



Brittons Academy ahead of the technology curve, with help from D-Link



"We have been working with The Brittons Academy for several years, supporting them with a range of hardware and software supplies as well as ongoing support infrastructure. Brittons embraced mobile learning early on and we were thrilled to be working with them and D-Link to ensure a successful overall implementation."

— Steve Bonnic, Toucan Computing

Background

The Brittons Academy in Rainham, Essex, is a pioneering secondary school, driven by the vision of Principal, Robert Sheffield and Vice Principle, Richard Ayre. The ethos of the school, which became an Academy in 2011 in association with The Coopers' and Coburn School, Upminster, is to give pupils the right balance of inspired learning, whilst engaging them with real world experiences to help them prepare for their future working lives. Pupils are encouraged to get fully involved in all aspects of school life including contributing when the school is bidding for funding, getting involved in planning new developments and mentoring younger pupils at both Brittons and other local schools.

In order to maintain the balancing act of keeping the children entertained but still focused on learning, the school explored how to best make use of the latest technology. Following a discussion at BETT on the subject of pupils using their own devices at school, Brittons decided to look into the possibility of how it could work for them. The school was aware that the equipment students had at home was as advanced, if not more so, than the equipment at school, and that the children were streets ahead in their ability to use technology. The school also recognised that by harnessing technology in the right way it could really get the most out of its pupils.

To progress this idea, a working group of staff and pupils was put together to develop a protocol to ensure the proper use of mobile devices in the classroom, which both parents and pupils sign to ensure they understand that it is at their own risk if they bring kit into school and that any equipment that is misused will be confiscated. Like most schools, The Brittons Academy had experienced problems with pupils misusing devices in class and a ban had previously been put in place. These sanctions are

still in place if protocols are ignored but pupils can now use devices in class to enhance learning. The concern of both offline and online bullying has also been dealt with, with older pupils acting as mentors for younger members of the school community.

However, the school didn't just require a usage protocol in order to realise its vision as a school of the future. It also realised that its connectivity would underpin its technology vision and the learning experience for 1000 pupils and 200 staff.

Solution

The school approached current supplier, Toucan Computing, to find the best solution to its connectivity challenge. Toucan Computing then consulted D-Link for its expertise on networking, and worked with the D-Link team to implement a solution. "We explained our issues to them," said Richard Ayre, Vice Principal of Brittons, "and they understood them immediately. They listened to our requirements and came up with three solutions that they believed could work."

Out of the three solutions, the school chose the products with the highest specification in order to future proof its investment for the next 10 years. High quality, high-availability, chassis-based multi-layer DGS-6600 D-Link switches enable the school to be reliably and securely covered with a wireless system that is robust enough to host 1000 pupils at any one time.

The solution provides 10 Gigabit connectivity across the school grounds and is fully redundant, enabling the WiFi network to continue to work even if the equipment suffers from fan or power supply failures. Additionally it is set up to handle VOIP, a captive portal page is available to enable guests and pupils alike to securely access the WiFi, there is the possibility of adding IP security cameras at the school in the future and it also provides the ability to fully upgrade the technology.



THE BRITTONS ACADEMY



"I'm so pleased with the professional approach of D-Link and Toucan Computing to the project. The team understood the difference between an educational establishment and a business, listened to our requirements and delivered the best products for our needs, rather than just selling us an out of the box solution."

— Richard Ayre, Vice Principle



DGS-6600

Benefit

Richard Ayre added, "We wanted our pupils to maximise their learning experience by being able to access any information they want, no matter where in the school they are. Thanks to our new WiFi and BYOD policy we are achieving this. Previously, the school only had a few areas with WiFi access but since we've installed the new system pupils no longer have to fight for the limited space available in the library – they can study anywhere."

To maximise this new connectivity the school has also enabled pupils to access their homework online, cutting down on the amount of paper it uses. The school is also in the process of gathering email addresses for all parents so that it can communicate with them directly. Students will soon be able to email staff directly to send them their work, or ask them any questions they have, so that they will always feel that help is at hand. These activities, on top of the new connectivity across the school, are improving communications between all of the stakeholders involved in school life.

As well as the benefit to its pupils, Brittons has also become the first D-Link Centre of Excellence, showcasing to other schools how it is using technology to maximum effect, and helping the local community to develop its IT skills. D-Link works with schools and academies to create Centres of Excellence where they can train school leavers and members of the local community in IT. It has hosted an Open Day to demonstrate to other local schools how mobile learning can work to the benefit, not

the detriment, of pupils and staff. Richard adds, "As we're one of the first secondary schools to embrace this technology we are really pleased that we can help other schools in the area to implement similar systems. The Open Day demonstrated how we're working here and D-Link has come in to train technicians from other schools in the same way that they trained ours."

Andrew Mullholland, UK Sales and Marketing Manager, visited Brittons Academy and comments, "Brittons is one of the most inspirational school I have visited. I was so impressed by the way that the pupils are treated like adults and was astounded with how professional their behaviour was at the Open Day and the buzz created around the school. The fact that D-Link was able to provide equipment to benefit the pupils and staff is a real privilege. I'm pleased to have them as our first Centre of Excellence to showcase what can be done in schools to produce exceptional results, not only academically but to aid the personal development of the pupils."