Ribblesdale High School

Ribblesdale High School is a 1200 pupil school in Clitheroe, Lancashire. As a community focused school, they take pride in providing a challenging but nurturing environment for young people; with a particular focus on equipping them with the skills, knowledge and resilience to be successful in adult life in the 21st Century.

It's this laserlike focus on doing what's right for their pupils that led them to begin their journey towards a personalised device programme 6 years ago. Paul Edge, Deputy Head Teacher at Ribblesdale High School explains:

"We started with a desire to go down the 1:1 route. We began to evaluate best practice by looking at what was out there, and what other schools were doing in our region.

"Many of the schools we spoke to had jumped on both feet to giving out popular consumer tablets to their pupils.

"This didn't make sense to us. We had Microsoft based back-end systems, and when we actually spoke with our teaching faculty about their ideas we found that their requirements would not be met by just going with the common tablet choice.

"There was the strong feeling that the type of content creation that KS4 pupils are doing really needed the unique capabilities that Microsoft Windows offers."

With a clearer picture emerging of what type of 1:1 programme they wanted to run, Ribblesdale made a couple of pragmatic and sensible decisions.

Firstly, to build a successful programme they recognised the need for a solid technology foundation. Hence, the school invested continuously over a few years in the right infrastructure and support tools. They wanted to make sure that the school network was robust, and that the right blend of management, collaboration and productivity software was in place across the school.

Secondly, they realised that a journey to 1:1 student success began with 1:1 teacher success.

"Ultimately, our staff are the cornerstone of our school. We had a core belief that a 1:1 device programme would help to engage young people in the classroom in ways we had not seen before. It was crucial for us to help our teaching staff to develop a rich understanding of the power of Microsoft for Education, so we rolled out new Windows devices to all teaching staff." Paul says

With teachers, the senior leadership team, and school governors on board - the school was ready to begin engaging with parents.

Engaging their parents

Ribblesdale is a larger than average school. With a typical year-group approaching 300 pupils, the school made a decision to make 1:1 learning devices available to Year 7 pupils on a rolling parental donation programme. If they could get strong levels of uptake, this would put them on a path towards a 1:1 pupil-to-device ratio within 5 years.

As Paul explains, staff within the school went to great lengths to engage with parents about their intentions:

"We knew the first year would be the hardest year. So we made sure we dedicated a slot on the Year 6 parents evening agenda to talking about our 1:1 device programme. We let them know this was something we were very likely to do when their child attends our school.

"We concentrated on clearly communicating the benefits, our hypothesis on what it would do to teaching and learning in our school and even how we were going to mitigate the potential risks. It was a 25 minute formal presentation and then two and a half hours of fielding questions on the stage."

Once the first ordering window opened, it was clear all of the preparatory work had paid off. Straight off the bat, the school got an uptake of over 80% of parents/guardians electing to take a device for their child.

Moving things forward

As anticipated the school learned a lot from its first roll out. Part of the improvements made for subsequent years has been a change of partners. Ribblesdale has been working with BT Business Direct and 1:1 programme specialists Freedom Tech now for over two years. After trialling different device manufacturers, Ribblesdale is now proudly an HP partner school too. Paul expands:

"After playing the market a little during the early days of our programme, one learning for us as a school is that it pays in the long run to build a strategic relationship with a single manufacturer. We've found that having a stable, trusted OEM gives us the stability and support we need to manage thousands of concurrent devices across our school.

"HP have given us a lot of support in terms of suitability of device choice, helping us select the incredible HP x360 G1 EE convertible notebook. Their generous trade-in scheme also meant that we were able to significantly offset the cost of our shiny new 1:1 devices by trading in some old tech."

With 1:1 devices, schools must consider not only the requirements for effective classroom use but also what functionality would be required in the home.

Paul adds: "We needed a touchscreen device, with two cameras, that also comes with a stylus option. For us, the stylus is crucial as it helps to cement the work our young people do offline too by blending handwriting with digital experience. All this needs to be achieved by making sure our programme is great value for money for parents too, so we demand an aggressive match between value for money and quality."

Just another tool

Now in their third year of running a 1:1 programme, with the majority of pupils in the school now having anytime, anywhere digital access via a personalised device, the school is proudly no closer to becoming a paperless school.

