



Berkhamsted School

Berkhamsted School is a family of leading independent schools based in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire that offers high quality education and care to over two thousand boys and girls aged 5 months to 18 years.

With a rich heritage spanning over four hundred and seventy five years, the school prides itself on helping to empower its pupils and alumni to not just earn a living, but enjoy a life worth living. As part of this commitment, the school is forever evolving its provision and curriculum to accommodate the changing nature of society.

As part of this drive, Director of IT Prad Samtani set about evaluating the role of personal learning devices within the school:

“As one of the country’s leading independent schools, Berkhamsted have always been proudly at the forefront of technology.

“That said, technology evolves at such a great pace, we decided to move away from our old setup of, IT suites, iPads, laptops and charging trolleys to a 1:1 device strategy.”

Such a decision was not taken lightly. BYOD as a phenomenon had already been around for a couple of years, and Prad was keen to carefully research and evaluate all of the options open to them.

He explains: "As I spent a lot of time visiting other schools, I could easily build up a picture of what was working and what wasn't.

"From my research, BYOD in the classic sense of bringing in pupil-owned devices from school didn't work. On my travels I witnessed major issues with security and consistency across operating system versions, application versions and variance in the deployment of software. Hence, we decided school-issued 1:1 devices would be the optimum way forward for Berkhamsted.

"We then assessed whether to offer parents and pupils a choice of devices from an approved list. When we then considered how different seemingly similar laptops might actually be after 12 months of use with regards to battery life and performance, we very quickly moved away from that model and decided on a standardised approach across the school.

"We had a strong vision that all pupils should benefit from a world-class standards-based approach to personal devices across the school."

The right platform

With a clear route forward on device provision, attention turned to the type of device. Historically a Google school, Berkhamsted had recently migrated to Office 365.

Prad comments: "Our move to Microsoft has been a fantastic step forward for Berkhamsted. The Microsoft range of applications are enterprise class and will set our children up for the world of work or university.

"They'll leave Berkhamsted having either done GCSEs or A Levels and will be completely comfortable and confident with the Office 365 suite of products, which is undoubtedly the elite workplace standard. They save everything to OneDrive and have developed an intricate working knowledge of cloud storage which will definitely stand them in good stead for the future - whatever they choose to do."



The right device

With the bar set high in terms of productivity software and cloud collaboration, the device choice had to be right. Again, Prad was not prepared to compromise when it came to quality - looking to bring in products that could blend features designed for teaching and learning with a seamless transition into university or the workplace:

“Again we went and visited other schools and assessed dozens of devices from many different vendors. As you might expect, there is a huge variance in the quality, performance and suitability for educational use.

“For us, the Microsoft Surface range of products stands head and shoulders above the competition.

“A major factor is inking. The Surface Pen is a wonderful piece of technology, and for a 3-in-1 device like the Surface, it makes complete educational sense to support handwriting as part of developing rounded skills in our young people.”

“Their range starts with the Surface Go products, which are an ideal lightweight device for the needs of our Year 7 and Year 8 pupils. It is then an easy transition for Year 9 pupils to a Surface Pro device, which offers the powerful processing and performance they need to meet more intensive curriculum demands that befit the latter years of school life.”

Accelerating impact

With the product roadmap complete, Berkhamsted motored on with their deployment. They made a decision to accelerate the impact of the project by fast tracking deployment across the school - opting for a two year rollout rather than the often-favoured seven year (a single cohort per year) deployment.

Prad explains: “As with most senior schools, all of our colleagues teach multiple year groups. In terms of embedding the devices within the pedagogy of the school, and being able to use them in all curriculum areas when appropriate, we wanted to make sure we could get devices in the hands of as many pupils as possible.

“Hence, we decided that in the first year we would deploy to four year groups (7, 9, 10 and 12) and in the second year to the other three.”



A smooth operation

The only remaining elements to iron out were firstly how to facilitate school-provided devices in a way that meant pupils felt a sense of ownership, and that were fully covered by a comprehensive combination of support and warranty provision.

Secondly, they needed to consider the logistics. Such an undertaking would be no mean feat. Deploying a new programme to several hundred students in one fell swoop was not a decision that was taken lightly.

