Connect the Classroom case study

Thrapston Primary School

RM

Upgrading network connectivity across the school has helped SEND provision, reduced workload and improved collaboration at Thrapston Primary School

Thrapston Primary School in Northamptonshire teaches approximately 480 pupils from Reception through to Year 6. It has specialist unit provision for children with special educational needs and a nursery.

In October 2023, the school joined Brooke Weston Trust. The school already knew its network connectivity was inadequate, and the trust's due diligence process had prioritised improving it.

Using funding from the Department for Education's Connect the Classroom (CtC) scheme, the trust worked with RM, its managed service IT partner, to update connectivity across the school.

Requirements

- Bring reliable connectivity to the whole school site, including outdoor areas.
- Support the school's integration into the trust's single M365 tenancy to bring the benefits of acting together, reinforced by central trust operations.

Challenge

The school consists of several modern and Victorian buildings spread over a large site. An uncoordinated assortment of network hardware provided unreliable connections in some parts of the school. Other parts, including the school hall, the newly opened SEND unit, and outside areas, had no connection at all.

> "It was a case of turn it off, turn it on again and cross your fingers. In terms of our well-being, it wasn't great because you never knew if anything was going to work."
>
> **Pauline Turner,** Principal

Solution

Brooke Weston Trust and RM were already working on CtC scheme projects at other trust schools. Using the same process, the trust submitted a successful application to the DfE.

RM worked with HPE Aruba Networking hardware to ensure the new infrastructure met the relevant DfE networking standards and provided the resilience school environments need.

> "It's a lot faster now. You don't have that delay and that lag with anything loading, particularly using anything online. It's a lot quicker."
>
> **Sharon Webb,** Senior Vice Principal

RM removed the existing systems and replaced them with the following:

- HPE Aruba Networking AP-515 indoor Wi-Fi 6 access points

- HPE Aruba Networking AP-575 outdoor Wi-Fi 6 access points

- HPE Aruba Networking modular PoE+ switches with redundant power supplies and Smart Rate ports

- HPE Aruba Networking multi-port PoE+ edge switches

- HPE Aruba Networking Central cloud-based network management software

RM planned the installation to minimise disruption. Much of the work took place outside school hours to avoid inconveniencing pupils and staff.

> "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.

Outcomes

Network connections have improved enormously. From hand-held devices used by pupils to interactive screens, everything connects smoothly and remains online.

SEND

In the school's SEND unit, the ability to use tools such as speech-to-text and more visual resources has helped pupils with autism or speech and language challenges access learning more easily. As a result, the school has doubled the number of places available in the SEND unit. In addition, best practice developed by experts at the Thrapston unit can be shared easily with other schools in the trust.

> "The SEND unit has 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

Workload

The impact on teacher workload has been multi-faceted. Teachers no longer need to plan lessons which include a backup plan for when online resources are not available. Collaboration in the school, and with other trust schools to avoid duplication of effort, is far easier thanks to reliable access to centrally held information. For example, Thrapston's early careers teachers (ECTs) can contribute to and benefit from planning and resources developed by their peers in other trust schools.

Previously, one person would try to download an entire subject curriculum in one go and then distribute it to colleagues by email. Now, teachers can access the latest version of any resource online when and where they need it.

Safeguarding

Like many schools, Thrapston uses online systems for recording, reporting, and responding to safeguarding matters. Being able to access these systems reliably ensures that those with safeguarding responsibility are aware of any incidents and have taken the appropriate action.

With network access now possible in outside areas, it's much easier to manage fire drills or an actual emergency. Staff can access class registers to determine a pupil's whereabouts and obtain parent or carer contact details if necessary.

Integration with the trust

Brooke Weston Trust uses a single M365 tenancy to underpin much of its operations—in the classroom and administratively. The improved ability to access the trust's central team and other schools has helped Thrapston quickly become part of the trust and benefit from its opportunities. Even something as apparently mundane as the ability to see others' calendars saves time for busy teachers and administrative staff.

Conclusions

- Network connectivity upgrades can be genuinely transformational for schools that understand their possibilities.

- A functioning network that connects all parts of a school, its trust's central team, and other schools in the trust will help the pupils and staff flourish.

- The Connect the Classroom scheme has accelerated progress for schools and trusts by providing funding to improve network infrastructure. When opportunities for DfE funding exist, make sure you take advantage of them.

- Having an IT partner who understands how your school or trust operates and can apply knowledge gained from similar situations will help make change easier.

"When you look at the world that our children are growing up in, it is so tech-based. This has been something that has enabled us as a school to begin to move forward in a much more productive way."

Pauline Turner, Principal

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