Gowerton School uses Google Apps for Education to transform learning

Background

Gowerton School is a secondary and sixth form school. It has 1,135 pupils aged 11-18, and is located in Gowerton village, near Swansea in Wales.

Challenge

In 2006, Darren Long, Gowerton's Teacher of ICT and ICT coordinator, had become disillusioned with the time it took to maintain the school's existing email system. "I needed to re-license our Exchange server and really didn't want to invest in a new server and licenses that I had to spend a vast amount of time looking after. I read an article on hosted systems and saw a way to free up my time for more valuable projects, such as how to transform the learning experience using technology," he says.

Solution

After looking at the hosted options available, Long chose to replace the school's existing Exchange server with Google's cloud-based email solution, Gmail For Your Domain (now part of Google Apps for Education).

"I knew that Google would provide a better service than I could, so I set up all of our staff on Gmail," says Long. "I wanted to make sure they were comfortable with the new system before I rolled it out to the students. It really appealed because it gave them the ability to access email on any computer, wherever they were. It also meant an end to expensive software licenses and time-consuming server maintenance."

Gowerton's staff were impressed with Gmail and it soon became indispensable. Long then confidently rolled it out to students, who used it enthusiastically from the the start.

"A lot of the time you go to an ICT lab and find that it's all about the technology when it should be about the teaching. Chromebooks take away this barrier, they are just another tool in the pencil case. This means teachers can concentrate on what they do best – teaching."
—Darren Long, Gowerton's Teacher of ICT and ICT coordinator

Google soon added further functionality to the tools it provided for education providers, in the form of Google Apps for Education; an online suite of communication and collaboration tools which includes Gmail, Calendar, Hangouts, Drive, Sites and Docs.

"Teachers soon began to appreciate the breadth of opportunities for collaborative content creation and accessibility that Google Apps for Education brings," comments Long.

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
• Stop spending time and money on expensive server and license maintenance

What they did
• Replaced their Exchange server with Gmail and embraced Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks

What they accomplished
• Freed up the IT department's time to create collaborative learning opportunities for pupils
• Used Chromebooks to engage pupils in learning
• Achieved higher attainment levels because students are more engaged and enthusiastic about their work

Benefits

Collaborative learning is one of the biggest benefits Google Apps for Education has brought to Gowerton. The entire curriculum – from Geography to Science – is now being taught using the service.

"Previously students and teachers sent assignments back and forth on email," explains Long. "With Google Docs, they can work in the same document at the same time, wherever they are, making group projects much easier and allowing teachers to help to shape it as it progresses, rather than just give a mark at the end of the process and move on. It's a much better learning experience, and has led to higher attainment levels. By working more collaboratively with students, we've seen a real improvement in their grades."

Both students and teachers have quickly adopted the full range of tools available within Apps. For one project, students created questionnaires using Google Forms, analysed the data using Google Sheets, collaborated on the findings in Google Docs and presented the results using Google Presentations.

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By using Google Apps for Education, Gowerton has also been able to cut costs significantly. It has saved at least £30,000 in licensing and server maintenance costs.

This has enabled it to invest money into buying computers for teachers and students to use in and out of the classroom, including 70 Google Chromebooks. The devices offer an affordable way for students to learn through the web, providing simple, quick access to all the features within Google Apps.

About Google Apps for Education

Over 30 million students, faculty, and staff use Google Apps for Education worldwide. Google Apps is a free suite of hosted email and collaboration applications exclusively for schools and universities. You can learn more and sign up to try it out by visiting our website:

www.google.co.uk/a/edu

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are fast, portable computers that give students access to the web's rich educational tools & resources. Educators can manage Chromebooks easily from their web-based Admin Console. And starting at just £199 per device including Google Apps for Education for free, these computers make technology affordable for schools. You can learn more here:

www.google.co.uk/intl/en/chrome/ education/devices/

"We're very keen to deploy more Chromebooks," says Long. "Students love them because they are intuitive to use and give them instant access to Google Apps. They're also great from an administrative point of view. We experimented with laptops for a while, but found they were too expensive and high-maintenance. With the Chromebooks, we don't need to worry about maintenance, updates are automatic and they are good value. They're also really flexible. We're limited on space so don't want to have to put more ICT rooms in. We can wheel the Chromebooks between classrooms – they're light, portable and the battery-life is great.

"A lot of the time you go to an ICT lab and find that it's all about the technology when it should be about the teaching. Chromebooks take away this barrier, they are just another tool in the pencil case. This means teachers can concentrate on what they do best – teaching," he continues.

As all information is stored in the cloud, there is no issue with sharing the Chromebooks amongst students. Users, apps and policies can also be centrally managed from a web-based management console, across the whole fleet of devices.

"ICT isn't a barrier any more. We don't need to worry about policy and software updates. It's an enabler, and the importance has shifted back to the curriculum rather than technology. We've found that by making use of the technology available to them, students are more engaged with the curriculum and more enthusiastic about their work," says Long.

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