



Wickersley Partnership Trust

Wickersley Partnership Trust's vision is to further the interests of the young people it serves. Fuelled by a core belief that education empowers and enriches, the 13 schools within the Trust focus on delivering outstanding teaching and never knowingly doing less for other people's children than they would do for their own.

As Mike Ward, IT Manager for Wickersley Partnership Trust explains, these core philosophies coupled with a greater use of technology across all areas of the curriculum led them on a journey a few years ago towards 1:1 learning:

"There was appetite from our board, and also within two of our schools - Wickersley School and Sports College and Rawmarsh Community School - to look at the most efficient way of getting a device in the hands of every student. After evaluating the different ways we could achieve it, we settled on the idea of providing a 1:1 device programme for parents.

“For us in IT, and also for the senior leadership teams within the schools, it made perfect sense. A programme funded by parental payments means that students have got a high quality device that’s perfect for learning in the classroom and for completing self-directed learning at home.

“We decided on this rather than a more generic BYOD programme that was focused on any sort of device as we recognised that having pupils remaining within the school email and technology environment, even when they’re not on-site, would be good for focus and concentration.”

Building a plan

One of the early planning decisions was to ensure that it was run as a true programme. Considering that the devices would be making their way to school and back again each day, the Trust was clear that a fully managed programme that included support and the backend administration was crucial.

There would be no compromises on tech either. The school had already recognised the benefits that Google for Education could bring, so began preparation to double down on Chromebooks and Google Workspace for Education.

Mike expands: “At the beginning of our 1:1 journey, we already had around 300 Chromebooks as part of our estate. We found the devices themselves to be perfectly designed for classroom use with a great battery, incredible functionality, all at a fair price point.

“Interestingly, our students had already begun to make a natural movement towards Google Workspace for Education. We would walk past classrooms and see young people using Google Docs on a range of different devices. Our schools were naturally evolving their technology to suit the needs of young people.”

The Trust was very keen to make this scheme completely voluntary, but after speaking to other schools who had successfully implemented 1:1 device programmes, they made sure that the wording to parents was completely transparent.

Mike and the team didn’t want parents to feel like they were being forced into taking a device. They wanted to concentrate on effectively communicating the benefits to their pupils’ learning, but also ensuring there was provision for those pupils who weren’t taking part in the programme.

“Noone should be disadvantaged from 1:1 programmes - so we were very careful in planning the programme that it was nothing but upside for pupils and parents,” comments Mike.



Going out to tender

With a clear view of what was required across the two schools, Wickersley Partnership Trust put together an Invitation to Tender asking interested parties to get involved.

A large number of potential suppliers got involved in the procurement process. Having engaged with a number of potential third parties, for Wickersley it came down to a few key points.

“From the outset, Freedom Tech were extremely responsive. Even before we were working with them, they were going out of their way to help. Their communication was extremely strong and they were very transparent about how they worked, the mechanism of their Tech 4 Learners programme, and how all the backend administration was processed. It was this transparency and the fact that they offered excellent value for money that resulted in them being appointed as our strategic 1:1 device programme partner.” Mike says.



A partnership for the future

Several years on from selecting Freedom Tech and the programme is improving all the time.

As Mike explains, staying responsive to the changing needs of pupils, parents and teachers has been paramount:

“Having the right blend of device options that give young people a high quality learning device, but also offer parents value for money is crucial. Each year we review the device choices with our chosen technology partner, Stone, and Freedom Tech to ensure that we are offering the best possible performance levels at the lowest possible monthly payment for parents.

“In the case of Wickersley Community School, uptake has been up to 80%, so we know if we can keep improving then we can continue towards our vision of true 1:1 learning for all students across the two schools.”

Parental engagement

Mike was pleasantly surprised with how positive parents were about the programme.

“Having spoken to a number of schools that had gone down the 1:1 route, many said we would have a battle with parents. That simply wasn't the case: our parents really brought into the programme. I think this was driven by being completely transparent with parents, having a voluntary programme which didn't force them into anything they didn't feel comfortable about doing and being flexible.”

This flexibility extends to a two-portal process. Most parents who take part in the programme will place in the Summer term ordering window. The Trust is also sensitive to the dynamic nature of family life, so they always make sure another portal is available to cover the 'back to school' period at the start of the Autumn term giving parents who missed out the first time a second chance to take part.

The Freedom Tech difference

With a Chromebook estate now topping 1500 devices, and teachers finding new and creative ways to enhance the learning experience using technology, the Wickersley Partnership Trust and Freedom Tech relationship continues to go from strength to strength.

In Mike's view, this is because of some fundamental differences in the way that Freedom Tech goes about delivering 1:1 learning programmes.

"My experience of education technology suppliers is you get those that make life easy, and those that make life hard. Freedom Tech make our lives easier in everything they do.

"Back at the beginning of our journey, they took the time to come and sit with the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer of the Trust and take them through the structure of the programme in an open and straightforward way.

"This gave crucial comfort to the board that all risks were mitigated and that running such a programme across our schools would be a safe and secure way of improving learning outcomes for our young people. It's a completely refreshing approach.

"While we've learned a lot since we began, there have been had no hidden surprises about the programme, which is in direct contrast to many other schools I've spoken to who have used other providers.

"Communication is outstanding too. When I call our account manager, he always picks up the phone. We usually get a resolution on the same day because he works tirelessly to put our needs at the top of his day's agenda."

Going the extra mile

For Mike, the Freedom Tech difference was exemplified in their response to a recent challenge.

"This year we had a parent who missed the programme completely. They were absolutely gutted as they wanted to give a device as a Christmas present to their child. Freedom Tech worked hard around the standard ordering portal process to make certain the parent had one in time for the big day. Most companies would have turned their back on an isolated case like that, but Freedom Tech worked night and day to deliver delight. I can't recommend them enough."

The future

With department level digital leaders now in place driving closer link between the technology and the curriculum, teachers increasingly using the devices to augment the learning experience, and the continued development of the Google Workspace for Education platform, the sky's the limit for Mike and the team at Wickersley Partnership Trust.