Google for Education

David Ross Education Trust chooses Chromebooks and multi-platform tools to raise student engagement and teacher creativity

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David Ross Education Trust
Broadening Horizons

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
- Rapidly improve student and teacher engagement in new academies
- Allow academies to choose their own software for teaching and productivity
- Eliminate isolated technology rooms, and instead bring technology to classrooms

What they did
- Added Chromebooks and G Suite to classrooms so students can share work with their peers
- Chose a multi-platform approach for greater flexibility
- Added a variety of web software resources to each school's Chromebook homepage

What they accomplished
- Teachers develop creative ideas for increasing student involvement in their lessons — such as encouraging students to comment on each other's work
- Individual academies have the freedom to select technology resources that work best for their students and teachers
- IT staff manage far fewer support tickets for Chromebooks compared to Windows devices
- Schools can adopt classrooms and other spaces for other uses, since they're no longer needed for computer labs
- Schools can make significant changes in technology without high cost, or intense project management and technical support

Background
The **David Ross Education Trust** (DRET) manages 33 primary and secondary academies across the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside and the East of England. As a firm believer in every child's right to an outstanding education, DRET's mission is to support each of its 12,000 students to achieve a high standard of academics.

Challenge
As schools join DRET, expectations are high for rapid transformation of learning standards and processes. "When you have a change in status for schools, people expect to see momentum," says Guy Shearer, DRET's Head of IT, noting that the trust has been in a period of rapid growth. "We were on a mission to improve our schools as fast as we could." In many cases, arriving schools suffered from poor IT infrastructure, including computer labs with outdated equipment that tended to isolate teachers and students.

The problem was particularly noticeable in DRET's 23 primary schools. "We knew that children probably had access to technology at home, but no real way to link that technology to what students were doing in the classroom," Shearer says. "We wanted to make it possible for students to take their learning home."

"All of the feedback from teachers and students on Chromebooks is incredibly positive."
— Guy Shearer, Head of IT, David Ross Education Trust

Complicating the challenge of improving access to technology was that each school's teachers and administrators had different preferences for software solutions, which would inevitably change over time. "We want teachers to use what works well in their schools," Shearer explains. The trust didn't want to dictate choices about technology or teaching philosophy, so Shearer had to choose devices that were flexible enough to allow for different classroom approaches.

Solution

To bring about fast transformation yet also allow schools the independence to choose their own tools, Shearer needed devices that would work across platforms. Some schools used G Suite, while others used Microsoft Office 365. Any device chosen by Shearer and his colleagues had to be flexible enough to support both platforms. In 2013, Shearer began testing Chromebooks in DRET primary schools. C-Learning, a Google for Education partner, helped DRET with initial teacher training for Chromebooks.

For schools using G Suite, the adoption of Chromebooks was simple: Students logged in with their G Suite account and accessed all of their usual assignments. For schools using Office 365, DRET created a custom kiosk for the Chromebooks. To access Office 365, students use a single sign-on platform and are then authenticated to use resources like Office 365.

"For us this has meant a massive simplification of our hardware deployment efforts," Shearer says. "We know that as long as any tool or online resource works in a browser, then it will work for every student. Whether students are in school with their Chromebooks or at home with their own devices, what they see in the browser is the same."

To help strengthen adoption of Chromebooks, Shearer identified specific classes in the school where teachers could absorb the full impact of a device in every student's hands. "It's really easy to superficially allow people to try technology for a few hours – but we needed to let people try it long enough so that they could work out the issues and prove it works." Shearer says. Inevitably, once teachers tested out the Chromebooks, they'd say, "Can I have 20 Chromebooks for my class, please?"

Soon, word spread quickly that students were more engaged and improving their performance with Chromebooks and that teachers were coming up with inspired ideas for using Chromebooks, G Suite and other applications.

"Early on, we had one student who was a reluctant writer," Shearer says. "With a Chromebook and G Suite, he realised he could write stories and share them with his friends in the class. Writing for his teacher didn't motivate him, but writing for his classmates did."

John Murdin, a now-retired deputy head and year 6 teacher at DRET's Eastfield Academy, found that the sharing capabilities of G Suite, Google Classroom and Chromebooks enabled greater collaboration. For example, Murdin asked several students to take on different roles to jointly develop a written assignment. One student wrote the rough draft; another edited to add more creative language, and a third served as "grammar guru," double-checking for grammatical errors.

About G Suite for Education

G Suite 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 60 million students, faculty, and staff in schools around the world have gone Google with G Suite 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 £159 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

"This was exactly what we were looking for," Shearer says. "Students would read what other students wrote, then they'd go back to the project and work some more. It made students pause and reflect on their work."

Benefits

Chromebooks help DRET meet the trust's goal of allowing schools to choose which software works best for their staff and teachers. The Chrome operating system provides access to G Suite, Office 365, and other teaching and productivity tips on the Chromebook home page – customized for each school.

"We decided not to adopt a single platform – we don't want to tell schools which products they have to use," Shearer says. "Every school can discover and use their own web-based tools." All 12,000 DRET users were added to a directory management system, so students, teachers, and administrative staff only need a single login to access their homepage with all of their applications. For example, DRET's Malcolm Arnold Academy relies on applications using the Windows operating system, via Chromebooks running Citrix.

Chromebooks bring a number of benefits for IT staff at DRET, too. In addition to being less costly than competing devices, Chromebooks are easier to set up, so they were quickly deployed at scale. They also help reduce the workload for Shearer and his DRET IT colleagues. For example, staff manage 50 times fewer support tickets for Chromebooks compared to Windows devices. The staff also doesn't have to spend time testing accessibility of apps and online resources across platforms. "Putting things out on the web is so rapid now," Shearer says. "Deploying applications is easier, so it takes less time to bring services to all students and teachers."

Today, DRET's schools are using thousands of Chromebooks in classrooms. "All of the feedback from teachers and students on Chromebooks is incredibly positive," Shearer says. To increase engagement by staff, schools invited students from the pilot groups to lead training for their teachers. "A student talking to a teacher and explaining how he wants to be taught – that's powerful," Shearer says.

The adoption of Chromebooks, and teachers' willingness to test new ways of engaging with students, are evidence that DRET's changes are working. "You can lead people in a certain direction, but if they're not happy about where you're taking them, they won't go," Shearer says. "The good thing is that teachers are not perceiving that the change to Chromebooks is the end of something – but more like the beginning."

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