Academies Enterprise Trust leads the way for UK academies with Google Apps

Academies Enterprise Trust
To make our best better

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
- Replace an expensive, unreliable and varied technical infrastructure
- Install an affordable email service to improve student and staff communication
- Review the use of ICT Labs as an effective use of resources
- Create new ways for students to engage with technology in the classroom

What they did
- Provided Google Apps accounts to all staff and an increasing number of students including Gmail access
- Rolled out Chromebooks as the in-class replacement to ICT Labs

What they accomplished
- Inspired students to enrich their group projects and individual work
- Resolved IT administrative issues and made estimated cost savings of £180,000 per year
- Highlight scalability across 76 academies
- Increased communication between teachers, across institutions, strengthening the AET community

Background

Founded in 2008, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) is the operational arm of a non profit making charitable trust which believes that all young people deserve to become world class learners.

The Trust works with a national federation of primary, secondary and special schools to ensure that all learners achieve significant improvements in standards, and are provided with every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

With over 5,500 staff and 42,000 students, AET has become the largest multi academy sponsor in the UK and currently supports 76 schools.

Challenge

AET is committed to ensuring that every student from each of its 76 academies can one day participate in local, regional and national economies, helping them to develop the skills and confidence to make a valuable contribution to the world. As part of this, the use of technology is vital in ensuring that AET can maximise educational opportunities.

The Trust was held back from exploring the full potential of technology for learning as technical setups varied wildly across the different academies. Without a unified system, it was difficult to create efficient processes and simplified budgeting structures. This meant that each academy worked in a silo, both from an administrative and knowledge sharing perspective.

At one of the largest academies, which hosts up to 1,800 students, it was also a challenge to provide up to date equipment in ICT labs, with limited budget available. At the same time, students wanted to bring their own laptops and smartphones to their lessons, so the older hardware in the labs was gradually becoming redundant.

Chris Meaney, Director of ICT at Academies Enterprise Trust explains: "Students now expect to be able to access the same sort of technology that they do in their home lives when they are at school and this would stretch us with our existing technology and available budgets."

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> *—Chris Meaney, Director of ICT at Academies Enterprise Trust*

Solution

In the summer of 2012, AET adopted Google Apps for Education, the web-based communication and collaboration suite available for free to education establishments. With products including Gmail, Google Calendar, Google

Drive, Google Sites and Google Classroom, AET saw the potential it would bring to classroom learning, better knowledge sharing across the academies, improvements in administrative efficiencies and in providing access from home for all.

To enable all students to have access to the most up-to-date technology, academies have also rolled out many class sets of Google Chromebooks, affordable browser-based laptops, providing quick, simple access to the web.

Chris Meaney says: "We did not anticipate just how easy it would be to make the switch or just how many opportunities the move to Google Apps would provide. A wide range of services, including our email, document storage, Intranet and school websites are run through Google Apps across all our academies. In addition to enhancing our students' education, we are also able to manage the devices they are using in a much easier way."

Benefits

Expensive, unreliable multiple infrastructures are now a thing of the past. As Google Apps is hosted entirely online, maintenance is minimal. 95% of AET academy websites have already moved to Google Sites, without any need for expensive web developers or hosting fees which are estimated to have saved £33,000 so far.

Students now use Gmail to communicate with each other when they are working on projects together, while teachers use it to allocate tasks and provide feedback on homework. With Google Drive, the web-hosted storage service, students and staff can access documents online from wherever they are, and on any device, whether on their mobile phone or a home computer.

With the Chromebook roll-outs well underway, AET is now reconsidering its need for ICT labs. By replacing these with in-classroom access to technology, significant maintenance resources and space within the academies could be saved. The decision would also reflect the need for technology to become more integrated into a range of lessons and not just a subject in its own right. There are currently 1200+ Chromebooks deployed at AET academies with the largest single roll-out consisting of 700 devices which led to cost savings versus traditional laptops of up to 50%, or £100,000.

For example, at Maltings Academy in Essex, at the start of the year, each student is tasked with writing a 500-word story across all subject areas, which will form the basis of their learning for their curriculum for the year to come. The students now write the story in a Google Doc, and use Google Sites, Google Forms and Google Drawing to enrich their work with surveys and illustrations, whether they need to draw a diagram to accompany the story or create a supporting chart. Students work in pairs when writing their stories, editing one another's documents and making suggestions. Through the shared access, they can see where changes are being made, and collaborate on particular sections of the project.

Google Certified Teacher, Dean Stokes comments: "The use of the technology in the partner work means they are much more engaged, working quickly and efficiently to complete something that both partners can be proud of."

The feedback process has also been transformed through use of Drive and Classroom. Rather than using the traditional method of taking the work home and marking it, teachers now input their comments straight into the students' documents, so that students can instantly see where changes are required and amend their work during lesson time. This instant feedback helps accelerate their progress.

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a suite of free, secure tools that includes Gmail, Calendar, Sites & Documents. Use it for collaboration and communication no matter where you are or which device you're using. Over 40 million students, faculty, and staff in schools around the world have gone Google with Google Apps for Education. You can learn more and sign up to try it out by visiting our website:

www.google.com/intx/en_gb/edu/products/productivity-tools/

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are designed to help students and teachers get things done quickly and easily. Devices start at £166 and are simple to manage at scale through a web browser. With several devices to choose from, it's easy to find a Chromebook that meets your students' needs. You can learn more here:

www.google.com/intx/en_gb/edu/products/devices/chromebooks.html

Academies are now working together more effectively to share knowledge and best practice through using Google's social networking service, Google+, which is also embedded in the Google Apps suite. The academies' "eLearning Leaders" post to Google Groups, encouraging discussion about winning techniques and sharing their ideas on digital learning to benefit other teachers. In time, the plan is to build out the use of Sites and Google+ to create a shared repository of learning materials and lesson plans, accessible to staff from all 76 academies and an existing example of this is a Primary site built to showcase excellent corridor display examples that can be accessed by other AET primary academies.

"There's no doubt that Google Apps has helped bring together our academies, forming a support network for teachers and an excellent knowledge-sharing platform. We are confident that this virtual support community will become a key part of teaching and learning within our academies," adds Chris Meaney.

AET has explored the long-term cost savings* of the move and estimates cost savings of £7,701,044.25 over the next five years. This will come from economising on areas including licensing, power saving, server hardware and maintenance.

It doesn't stop there. AET is also looking at the prospect of using Google Maps Engine, Google Earth and the Google Cultural Institute to make geography and art lessons more engaging and inspiring for its students.

"Looking at the range of options that we can now pursue to improve students' learning experience, we're confident we took the right step in moving to Google Apps. It has become a vital part of our fabric, supporting education and related administration for students, support staff and teachers, helping to prepare them for life outside the classroom," concludes Meaney.

*For printed version, please visit goo.gl/bbR2mL in your browser to access AET's estimated cost savings document.

Google for Education