuming and costly. In particular, if relying on an individual physically in the school, it can be more of a security risk if they can't patch the server in a timely manner, either due to not getting into the school at a good time or, more likely, due to being distracted with a request to fix issues elsewhere halfway through a security patch.

Relevant to both security and general updates; schools will often have to manually update or upgrade their server, either physically or the Operating System, whereas the likes of Office 365 will update constantly (at appropriate, pre-determined times) to ensure security, but also usability remains up to date.



We hope you have found this article helpful. We have added further links below but if you would rather have a conversation about your school's specific situation, just contact us using the link below and we would be happy to have a chat.

Who are RM?

We can help you with every stage of the journey, from getting the foundations right, to investing in new devices, to getting the best suppliers with the best financial terms, to managing your migration from start to finish and adding clarity to your vision for the future, to helping you with training and onboarding.

Because we only work 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

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

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

[Contact Us](#)



RM Education, 142b Park Drive,
Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4SE