

Case study

St Dominic's Priory College scores cost effective teaching goals



St Dominic's educational IT goals met by HP Thin Client solution

Industry

Education

Objective

To create a flexible and robust IT environment to support the teaching and learning needs of the school's teachers and its highly mobile students

Approach

Identified, scoped and designed the concept blueprint and tested it against solutions offered by four major IT vendors

IT matters

- Delivered a flexible mobile platform allowing students access to updated apps and data
- Enabled ease of centralised control to ensure configuration could not be accidentally or deliberately altered by students
- Slashed the time taken by the IT department to deploy new devices from two hours to just 10 minutes
- Allowed the deployment of 200 additional devices to the environment using existing IT resources

Business matters

- Boosted the delivery of the school's core curriculum in support of the teaching and learning environment
- Delivered a more cost effective solution working within the school's budget parameters
- Ensured productivity gains to allow extension of thin client mobile solution to greater number of school years
- Satisfied the parents' demand for 1:1 computing by thin client replacement of laptops and cut the cost to parents by 40 per cent



“Our approach was to investigate, architect and build an IT solution flexible enough to maintain curriculum excellence standards in delivering a consistent educational experience for our highly mobile student users. It had to be secure and safe while easy to centrally manage and meet our budget requirements. The HP Thin Client solution ticked all those boxes.”

– James Trevaskis, IT manager, St Dominic's Priory College

Quick, secure, flexible IT access for highly mobile college students

For more than a century St Dominic's Priory College has delivered curriculum excellence to its students. In 2014 it planned an IT environment to give its highly mobile student base the flexibility to access its central computing resources from school or home. Quick to configure, secure and easily managed, HP provided the secure, cost effective thin client solution.





Challenge

Creating 1:1 student access to modern IT systems

For more than 125 years St Dominic's Priory College has been educating the children and youth of South Australia's capital city, Adelaide. Founded by the Sisters of the Dominican Order, the school philosophy is inspired by the Dominican motto, Veritas - "Truth". Students from Reception to Year 12 are taught to respect the dignity and uniqueness of each person while sharing their gifts responsibly. The school helps promote the family atmosphere it believes gives community building an added chance to succeed and encourage its students to make a difference in the world.

The school embraces the supportive role that education technology can add to the teaching and learning modality. Like so many educational institutions it has seen how the benefits promised by technology can often disappoint with its inability to consistently deliver guaranteed access to a school's core curriculum, and that not all students can gain access to the technology when they need to. This frustration is further compounded when the delivery is unreliable.

Under the direction of IT manager, James Trevaskis, St Dominic's has pursued a culture of investigating, architecting and building its own solutions. Trevaskis notes how education technology continues to evolve and strengthen its usefulness. He explains: "Times have changed in a relatively short time. These days during enrolment, parents make it clear they expect their daughters to have 1:1 access to modern IT systems, not only while attending school but also at home.

"They expect schools to deliver this technology for an affordable price, which becomes even more critical if there are two or three siblings attending the school."

During the 2014 school year, St Dominic's ran a laptop programme for the first time, using a family funded, school managed model. While this model was successful, it was time consuming to manage and was judged too expensive for parents who had a large outlay up front to buy the laptop outright.

Demand for cost effective flexible IT solution

A survey of parents reinforced the need for a more cost effective, flexible IT solution. "They didn't want costly devices which they would be stuck with when their daughters finished school. They also wanted a system that could be centrally managed to ensure safety was guaranteed."

Trevaskis added further criteria as he designed the scope and effectiveness of his 2015 solution. "Importantly the system had to support our tradition of excellence in curriculum. We wanted a world where our teachers could spend their time teaching students and not troubleshooting technology problems."

He summed up the challenge facing St Dominic's this way: "To find a technology that could tick all of those boxes while being easy to manage and scalable from an IT perspective."



He recalls: "When planning for 2015, we applied the lessons we learned in 2014 and pursued a model that could be delivered for a lower cost while improving support response times and reducing the resources required to manage devices.

