GREENWOOD ACADEMIES TRUST

"There's a realisation now that running IT services isn't core business for a Multi Academy Trust"

Greenwood Academies Trust (GAT) invested in a shared ICT platform for its academies, based on Microsoft technologies. Our Learning Cloud (OLC) provides a managed support service that enables each academy to develop its use of technology. It has transformed ICT from a regular source of complaint to an enabler of more effective teaching and learning. Providing both the Trust and individual academies with value for money and time efficiencies.

The client

Greenwood Academies Trust (GAT) has 37 primary, secondary, all-through, and special educational needs academies in the East Midlands and East of England. Many are in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. The Trust has around 19,000 students and 3,000 staff.

Driver for change

GAT could see that its academies had an inefficient and ageing ICT infrastructure, in need of investment.

"We'd grown from a relatively small Multi-Academy Trust to a large organisation, made up of academies with very different legacy systems and approaches to providing services supporting the core function of teaching and learning," says Graham Feek, Deputy Chief Executive at GAT. He continues, "ICT for academies joining GAT was relatively traditional, and all on premise. It wasn't professional, it was expensive, it wasn't reliable, and there were concerns about security. It was something we were spending

a lot of money on and viewing it as a commodity, rather than a business enabler."

It was also a source of dissatisfaction at Academy level. "ICT was a constant source of aggravation and was the service we had the most complaints about," remarks Graham.

Solution

GAT was among the first Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) to provide ICT to its academies as a central service.

> We were fortunate in having the guidance of someone that had the vision and foresight, as well as having the technical ability and the experience of an educator. This allowed us to consider how we delivered a platform that supported teaching and learning, as well as business needs," comments Graham.

Delivered from Microsoft's Azure cloud, the solution provides pupils and staff with Microsoft 365, and is supported through a central managed service developed from commercial best practice.

Benefits

OLC enables GAT to provide its academies with a consistent and reliable ICT service that supports effective teaching and learning. It also provides both the Trust and individual academies with the value for money they need.

"Value for money is about efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and we're spending less now per pupil, in real terms, than we were in 2016. Significantly less," reveals Graham. "We can be more efficient in terms of administration processes, teaching and learning processes, and it has also given us new tools to better engage with young people, so they can have the most effective learning, and we can be as effective as possible in our teaching. So, it covers every aspect of value for money."

Microsoft's applications include an array of features that can be highly beneficial in education: ranging from automatic marking and instant feedback, to individual help with reading and comprehension. Ongoing skills training is a core part of OLC's service and focuses on how staff can beneficially use the tools available to them in school.

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> **The service is providing academies with cash savings and they're getting services, such as training, that they didn't have before," notes Graham. "There are obvious benefits in time savings for all staff, including teachers. But it's not about reducing headcount, it is about using those savings in time and efficiency to do higher value activities."**

Looking to the future, GAT sees huge productivity gains from automating labour-intensive admin processes. "We're looking to systematically work through a list of our manual processes and use Microsoft Power Apps to automate these processes at scale across the Trust," states Graham.

"OLC is a trusted partner, and is key to GAT driving forward its business and its use of digital technology to support teaching and learning," declares Graham.

One of the ways this happens is through regular meetings between each Academy and OLC. These review top line performance, how well the use of digital technology is aligned with the Academy Improvement

Plan, and specifically what OLC can do to support that – and this may take the form of additional, specific, bespoke training.

"Something I really like is that they're very accessible," explains Graham. "While there's a formal process to raise issues through a service desk, the key people are available. Sometimes there are things that academies raise as educators, perhaps where there's a safeguarding implication, that are very difficult for an IT service desk to understand. OLC is very amenable to escalating things very quickly if we say there's something on top of the service level that needs to be dealt with."

"They may be a third-party supplier, but they feel like they're part of GAT and care about what we're doing every bit as much as we do," adds Graham.

He continues, "OLC were established from a MAT, they have staff that have come from other MATs, and most of their staff have worked in schools for many years, and it's a very different way of working. They successfully balance the day-to-day needs of an academy, with providing a professional business service."
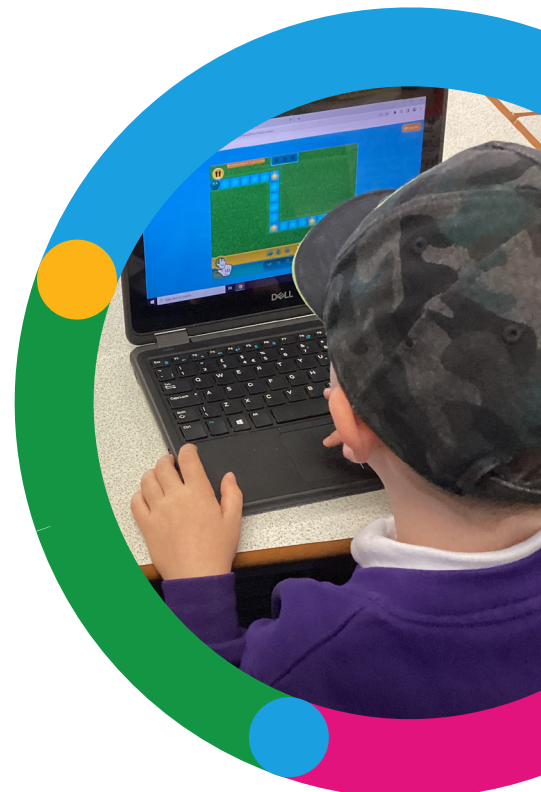
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> **The cost of the managed service is predictable. It's based on a per pupil cost which is stable, changes are very marginal, and it's allowed us to offload a lot of risk,"** declares Graham.

He concludes,

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> **I'd absolutely recommend OLC: they're steeped in education, they understand our business, they understand our pain points, and they understand how to support us. They are not just talking the talk, they can walk the walk, and have successfully done so many times over, across many very different schools, in different areas, with different needs."**