Paul says: "You only have to take a good look around our school to see, it's not all flashing lights and technology. We must operate a blended learning approach to do right by our young people and their respective futures.
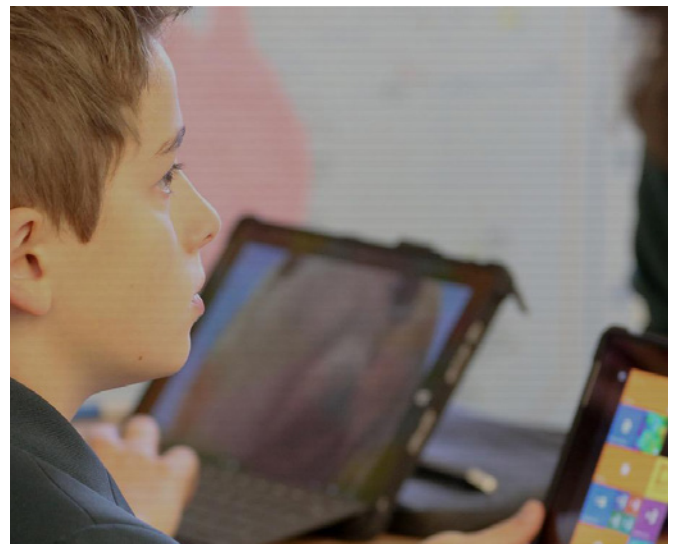
"We've been very honest with all our communities: the devices are used when they add value. They are another teaching and learning tool that teachers have to use when the time is right, whether that's to save some time or to take the lesson in an exciting new direction. Often it's about engaging students in a subject in a non-linear or creative way."

"We then created Teams sites for all classes within the school. Initially our teaching faculty were a little apprehensive to provide online discussion threads to their classes as they were fearful it was going to be misused.

"We overcame this by challenging our teachers to think creatively about how such functionality could be used through a curriculum lens and how it might empower all students to find their voice through an inclusion lens."

Teaching first

Teachers are key to Ribblesdale's success in lots of ways. Paul and his team have made it their business to remove all the barriers to teacher adoption. For example, the school's internal IT team automatically generate the 1600 OneNote Class Notebooks to save the admin burden from teachers.

As Paul explains, OneNote was very much the key to unlocking a more collaborative classroom:

"We knew we needed to get teachers using OneNote. It's such a powerful tool within Office 365. So we made the faculty go to OneNote for everything from staff notices, through to minutes of meetings. Our attitude was very much if you want it, go to OneNote.

"Through these nudges to behaviour, and focus on the management and classroom efficiencies, uptake of OneNote started to rocket. We saw that when a teacher adopted OneNote, Microsoft Teams would soon follow.

Ongoing CPD is based on the needs within individual subjects. Microsoft Innovative Educators (MIEs) operate across every department at Ribblesdale High School.

"We let faculties drive their own training needs because we celebrate the differences in the way that they deliver learning outcomes. Centralised CPD didn't work for us as it was too linear and didn't allow the flexibility the various subject matters demand. The MIE structure allows us to deliver whole school projects much more easily, as we are able co-create the way we'll do things in partnership together with the continued comfort that the MIEs will then work in a way that's contextual for the teachers within that department." Paul adds.

With a strong technology foundation in place to help collaboration and coordination, the school moved to add to the curriculum line up too. Rolling out Minecraft Education Edition for KS3 pupils has had a significant impact, even in areas you might not expect.

"Religious Education and English lessons have been able to use Minecraft Education Edition to cement the learning and drive interaction and engagement in lots of interesting and exciting ways.

"We're not radical. We just use the tools effectively." Paul comments.

A product of evolution

With two or three student digital leaders in each class helping to cement the work of MIEs, take up for Ribblesdale 1:1 programme now stands proudly at 92%.

As Paul sets out, the wider community now understand the Ribblesdale High School philosophy around personalised learning:

"As always, parents of Year 6 pupils have choices to make about schooling. The parents that select our school now know us as a 1:1 school. If they do come here, then the overwhelming majority donate.

"Parents tell us now that more often than not they were going to buy a device to aid their child's learning in any case. They tell us that we take away the pressure of decision making and whether they're getting a device that supports our delivery of the curriculum across KS3 and KS4. They love the fact they can get a hassle-free device for 3 years.

"If there's a fault, they get a loan device. With the full package of accidental damage and theft on offer from Freedom Tech, there's also full peace of mind in the event of a problem, so we don't really get negative feedback."

The Freedom Tech difference

Paul is under no illusion that a key part of the success of the programme comes down to having a finance and 1:1 device programme specialist in his corner:

"Out of 269 students signed up this year, I think we had 2 parents that we needed to speak to in more detail. That's how slick these Freedom Tech programmes are.

"The whole finance thing is a different ball game altogether. You can't work with just any partner. They have to be financially secure, ethical and straightforward. Obviously we have an SLT that is like any other SLT: a key part of their role is to identify risks and put measure in place to mitigate them.

"Having Freedom Tech on-hand to ensure our programme is watertight from a business and financial perspective and that neither the school nor the parents are exposed by what we do is a crucial part of the puzzle. We simply couldn't do it without them.

"It's not only on the business management side of things Freedom Tech have supported. They've gone the extra mile to ensure that every element of the programme delivery has been as efficient as possible even supporting with the imaging of devices in their Sheffield-based configuration centre."

Paul concludes: "We use Active Directory and Microsoft Intune, so our devices need configuring in a particular way before we give them out to those who have donated. We simply don't have the on-site resource to image 300 devices prior to student roll out.

"Freedom Tech manage all of that for us at their off-site facility, which ensures that we were able to spend our time preparing the school network and getting the range of learning, collaboration and productivity tools ready for action. I can't recommend them enough to any other schools who need a trusted 1:1 programme provider."