



WIREBIRD

Swindon Borough Council **Case Study**



Swindon Schools ICT Project:

Asked to complete a major ICT project in seven new schools in Swindon, Wirebird delivered on time and received top marks

Objective: *Provide the procurement, design, project management and delivery of the ICT infrastructure for seven schools which include two secondary schools, three primary schools and two special schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties. The project had to be delivered in multiple phases to accommodate the academic year and occupation of the schools by pupils.*



This was the task facing IT specialist Wirebird as Swindon Borough Council and teaching staff embarked on a journey to provide around 3,000 pupils in North Swindon with state of the art facilities for education and learning.

Led by the Council's Corporate Project Team, the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) financed project would eventually include the design, build, financing and operation of two secondary schools, three primary schools and two special schools for pupils with learning difficulties. The project would also lead to the creation of a pioneering Learning Campus containing sports facilities, a physiotherapy and speech therapy unit and a hydrotherapy pool.

"This was an ambitious and extremely worthwhile project which involved many different organizations and individuals, each with their own experience to bring to the table," explains Malcolm Gardiner, Managing Director of Wirebird.

"As well as the building requirement, there was a strong need for an ICT infrastructure for use by pupils and teachers to support learning and teaching at a range of levels and in a variety of ways. It was clear that such a requirement needed highly specialist support and expertise."

The timescales for build were not only demanding, but proper planning and implementation of the ICT infrastructure needed to fit in with school term times.

The brief for ICT had been drawn up over several months by several individuals involved in planning the schools, among them Head Teacher of the Hreod Parkway School, Andrew Fleet.

"We did our homework, attended conferences on IT, and were careful to look at other schools and examine their set-ups, exploring what worked well," explains Andrew. "We also needed to consider our own wish list and specific requirements for ICT."

"Some teachers were more advanced than others with their experience and knowledge of IT, however we were all on a bit of a learning curve especially as changes in technology have a habit of moving so fast."

"As well as practical considerations, like staff training, we were keen to see how we could use ICT to make learning even more fun and engaging. For example, generally speaking boys tend to be less engaged than girls at school and so using digital technology to enhance their learning experience has been an important step forward. Reading about a volcano is not quite the same thing as seeing one erupt in 3-d in front of your very eyes!"

What came out of this learning process was a clear requirement for an infrastructure that could support school administration and education across the board, from the needs of teachers to those of the pupils, including children with very special needs.

This specification included the planning and implementation of an integrated local area network with wireless capabilities; wide area networks providing connectivity to the Southwest Grid for Learning; and server installation, the junior schools having standard HP servers, while the senior schools had 'blade' systems.

"We also needed to provide desktop PCs, all built to an agreed specification and configured off-site, laptops for use by teachers population and for loan to students, tablet PCs, printers, interactive whiteboards, smartboards and projectors," explains Malcolm Gardiner.

"As well as delivering the ICT infrastructure and equipment, our role was to understand exactly what the teaching staff wanted to get out of their new system and applications. Education has its own set of evolving challenges, and with technology moving so fast it was essential to provide an infrastructure which would suit their needs today as well as in the longer term."

The Wirebird Effect

Wirebird provided the procurement, design, project management and delivery of the ICT infrastructure for the schools. Once the contracts with the Builders and Swindon Borough Council were negotiated and signed, a programme of meetings was drawn up with various interested parties.

These meetings were facilitated by Wirebird to bring together the different customers, suppliers and contractors ensuring head teachers would eventually receive the best technological fit for their schools.

The IT requirement was for a robust platform upon which systems for both administration and curriculum could run side by side without compromising security or performance.

Secondary schools systems were designed and built on HP b-Series and c-Series BladeSystems and a Storage Area Network which provided high resilience and excellent performance for hundreds of users, with Microsoft Exchange 2003 clustering providing additional fault tolerance for email at one of the schools.

The entire network was designed to incorporate high speed links and high-performance switching equipment to staged communications rooms in the school campus. This was to ensure that performance degradation across such a large site would not become an issue.

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Primary schools systems were equally complex, albeit on a smaller scale. Several software packages, many of which were 16bit legacy packages normally used on a single machine, needed to be reconfigured to run across the modern network.

A unique software deployment and PC imaging system was designed by Wirebird ensuring that curriculum software packages could easily and quickly be deployed to client machines, or in the event of a PC replacement requirement, complete images deployed within minutes keeping downtime for users to a minimum.

The project was delivered in multiple phases to accommodate the academic year and occupation of the schools by pupils.

Adam Glass, ICT PFI Project Manager for Swindon Borough Council, said: “There were so many stakeholders in what was a very complex and demanding project, it was always going to be a challenge to get things done correctly straight away. To many people, IT is a foreign environment and so having people involved who knew what they were doing as well as explaining technology in practical lay terms was incredibly useful.

“This is really where Wirebird came into their own. They were always willing to go the extra mile to have the project completed properly, sometimes working into the night to ensure that systems were working properly.

“Probably more important was their understanding and level of engagement. They were always on hand, always communicating and handling the ICT side as part of the bigger picture.

“What they’ve managed to achieve is a huge asset for the schools – for the Council’s Project Team, for the teaching staff, and most importantly for the pupils.”



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