



Ashton-on-Mersey School

Viewpoint

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Nick David

Business and Finance Manager



Applying experience to improve learning...

Ashton-on-Mersey is a high performing school, recognised by OFSTED as an 'outstanding' education centre for its motivated teaching and support staff, excellent examination achievement and commitment to providing a productive and rewarding environment for pupils to learn in.

The adoption of thin computing using Wyse Winterm thin clients and Citrix has enabled the school to create a secure and feature rich working environment for pupils without suffering the burden of operational and support issues so often faced by schools trying to run a PC desktop based infrastructure. Rather, it has put in place an infrastructure that facilitates the future growth of ICT use in the school and so empower pupils with greater learning capability.

Taking Action

Nick David, Business and Finance Manager at Ashton-on-Mersey, is responsible for ensuring that the school's computer system is fully supported so that its 1300 secondary level pupils have available the resources and applications they need for learning. "Our system had evolved over a number of years and we'd developed an infrastructure based on approximately 200 diskless desktop PCs of varying specification and a Novell server from which applications that pupils need were downloaded." he says.

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Although this system allowed a degree of central control, its management had proved difficult. "Like most schools we have very limited staff resource to support the system. It was proving increasingly difficult and costly for our IT Manager to support 200 PCs, with him having to continually fire fight technical problems rather than being able to concentrate on developing the system to accommodate our future needs." He adds. It was obvious that a better solution was required.

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That solution needed to satisfy several key objectives. It needed to be scalable to meet the future computing needs of the pupils and enable the school to comply with evolving Government legislation requiring the ratio of pupils to access screens to be reduced. It needed to be significantly more reliable and enable the school's limited resources to manage application delivery and provide support centrally. It also needed to provide a high level of security in terms of providing access to permitted work areas at various levels. Underlying all this was the need to reduce the cost normally associated with support and replacement PCs.

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Under the guidance and support of Wyse Gold Partner Novus Group, Ashton-on-Mersey school considered the options open to it. As IT Manager Farook Mulla explains: “We quickly realised that a Citrix server-based computing solution using Wyse Winterm devices was the simplest and most cost effective option for the school.” The school had been working closely with Novus for several years, having initially commissioned them to provide troubleshooting support. As the school's needs have progressed, they have relied on Novus to help drive their systems forward.

The original deployment comprised 70-100 Wyse Winterm 1200LE and 8235LE thin clients as these provided excellent multimedia capability such as streaming video. Today, the School operates a network of over 200 Wyse Winterm thin clients running on a Citrix Server based system that provides for central management. The system comprises Windows 2000 servers with Active Directory running Citrix MetaFrame Xpe and the required applications. The servers provide file and print services, user validation and access to the Internet and email.

Novus was key to the implementation as Nick David comments: “Novus are able to translate our raw thoughts into an effective working solution. In times of difficulty we have been able to rely on the expertise of their technical staff in resolving network issues whether this be via remote links to our network or by visiting the school.”

Achieving Objectives

The technical benefits of implementing a thin client solution were obvious from the start. As Farook Mulla explains: “Rolling out the Wyse Winterm desktop devices was a straightforward, out-of-the-box installation. Then having established the desired profile of the first device in about 10-15 minutes, the profile is automatically established on every other thin client.”

Operationally, the School has derived several key benefits. Pupils are now able to access multimedia applications, the Internet and email as part of their everyday education. Significantly, greater control over the entire system has been achieved and efficiency gains made with the IT Manager able to centrally manage application availability, control access to permitted work areas and ensure pupils are protected in terms of what they can see when using the Internet. The greater flexibility of the system has further enabled Ashton-on-Mersey School to provide remote learning centrally, with pupils able to access their work areas outside of school hours.

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Nick David concludes: “It's fair to say that the system has realised all the benefits we set out to achieve. This is evidenced by the fact that significant expansion has taken place since the initial installation to a multi server network with hundreds of Wyse thin client desktops. Not only are we now serving our pupils efficiently and cost effectively, I'm also confident that we're able to more easily address their growing needs with a truly scalable infrastructure.”

Conclusion

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