

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF NETWORK TRANSFORMATION AT A MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

With IT playing an increasingly important role in education, The Priory Learning Trust in South West England needed to upgrade their network to meet growing user demand – and to standardise network performance across their six academies. This was no small ask. With a tight budget and timescale, the project team faced additional pressures of working under covid restrictions. HPE Aruba and Platinum Partner Switchshop collaborated closely with the Trust's IT team to deliver a successful network transformation.

Introduction

In this digital age, the role of IT in education cannot be understated. Not only is it helping managers run their trusts more efficiently, it's also helping educators deliver enhanced learning experiences to students – from face-to-face teaching in the classroom to remote learning in the bedroom. As the AI revolution gains momentum, the role of IT in education will only grow. So too will the need for schools and trusts to embrace the latest network technology. The Priory Learning Trust (TPLT), a Multi-Academy Trust in South West England, the first stage of their digital transformation strategy was to create a cutting-edge network infrastructure across its seven sites. To deliver it, TPLT turned to Aruba Platinum Partner, Switchshop.

"Our vision and strategy is to centralise our IT systems and infrastructure over the next few years to better the outcomes of our students and streamline the experience for staff."

Simon Merrick, Head of IT, The Priory Learning Trust

The Challenge: a need for standardisation, high performance and cost effectiveness

In education, like any other sector, organisations must adapt to thrive. Trusts like The Priory Learning Trust constantly seek to raise standards and improve outcomes for their students. As a multi-academy trust, this has to be achieved in a consistent way across its six academies, seven sites. In addition, today's education centre networks require fast wireless access, storage solutions to cope with heavy user demands and filtering to keep children safe.

The first key challenge of network transformation was therefore to upgrade and standardise local network infrastructures across all sites. To be fit for purpose, the solution would need to be future-proof – providing robust, high-speed wireless and wired network capability – while being scalable, secure, easy-to-manage, and above all, cost effective.

There was also the question of on-time delivery – in the middle of a global pandemic. This would require a flexible approach to project management and a capacity to overcome practical hurdles to deliver training to the Trust’s IT team. All of this against a backdrop of very tight budgets: the solution would have to clearly demonstrate cost-effectiveness.

The Solution: Secure, reliable and mobile-first

Working closely with the Trust’s IT leaders, Switchshop defined a strategy to standardise local network infrastructures across all sites – as part of the first phase of digital transformation at TPLT.

The agreed strategy saw the creation of a 10GB backbone infrastructure at each site, deploying both OM4 fibre and 10GB switches. The solution specified cutting-edge switching technology from HPE Aruba, namely the 5412R chassis loaded with fibre and ethernet modules. This provided the basis for a highly resilient, mobile-first network. The use of 2540 series and 2930F series edge switches brought high-speed, mobile-friendly network coverage to the Trust’s seven sites, in a highly cost-effective way.

“We know the challenges educational trusts face when it comes to delivering high performance and reliable networks on a tight budget. We help them strike a balance to obtain the most important technologies without overspending. One size rarely fits all, so diligent design and understanding the customer requirements is the key to getting it right – ensuring all the while that we can generate savings, whilst delivering significant improvements in network performance and reliability.”

Michael Curry, Director, Switchshop

Vendor choice: Why HPE Aruba and Switchshop?

As the UK’s wired and wireless market leader*, HPE Aruba has a proven track record in delivering secure, high-speed networks in educational settings.

TPLT’s IT team were already familiar with the configuration and maintenance of the HPE Aruba hardware. The high level of standardisation made the project easier to manage and more cost-effective to deliver.

In addition, Switchshop’s engineers are some of the most qualified and experienced in the country, with decades of experience designing, installing and fault finding. The ongoing commitment to providing high quality service desk support – beyond the initial deployment – was a significant factor in vendor choice.

Moreover, the provision of additional training by the network experts at Switchshop proved of great value in upskilling TPLT’s IT team.

*Forrester 2019

The result: high performance, no issues

The entire project was delivered successfully over the summer of 2020. Despite the closure of schools due to the pandemic, Switchshop worked in a covid-secure manner to enable TPLT’s IT team to commission and install equipment in time for the new academic year in September 2020.

The HPE Aruba switches provided a standardised, secure, robust network across all of our academies. At the time of writing, four months after project completion, zero network related issues have been encountered. TPLT’s expectation is for this to continue. This ensures the teaching and learning happening within TPLT’s academies will suffer no or very little impact due to network connectivity issues.

“We chose to work with the team at Switchshop, because they are experts in network transformation in the education space. Their advice and professionalism resulted in an on-time, on-budget project. The results have delivered an always-on secure network for students and teachers across multiple sites”

Simon Merrick, Head of IT, The Priory Learning Trust

The future: empowering teachers, students and the IT team

With a high performance, future-proof network infrastructure, TPLT’s teachers can have the latest resources at their fingertips. In turn, students will receive the best possible experience in the classroom, with lessons delivered straight to their devices. Remote learning and online homework are greatly enhanced – with everything managed and monitored via the single, central network. A combination of high-quality service desk support and

professional training from Switchshop has raised the skill level and productivity of the TPLT's IT team. Scaling to meet future demand will be easy – and cost-effective – thanks to the standardised, modular nature of the HPE Aruba technology.

“This has been a significant investment for our Multi Academy Trust into HPE Aruba technology across our academies, to ensure a secure and reliable environment for our students to learn and progress for the foreseeable future.”

Simon Merrick, Head of IT, The Priory Learning Trust

Further Resources

The Priory Learning Trust – a multi-academy trust

www.theplt.org.uk

Switchshop – IT network specialists, Aruba Platinum Partners

www.switchshop.co.uk

HPE Aruba – enterprise networking and security solutions

www.arubanetworks.com/en-gb