Fortunately the school had called upon Freedom Tech to provide end to end support as part of their Tech 4 Learners programme.

Prad says: "Because of the two year rollout schedule, we needed a complex combination of lease durations and agreements.

"We engaged with a few different lease providers, who quickly fell by the wayside. Freedom Tech had a clear understanding of the education sector that others didn't. There was also an additional layer of flexibility that was unique to them.

"The fact that Freedom Tech can offer device maintenance and repairs as part of the lease is one of the major reasons that we chose Freedom Tech. We didn't have to contract with a support company separately. None of which compromised the commercial terms either - Freedom Tech were competitive in their pricing."

To drive a sense of ownership of the devices, they were part-funded by parents - included as a mandatory extra in the fee structure within the school - with the school contributing the majority as part of their commitment to school excellence.

All devices include Windows, Office 365 licensing, URL filtering, security and safeguarding software that's keeping them protected both on campus and at home. Additionally, pupils benefit from a full package of warranty and support to protect against malfunction, accidental damage and theft.

Prad explains: "The way we like to think about it is a parent is paying for the right for their child to be issued with a device. If there's an issue, we sort it for them - whether it's general day to day support, a warranty fix or a maintenance repair, Berkhamsted will provide a complete end to end service.

"With Freedom Tech, the support claim process is simple and straightforward for both our IT team processing the claim and the pupil. It's all designed to make life hassle-free for everyone involved."



Teaching and learning

A few months into their 1:1 digital device programme and the school has made huge strides in terms of impact.

“Over 70% of teachers are now using OneNote Class Notebook. Our device rollout combined with best-in-class Microsoft classroom tools have completely transformed the way our pupils learn and interact. There will almost certainly come a point where pupils will be demanding teachers to use them in every lesson. We want to provide the top-down support to our teaching faculty, but love to see the enterprising nature of our pupils too,” comments Prad.

He expands: “When it comes to school visits, the whole process has gone full circle. In the same way we visited dozens of schools when we were considering what personalised learning looks like for us, we are now one of the schools that other schools are visiting to look at 1:1 provision.”

The rollout

With a plan in place, it was time to action it. Berkhamsted were extremely keen to make the process of device collection across the four year groups as seamless as possible and ensure that all pupils had a device before the first day of term.

To this end, pupils were asked to come in and attend an onboarding session where pupils could learn how to setup and use the device in a classroom training environment, ensuring that they have the necessary skills to get them going from day one.

Prad explains “We considered the fact that our pupils have largely grown up with technology in their homes, but that technology nowadays can come in many different form factors and operating systems. We did have some pupils who had never used a Windows device before, so we wanted to make certain they were comfortable with how to use email, how to check their school calendar, how to use OneNote Class Notebook and access the learning platform.”

The future

With year one of the two-year rollout completed, attention is now turning to the future.

Freedom Tech have worked options into the lease agreements to allow those leaving the school at the end of year 13 to make a small end-of-term payment. This option allows these pupils to take ownership of the device and use it for their continuing studies at university, or in their day-to-day lives.

With an estimated 550 devices being distributed each year, Prad is excited about where they go next.

“I am excited to see the ongoing impact of what we’re doing at Berkhamsted on the outcomes for our pupils.”



Why Freedom Tech

Whatever the future may hold for Prad and the 1:1 device programme, he is confident of one thing:

"No doubt we will be using Freedom Tech as a strategic partner for many years to come.

"Freedom Tech came to visit on a number of occasions. They took the time to understand our needs, what we were trying to achieve and our unique processes.

"They have put in place a flexible and efficient programme, and frankly without their help we may never have been able to run it in the way we run it now.

"Unlike other educational device providers and lease providers, they don't just 'box-shift' or concentrate on getting contracts signed. They focus on the intricate details of facilitating a world-class 1:1 device programme that is bespoke to the needs of our school.

"They have come in and provided an end-to-end service that was speedy, but smooth from initial engagement, all the way through to warranty and maintenance claims.

"Fortunately for us, we chose a single trusted partner who has been there for us every step of the way."