

A Study in EdTech Success

Greenwood Academies Trust



The Greenwood Academies Trust is a large multi-academy trust in England, centred around the Nottingham Academy, which was formerly the Greenwood Dale School. There are 34 academies within the trust, educating over 17,000 pupils.

We all know that 2020 saw the abrupt introduction of a 360-degree distance learning experience, meaning that schools, colleges and MATs were pressured into finding solutions - quickly. All whilst upholding the highest standards of safeguarding to their students.

COVID also meant that new obstacles were uncovered, meaning IT teams, designated safeguarding leads, and headteachers had to become even more vigilant when it came to ensuring students were connected, engaged, and most importantly safe.

One of the leaders of change was Greenwood Academies Trust, which has always strived to provide an innovative approach to teaching and which also worked tirelessly to ensure a smooth transition towards home learning.

Technical Service Delivery Manager Daniel Smart was placed in charge of ensuring all members of the team effectively deliver quality service across a single MPLS network of 36 sites with a total

20,000 users. Below we find out from Daniel how Securly and its software helped save the lives of students during COVID, and why for them having a supplier that is able to work with a variety of different school structures and stakeholders ensured a seamless roll out across the Trust.

Read below OR watch our main stage speaking slot interviewing Daniel at the SAAS Show - <https://vimeo.com/540089440/f6840b47f2>

D Daniel Smart

Can you take us back to the beginning of the 2020 school year, particularly the initial hurdles you faced moving into a distance learning model?

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So obviously we all got caught out with big, big changes and all of a sudden, a big shift. We were really lucky in some senses, we've made a huge shift to using cloud storage and things like Microsoft teams and as an organisation we saw massive benefits from those technologies.

But all of a sudden we had to adapt our web filtering completely - and at the time that was still hosted very traditionally on-site and hadn't changed or adapted in around five years. So that was a huge change for us, because everybody was at home with their own internet connection and not relying on being in school. We had to quickly adapt and look at how we look at that traffic and how we would filter it and keep on top of our responsibilities to keep our staff and students safe in an environment we'd never actually worked in at scale, at least for some time.

As a MAT you mentioned it was different for every school, did you try different approaches and roll out the most successful across all of your schools or did you have to adapt on a school by school basis?

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We went to our market and met with the different suppliers, but also reached out to customers of theirs to find a real-life example of them working, because every school is different and understanding how they've seen it work in real life as opposed to just demos was important.

One of the things that we were really keen to do was to not interfere too much with the schools and what they were doing currently - there's enough going on with trialing a new internet filtering product, as well as getting used to working from home. So most of our focus was actually being able to see and speak to people that had actually used the product and not just salespeople who have access to them.

We then shortlisted people we wanted to work with and set up an initial trial so we could test it doing the job for real and arrange for our organisation to move across; and with COVID coming along and the 'new norm' challenges, there wasn't a great amount of time to do this.

We had plenty of time in terms of the contract for our existing solution, this was coming to expire, which was quite

useful, not being stuck in a huge contract with a provider that wasn't fit for purpose, but we obviously needed to change to something more suitable quickly to close that gap where students could potentially be at risk.

COVID highlighted a huge increase in those risks for students when it came to things like emotional wellbeing and isolation. Is this something that you found to be true throughout your schools?

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Yes, unfortunately it was true - our trust has almost 20,000 students, so with a student base that large the likelihood of a student needing support from us is obviously quite high.

It took its toll on the strongest of people and for some students definitely they needed that extra help and weren't comfortable sharing that with parents etc. I think everybody's in the same boat and actually being able to start that conversation was critical for us. So, yeah, definitely.

And finally, how did your DSLs find adapting to safeguarding digitally and remotely?

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"Having DSL teams for all 36 schools, they were able to process and create meaningful reports and able to see the specific information about the students in each case. This was a massive change from having absolutely no visibility. Before they would just receive an alert saying that the student could be at risk and then there would be an investigation process to follow."



✉ uksales@securly.com

☎ 0141-343-8322

🌐 www.securly.com

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