

Paganel Primary School turns to Google Chromebooks to make laptop use in the classroom as simple as picking up a pencil



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Find a replacement for their cumbersome, slow laptops which would help technology to become a tool for learning in a classroom environment

What they did

- Purchased 32 Google Chromebooks

What they accomplished

- Helped children to work more collaboratively and engage in group projects more effectively
 - Made it faster and easier for teachers to introduce technology to an ordinary classroom environment
 - Cut down dedicated IT resources and reduced overall IT spend
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Customer

Paganel Primary School is a thriving, friendly community primary school located in Selly Oak, Birmingham. It offers an inclusive learning environment for all of its 234 pupils. 13 teaching and 18 non-teaching staff lead the school, offering a consistently good education to help Paganel reach its goal of becoming the best primary school in the Birmingham area.

Challenge

One of Paganel's key focuses is to teach children how to work together as a team to achieve something. This differs from traditional thinking that independent learning is the main priority for primary school learners but helps prepare children for the world of work and higher education, where it is becoming increasingly common to work together virtually from any location.

"While many people promote independent learning – which is indeed a highly important skill – we believe that it is just as important for children to learn how to successfully contribute to a team. This is what is expected in today's competitive working environments and is a skill everybody requires to succeed," comments Deputy Head Teacher at Paganel School, Steve Philip.

Using technology to work as a group is a huge part of this, and as a Google certified teacher, Steve Philip is a strong advocate of the benefits of a cloud-based approach to education. Teachers and pupils were already making use of Google Apps for Education, the free online communications and collaboration suite, which includes features such as Gmail, Google Talk, Google Calendar, Google Docs and Google Sites.

To get the most out of Google Apps, Paganel School also encouraged the use of laptops as teaching aids, with a set of laptops available for classroom use. However, it was becoming increasingly evident that these were being underused, mainly due to the time it took to set them up.

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—Steve Philip, Deputy Head Teacher at Paganel School

"With our old laptops, there could be a delay of up to ten minutes just to ensure each one was connected to the wireless network. In a 50 minute lesson this substantially decreased the amount of teaching time so we needed to look at other options," explains Steve.

“Chromebooks reboot within ten seconds, which has made a big difference to teachers’ attitudes to using this technology in the classroom. We’re very keen for technology to be seen as a basic learning tool, rather than a focus in its own right so it needs to be as simple to pick up and use as a pencil. Only with Chromebooks have we been able to move towards this change in attitude.”
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Solution

Steve had heard about Google Chromebooks and their use in schools from a contact in America and decided to investigate the technology. Chromebooks are laptops with no hard drives where nothing is stored on the desktop and all systems and programmes are accessed via the web browser, giving the ability to access information and services within the cloud in a matter of seconds.

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Paganel School purchased a set of 32 Chromebooks last year and allocated them to a class of Year six students aged 10-11. The students have access to them at any time they are needed during the lesson, with other classes borrowing them for specific tasks.

“The convenience of having a device where everything is stored online and can be accessed at lightening speed means teachers can now use them in the classroom whenever the teacher think they could help. The quick set-up time means they don’t disrupt the flow of the lesson. When you consider all the software licenses, server investment and ongoing maintenance costs of running regular laptops, we also anticipate long-term cost savings from the Chromebooks,” adds Steve.

Benefits

The first thing which struck the school about the new devices was the speed of use, which has meant that they are much more widely used in the classroom than previous devices.

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Teachers are now much more confident in using Chromebooks as a gateway to the Google Apps suite and the school has seen a vast array of exciting projects and tasks taking place within this collaborative online learning environment. For instance, one class recently completed a combined biography of Queen Victoria, with each student inputting their contribution into a shared Google Doc to create a joint piece of work.

“Since the introduction of the Chromebooks, we’ve seen some fantastic group projects, which support our belief that we can get the best out of our students when they are allowed to work as a team and share ownership of a project,” explains Steve.

Another key advantage to the Chromebooks for Paganel is their portability. They weigh just over three pounds and easily fit into a backpack, with a battery life of up to eight hours, so students can carry them outside the classroom when needed. This came in useful when Year six students were tasked with acting as roving reporters for the ‘Pag-Olympics’, a fun, educational exercise based on the summer’s sporting festivities.

“During the Pag-Olympics, some of our students were live blogging, undertaking photo reporting and creating podcasts and videos. The mobility of the Chromebooks meant they were ideal for this and the range of ways that

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a free suite of hosted communication and collaboration applications designed for schools and universities. Google Apps includes Google Mail (webmail services), Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Docs (online document, spreadsheet, presentation, and form creation and sharing), Google Video (secure and private video sharing – 10GB free) and Google Sites (team website creation with videos, images, gadgets and documents integration), as well as administrative tools, customer support, and access to APIs to integrate Google Apps with existing IT systems.

For more information visit
www.google.co.uk/a/edu

About Google Chromebooks

With hardware and software optimised for the web, Chromebooks provide the best experience for cloud applications and extend the ease of management and flexibility of the cloud to the PC.

For more information visit
<http://www.google.co.uk/chromebook/features-try.html#features>

the pupils found to use them astounded the teachers. It really showed just how far the children have come with their grasp of technology," says Steve.

Using Google Apps and Chromebooks in the classroom has also helped improve communication between pupils and teachers, particularly through the use of the instant messaging feature in Google Apps, Google Talk. Steve recalls that this particularly impressed the Ofsted inspector: "I was teaching a lesson where students were using Chromebooks and had to concentrate on one particular student at my desk. While I was doing that, I was able to respond to questions from other pupils through Google Talk. This meant I could give in-depth support to one particular pupil, yet still make sure the others progressed. The Ofsted inspector saw it as an outstanding use of technology."

Storing everything online and giving teachers access to the Chromebooks has also substantially decreased the school's need for internal IT resources and the associated costs. Teachers now store their documents in Google Apps and access them on the Chromebooks at school and from their own computers at home, without the need for external USB ports. This has considerably cut down virus infections and meant that they now only require a technician on-site twice a month, as opposed to once a week.

Finally, Steve believes that the anonymity of Chromebooks, which aren't heavily branded and do not carry the associations of apps and games which many other tablet and laptops have, also helps them to be seen by student as a learning tool rather than a distraction. "It is important to us that students know that when the Chromebooks come out there is work to be done. As none of them have Chromebooks at home they've never seen them outside of a learning environment. This, combined with their speed, ease of use and compatibility with Google Apps, makes them the perfect option for schools which want to ensure their students are well prepared for the collaborative, online environments which are becoming increasingly relevant in higher education and the workplace. The success that we've seen from using Chromebooks in the classroom means this approach is really working," concludes Steve.

