NetSupport School

St Peter's RC High School, Manchester
Dan Highton, IT Manager

Tell us about St Peter's RC High School…

We are a Roman Catholic High School based on a single site in central Manchester. We have around 960 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 on roll – all from a very diverse range of backgrounds and cultures – and approximately 150 staff. In terms of IT, we have around 750 machines, plus a server infrastructure in place to support them.

What are some of the main IT challenges you face?

One of the biggest challenges – and one that we have in common with most schools – is the funding and cost of maintaining systems. We have an enterprise grade infrastructure, but that comes at a cost of trying to keep up with the pace of technology. Our fleet of desktops ranges from brand new devices through to PCs of around six or seven years old (which came as an investment as part of the BSF programme), so now, as the time goes on, we are constantly striving to get the most out of all our IT assets in terms of performance.

How has NetSupport School helped at the school? What are the main benefits to teaching?

Our various faculties in the school use NetSupport School in different ways and to different degrees, according to each subject. Our teachers find that they get a lot of benefit from it in terms of the control that they have over the devices and the ability to gain the attention of the class. So, for example, they can prevent students from using certain websites that aren't relevant to what they're studying - or lock their screens to get attention and keep them focused on the subject of the lesson.

Keeping students on task is the biggest thing, but teachers can keep them engaged by sharing their screen to every student's device so can see it in front of them, rather than having to look at a central screen at the front of the class. Some of our departments (e.g. IT and Business Studies) find that conducting tests through NetSupport School's Testing module and assessing whether they've understood a topic with student surveys are really good ways to get the students involved and interacting.

What are the benefits for technicians?

From our point of view, it's really handy for us to be able to access the hardware and software inventory details on PCs – and carry out direct support through the Tech Console. Rather than physically having to go to different machines in different classrooms, we can just jump on a machine remotely and help anyone who is having problems. It's also great that we can do things like upgrades easily – we can log onto all the machines in one hit rather than visit each one separately – so it saves us a lot of time.

How does NetSupport School compare to previous solutions the school has used?

NetSupport School has been well established in the school for many years now; we have been customers since 2005, so I'm not aware of what came before it!

What do other staff in the school think of NetSupport School in terms of usability?

The teachers find it easy to use and we never have any issues about usability. The way we have it set up here is as part of Group Policy – and we use Room mode. So whatever room staff are in, they just start NetSupport School up and the machines relevant to that room are all there. So it's very straightforward as far as they're concerned. Even when we upgraded recently, the teachers didn't have any problems with the change; they all knew what they were doing!

For technicians, it's great, as we have instant visibility of any machine we want to get to on the network. NetSupport School contributes to the management of our IT assets as well, and its ability to gather hardware and software inventories helps us with planning and decision-making.

What is it like working with NetSupport?

I've spoken to both the Sales and Support teams. The Sales guys have been very efficient, and any questions we've had, they've always come back to us really quickly. Again, with Support, we've logged calls and asked questions and the information we've had back has always been spot on. We were a bit cautious about upgrading recently, but the Support team advised us what to do – and it went like a dream!

How do you see NetSupport School supporting the school's IT into the future?

Obviously, everyone has their own way of working and style of teaching, but as our staff use NetSupport School to varying degrees, it would be good boost the knowledge of those who use it at a lower level. However, in terms of the core activities that we want to do, NetSupport School ticks all the boxes. We have no problems with it whatsoever!