

'Outstanding' Grammar School expands student horizons with Microsoft modern technologies



When OFSTED 'Outstanding' West Kirby Grammar School wanted to upgrade and integrate its ageing systems to better support the faculty and high achieving student body, it turned to Microsoft. Using Office 365, Skype for Business unified communications, Windows Server 2012, SQL Server 2012 and powerful Windows 8.1 tablets, the teaching and learning experience has been transformed with truly anywhere working. The school can confidently look to the future supported by a secure, cutting-edge platform that delivers unparalleled experience and the scope to develop and grow in line with the school's success.

As one of the top 50 performing schools in the UK, West Kirby Grammar School has a highly driven body of 150 staff and 1,200 students to equip and empower each day. What sets the school apart is its passion for discovering and nurturing the unique talents of each individual child. That doesn't start and stop with what the students learn, it embraces how they learn and how the school can help them gain confidence and independence. Liam Hayes, IT strategy leader, has been taking the school on a 3-year journey to integrate and modernise its systems and technologies to prepare the school for the next generation of technology and students.

Challenge – Disparate systems, restricted capability

West Kirby Grammar School's IT environment had grown over the years into a patchwork platform made up of unconnected systems from different IT companies, and a basic PABX telephone system. The software had dated features and offered no real personalised or group working capability. Inflexibility made everyday systems management ever more complex and a large amount of time each day was spent dealing with malfunctioning tools, access and security issues. In such a high-achieving educational environment, IT was failing to support the teaching and learning environment. Liam began to develop a radical blueprint for a modern IT platform unlike any used by other local schools. "I wanted us to have the tools that enabled the teaching body to deliver their classes without restriction and to give the students what they needed to maximise their potential with every opportunity to develop and express themselves freely," says Liam.

Solution – Cutting edge technology with efficient reliability

Liam chose a new environment based on modern Microsoft technologies. "Microsoft is unrivalled in the education space because it understands schools' needs, and offers the richest products and most cost-efficient licensing models. There are no other vendors that come close," he explains.

Liam selected Microsoft Gold partner, Nviron, to help take his vision to the next stage, ultimately implementing a solution which embraces the very latest IT applications, servers, connectivity, networking and a complete cloud-based communications and telephony system.

Today, West Kirby Grammar School works seamlessly and creatively with Microsoft Office 2013 and other productivity apps provided through Office 365, a cloud-based 'Virtual Learning Environment' powered by SharePoint, personal document storage for all students, staff and teachers in OneDrive for Business, intuitive Windows 8.1 virtual desktops and an integrated telephony, video conferencing and instant messaging solution enabled by Skype for Business. Windows Server 2012 Datacenter edition and SQL Server 2012 provide a flexible and scalable underlying server environment.

For the first time, teachers and students alike have access to the same set of incredible tools, services and capabilities unleashing powerful new ways for them to interact, access materials, submit coursework, give two-way feedback and share ideas. The technology has also opened up enriching new opportunities for communication outside of the school environment by equipping students to build relationships with peers in partner schools all over the world.



"Our outdated, costly IT systems have become a dynamic, collaborative environment. The classroom is no longer a physical barrier and that's creating radical change. We can offer Microsoft Office Pro Plus free to our students on their home devices which has positively affected teaching and learning immeasurably. We couldn't be without these amazing tools now. Microsoft provided us with educational services fit for the 21st Century."

Liam Hayes
IT Strategy Lead
West Kirby Grammar School

For more information, visit:
www.wkgs.org
www.nviron.co.uk





The classroom environment has been transformed; old PCs and laptops have been replaced with amazing interactive TV screens, modern desktop computers and the very latest Windows 8.1 mobile devices. Wireless connectivity across the school site empowers teachers and students to work creatively from any location, removing the physical barriers of the classroom.

"The potential we have from this technology is very exciting," says Liam. "Nviron has given us a completely integrated technology and telephony solution that outshines other schools. The students face no barriers to learning and we are giving them the most dynamic environment possible to do that. Investing at this scale, I had to be sure that I was making the right choice and that it would last for at least 10 years. The new platform has prepared the school and everyone in it for the new technology age and our long term mutual partnership with Nviron will support us along the way."

