Case Study | Avondale Intermediate School

"We were looking at how we could achieve a one-stop-shop approach to lots of things that were going on in the school. Doing this successfully would impact on us financially, consolidate the delivery of service and support, and hopefully increase the capacity of our own busy resources."

– Joanne Hardwide, Principal, Avondale Intermediate School

Since 1945 Avondale Intermediate School in Auckland has been the stepping stone for local children as they transition from primary to high school. It currently has a roll of 306 children who are supported by 17 teachers, 3 learning assistants, 3 administration staff and a caretaker.

Snupped and savvy

The school was rebuilt in 2000. Taking the opportunity to thoroughly modernise, an interactive whiteboard and projector was installed in each classroom. Rooms were equipped with three standalone PCs, and a fourth connected to the whiteboard.

The library and ICT suite housed 22 PCs for student use, and further units for administration and teaching staff. Each teacher was issued with a laptop and provided with remote desktop access which was primarily used for accessing the school's student management system. Students and teachers alike utilised the Learning Management System (LMS) to upload and share work and resources.

One of the first schools to be equipped with ultrafast broadband in 2012, Avondale Intermediate was 'snupped' the following year as part of the School Network Upgrade Project. Being

upgraded to full wireless capability hastened the school's progression towards an infrastructure that supports the BOYD (bring your own device) model.

The school ran its own server, with Kathryn Eltringham, Deputy Principal: Learning and Teaching, in charge of the day-to-day running and support of their infrastructure.

Capping the CAPEX

Generous lottery grants offset some of the considerable capital outlay needed to provide and maintain their IT framework. Still, the costs faced each time a server upgrade was required or even a projector light bulb expired, at $400 a pop, were an on going burden for the low-decile school.

By the end of 2013 the school's new Principal Joanne Hardwidge and Deputy Principal Kathryn Eltringham were aligned in the decision to look for an inclusive cloud-based solution.

Eltringham was juggling her time working with a range of companies to support the IT hardware, office print devices, the LMS, the projectors and smart boards and the overall infrastructure. Due to her depth of involvement, both the support and service levels were of critical importance to her.

The school's ageing technology was also an issue. Mostly installed during the rebuild, it was all reaching the end of its life span at the same time.

Hardwidge's approach to change was all about streamlining. "We were looking at how we could achieve a one-stop-shop approach to lots of things that were going on in the school. Doing this successfully would impact on us financially, consolidate the delivery of service and support, and hopefully increase the capacity of our own busy resources."

The light bulb moment

The timing was perfect for Avondale Intermediate's print device partner, Fuji Xerox New Zealand, to introduce their OptimiseIT cloud computing solution.

Wrapping together Microsoft applications including Office 365, Dell hardware and cloud hosting, the solution resonated with Hardwidge and Eltringham. It ticked all the boxes. One local help desk, a support and service ted every three years, all IT software and security updates carried out automatically, and no upfront capital investment.

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The Dell hardware met with a particularly enthusiastic response. It was regarded by the school as 'rock solid', an important consideration when it comes to having children as the primary users.

The sticking point

The only area of potential anxiety for the school was the unknown level of service that came with the OptimiseIT solution.

"Although Fuji Xerox's track record with us was always really good," said Eltringham, "we had been used to superb service from our previous IT infrastructure supplier. So this was the single sticking point for me."

It was critical that Eltringham's time was freed up so she could focus on the rest of her responsibilities. "What would be the point of shifting otherwise?" said Hardwidge. "It had to be as good as, if not better than, what we already had."

A learning curve

In order to fully understand the complexities of the school's overall IT, the OptimiseIT team carried out a thorough audit. The existing solution

included VoIP (Voice over IP) which needed to continue as part of the new technology package. Many of the solutions the school used as an education provider were unique to their sector and required careful thought and planning to ensure that access was uninterrupted.

Following the audit the solution was implemented rapidly and went live in April 2014.

The strong relationship between the school and Fuji Xerox meant that any issues were dealt with quickly as they arose. "Their response was always positive and they were accessible," said Hardwidge. "We could go directly to people who had senior positions in the organisation to get problems sorted out, and it was always done with a smile and with courtesy. At one point we had an issue with the security that had been previously set up around our wireless. Fuji Xerox actually brought in another company to check it out and make it happen for us. Fabulous."

A new age of integration and collaboration

Avondale Intermediate was already a technologically savvy school, but the

new cloud-based OptimiseIT solution has strengthened their ability to communicate and collaborate.

For example, the integration between VoIP and the OptimiseIT solution across desk phones, mobile devices and PCs delivered significant improvements to the way the school's teachers and administrators work.

"From a leadership perspective," said Hardwidge, "the new level of integration is significantly different in terms of how we're able to operate. You can access everything from your mobile, which is quite a new way of working for us."

With Microsoft Office 365 the ability to share documents has seen a big shift in how staff work, and how students can collaborate. Cloud-based documents are easily shared, so the need to email documents to one another is obsolete. Instant messaging is a big hit, and student message runners between classrooms and administration are a thing of the past. Conference calling from multiple locations is an exciting new development, resulting in a complete rethink around meetings now physical proximity is no longer needed.

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> – Joanne Hardwidge, Principal, Avondale Intermediate School

Not unexpectedly, the move to a cloud environment saw the school's internet usage skyrocket, so the school quickly enrolled in the fully-funded Network for Learning (N4L). Fuji Xerox helped the school carry out the audit needed to fast track enrolment. The outcome was access to N4L's high-performance network not long after the OptimiseIT solution went live.

The move to a BOYD environment means the school has reduced the number of PCs per room to two. The increase in students using their own smartphones and tablets has topped up any shortfall in school devices, and keeps up with the rapid pace of change. The library and ICT suite now house 30 PCs, and the music space is equipped with Apple Macs, exposing the children to a wider range of operating systems. The placement of print devices through the school has also been rationalised, and each user, students and staff alike, has an individual log in.

In the odd instance where a device has been damaged or stolen, it simply requires a phone call or email organise a replacement unit. Eltringham, who previously dealt with multiple suppliers and red tape, described this new arrangement as 'responsive and seamless.'

Surprise-free and cost controlled

The OptimiseIT model means that the school's OPEX is fully predictable. "The only surprises we have now," said Hardwidge, "are ones that we make happen."

Keeping up with technology through the OptimiseIT leasing model is also important to the school. Moving to the cloud avoided $50,000 of capital outlay for a new server. Now that money is earmarked for other projects designed to enhance learning opportunities for students.

"Realistically, all of the devices we have now will be defunct in three years' time," said Hardwidge. "Without OptimiseIT we couldn't have the latest models that our kids need so they are prepared for the future."

Equipped for the future

Hardwidge is passionate about ensuring that the two years children are at intermediate level are well spent.

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Sticky service

And as for Eltringham's sticking point about the quality of service from their new infrastructure service supplier?

All issues are directed to one local support desk, and are resolved same day, often within 10 minutes of making contact. Exceptional issues, such as a lightning strike impacting the school's building management solution, have received knowledgeable and effective support. Unique issues, like the school's highly secure 'Fort Knox' wireless solution, receive careful, responsive management.

Eltringham and Hardwidge are firmly agreed: "The level of service through OptimiseIT has been really fantastic."

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