Trevaskis' design gave students the flexibility to access the school's central computing resources from anywhere via the campus wide wireless network. Students could take the device home and use their home internet to connect back into the school environment and continue to leverage school computing resources.

Solution

Testing the blueprint

St Dominic's tested its blueprint against multiple devices from four major suppliers, before choosing the HP mt41 Mobile Thin Client device integrating with a virtualisation Citrix XenDesktop solution. Trevaskis says that the HP Device Manager software was also an important factor in the decision.

"The ease of the HP Device Manager allows us to quickly build a task sequence that applies a customised configuration to our HP mt41 thin clients. The fact that HP is only an email away to get personalised assistance was comforting; however the HP Device Manager was so easy to use that only minimum assistance has been required."

Trevaskis was impressed with the calibre of support and expertise offered by the HP Thin Client division. "It was obvious that HP had wide ranging knowledge and expertise in what we were trying to achieve. HP readily joined in brainstorming solution sessions with us. This was invaluable."

Significant reduction of support resources

Productivity gains were quickly realised: "As of 2015 we have 1:1 computing from Year 7 to Year 12. Not only did we add another 200 devices to our environment, but we also significantly reduced the effort required to support our environment.

"We have also been able to reduce software deployment times and ensure 100 per cent coverage of deployed applications. We now have the ability to migrate our entire environment to the next version of Office or Windows® seamlessly. For instance, on a Friday all our students could be using Windows 8®, while we build a shadow upgrade to Windows 10®. When they log in on Monday morning every student will be successfully upgraded."

For St Dominic's students, the teaching technology is no longer bound to the classroom. The mobile thin clients allow the repurposing of existing computer rooms to flexible learning spaces. Trevaskis explains: "Fixed desks and computers have been replaced with mobile tables that can be used in endless configurations."

Customer solution at a glance

Hardware

- HP mt41 Thin Client devices

Software

- HP Device Manager

“Using a thin client based model from both school and at home has signaled the death of the USB stick. Our students now save all work directly to the network and rarely have lost files or corrupt work.”

He reflects on the importance of teachers being given the confidence to integrate IT into their lesson preparations. “Our teachers now know that the HP mt41 Thin Clients will guarantee reliable IT access every lesson and can develop their lesson plans with certainty that there will be an improved educational outcome.”

Benefits

Deployment time dramatically slashed

A dramatic productivity gain is being achieved as a result of deploying the HP Device Manager. The time taken to initially deploy each new thin client has been slashed from two hours to just 10 minutes. Trevaskis adds: “This is an easy tool that makes the initial build, deployment and any upgrades very fast indeed and it also allows us to clearly see what is happening on our network at any time. As a result, the network’s uptime is extremely high.”

“I was impressed with the calibre of expertise offered by the HP Thin Client division. It soon became obvious that HP had wide ranging knowledge about what we were trying to achieve. The in-depth support HP offered was based on its global experience in servicing schools and education departments. HP readily joined in brainstorming solution sessions. This was invaluable.”

– James Trevaskis, IT manager, St Dominic's Priory College

He explains that user device support is significantly lower than with traditional domain joined devices. “In the event of a device being damaged as students travel between class or at home, we swap the student’s device out for a spare and the student can immediately return to the class and begin working. In the meantime we can rebuild the device and return it to our pool in less than 20 minutes.”

The productivity benefit is paying off in reducing the school’s IT support burden by allowing St Dominic’s to scale up IT capability without the need to hire additional staff. “Next year we plan to add 90 more devices and plan to do so using existing resources.” He envisages a smooth scalability path towards years 4, 5 and 6 enjoying 1:1 computing.

Parents have seen an immediate tangible benefit from the HP mt41 Mobile Thin Client deployment. The financial cost passed onto families has been reduced by 40 per cent due to HP’s four year support warranty, the more cost effective thin client solution replacing laptops and the yearly rental programme now in place.

Additionally parents enjoy peace of mind that the school computing environment is kept safe. The devices are locked down to stop students being able to modify the devices configuration, whether by design or accident.

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