Benefits & Value for West Kirby Grammar School

Teaching and learning without boundaries

- Powerful Windows 8.1 tablet, with OneDrive for Business integration, bring creative teaching plans to life; students are using SmartSearch to quickly find information across the PC, apps and online and Microsoft Office applications to create and share content individually or in teams
- SharePoint underpins an extensive 'Virtual Learning Environment' used by staff and students to post documents, videos, blogs, learning materials and coursework, as well as provide valuable two-way feedback on classes
- Students benefit from individual secure, cloud-based document storage environments in OneDrive for Business from which they can store and access work, as well as manage teacher access for fast coursework submission
- 'Single sign-on' through Active Directory Federated Services, coupled with wireless connectivity across the school site, ensures users enjoy fast access to all applications and tools from any device without having to enter login information multiple times
- Windows 8.1 devices are breathing new life into practical subjects, enabling the students to research topics, create videos and 'show and tell' content outside of the classroom to support teaching topics
- Modern Office 2013 applications including Word, PowerPoint and Excel are used extensively by teachers and students alike for preparation and delivery of all class work
- Teachers no longer need to be onsite to work efficiently; cloud-based email and communications tools like Skype for Business enable them to work effectively from other locations in term-time and holidays

Unparalleled communication

- Office 365, SharePoint and Skype for Business provide everyone with integrated tools to interact and communicate in exciting new ways
- Skype for Business has transformed communication between students and teachers giving them the ability to send instant messages, speak and have video conferences at any time from school-owned or personal devices; this is directly impacting student engagement, support and results
- The new communications platform supports the students to have real-time two-way conversations with other students from partner schools in India and China for the first time, using video conferencing and screen sharing to interact, immerse themselves in the other cultures and broaden their learning experiences.

"We can engage students in ways that weren't possible before – we're no longer limited to the four walls of the classroom. Lessons are more dynamic and interactive."

"Skype for Business is the jewel in our crown, giving us Voice, IM and desktop sharing. We can interact with each other and other schools on opposite sides of the globe as easily as if they were down the road. That makes the world a much smaller place for our students."

"We're without doubt more efficient in many ways and the new environment allows us to really maximise benefit by giving us cutting edge tools at a dramatically reduced cost."





Greater cost and resource efficiency

- New virtual desktops delivered by Hyper V and Windows Server 2012 have reduced the number of physical PC's required, saving vital budget and energy costs
- Telephony services provided by Skype for Business have replaced the ageing, costly PABX device, dramatically reducing call costs and historic maintenance time
- By consolidating disparate systems and software vendors into one modern platform, West Kirby Grammar School benefit from a single predictable annual IT cost which can be more effectively planned and budgeted
- Microsoft's advantageous licensing for schools has enabled West Kirby Grammar school to benefit from a range of tools that would have been otherwise cost-prohibitive. They have saved over £10,000 alone on the costs of provisioning Office 2013 to 1200 students and 150 members of staff.

Simplified, reliable systems

- Upgrading Windows Server 2003 to Microsoft Windows Server 2012 gives West Kirby Grammar School a reliable and flexible server template to roll out new desktops on demand and deliver a seamless, integrated IT service
- Microsoft Server 2012 HyperV delivers hi-performance applications like AUTOCAD to study groups via virtual desktops, providing vital topic-specific capability without causing strain on other parts of the infrastructure
- Simple management interfaces in Windows Server 2012 and Office 365, coupled with remote access capabilities, makes everyday management tasks quick and effortless to complete from any location; giving the IT team time back to focus on development of services
- SQL Server 2012 extends the server environment, integrating legacy line of business applications like SIMS (School Information Management System) for greater teacher efficiency and productivity
- Windows Server 2012 and Office 365 provide the school with the reassurance of cloud-based data security, reducing the need for onsite manual back-up and providing an extra layer of business continuity protection should a disaster happen

Future growth assured

- West Kirby Grammar School now enjoys a reliable, integrated and cost-efficient platform to develop and grow in the future, in line with the schools own development
- Scalability is unlimited; new users can be provisioned quickly through Office 365 user-based services and HyperV virtual server creation supports fast addition of virtual desktops
- By investing in Microsoft technologies with a future-proof road-map, Liam has the reassurance that he can continue to consolidate systems, add new functionality and further embrace the power of the cloud as technology continues to evolve over the coming years
- Demonstrating investment in technology and empowerment of students is a vital ingredient for maintaining the school's OFSTED 'Outstanding' status, as well as attracting new pupils and additional funding

Liam's Favourite Features: Mobility Efficiency Collaboration

"Saving to OneDrive from Office is a brilliant feature which makes working on the go and team collaboration so simple. Proofing and Synonyms from a 'right click' within Word and PowerPoint is a very handy tool. Video conferencing, desktop sharing and 'whiteboarding' in Skype for Business brings team work into the 21st century."

"The service we're providing is noticeably more reliable – our ideal is to have IT forgotten about and that's happening more and more. We've no worry about systems going down, losing data or having a security breach. All the historic niggles have gone away."

"Looking ahead, our focus will be on continuity, mobility and adaptability. We have an IT toolset and platform that has a future, a platform that we can build on and develop. The school is a more diverse and dynamic place as a result."

