



## Case Study:

Building a sustainable IT Strategy for  
a growing MAT of SEND schools

**Client:**

Forward Education Trust

**Technology Partners:**

Computeam

**Project Date:**

July - September 2021



The Forward Education Trust (FET) is a multi-academy trust of SEND schools located in and around Birmingham. The Trust caters for a wide range of specialist needs amongst its pupils, ranging from SEMH to PMLD and every school's requirements for IT are different. Computeam became the Trust's new strategic IT partner following a successful national tendering exercise via the DfE in 2020, and have worked since then to drive a trust-wide IT strategy whilst preparing for the opening of two new-build schools in September 2021.

## The Challenge

### **The Challenge: harness a capital build project to improve IT across the Trust**

FET's successful outcomes for SEND pupils at its existing schools had enabled it to bid for several new build programmes let by the DfE and local council. These programmes come with capital budgets to provide a good infrastructure in the new building, however the Trust wanted to use this investment as a springboard to improve provision across its existing schools, much of which had suffered from a lack of available funding in recent years.

Computeam was chosen as the Trust's partner from a field of ed-tech specialist bidders on the DfE's RM6103 framework in 2020. We were then given the challenge of preparing for not one, but two new school build projects opening in September 2021, and using the investment attached to these projects to drive a strategic improvement in the use of ICT across the Trust. The backdrop of supply-chain disruption caused by Covid-19 added a further challenge to the process.

## The Solution

### **The Solution: Early Engagement and a Clear Strategic Plan**

From our experience on other build projects, we knew it was essential to engage early with the Trust, the DfE ICT Advisor and the various design and build contractors involved in the two new build projects. This process was complex as the projects were being managed and funded via two different routes, however the strong relationship we built up with the Trust enabled us to establish a clear set of strategic priorities that we could take to every meeting.

We also developed good relationships with other stakeholders that helped deal with some of the Covid-19 related issues we faced. One challenge was the provision of a new fibre leased line internet connections to the new buildings. Persistent delays and poor communication from the major internet carriers were mitigated thanks to some collaborative working and quick contingency planning that established an alternative route into the site and provisioned a failover backup line to give everyone confidence that the school could open on time.

Thanks to our cloud-first design, we were also able to establish common platforms in readiness for the new schools that were not dependent on the progress of the build programme. For example, we built a new Trust-wide Microsoft365 domain platform in readiness for user accounts and set up device management profiles ready for the import of laptops and desktops. We also set-up a cloud-based network management platform in Aruba Central, and an ESET Anti-Virus update server. This early progress in our own project plan allowed for plenty of contingency later on when we were up against deadlines onsite.

Elsewhere in the Trust, we were pleased to work with incumbent IT providers constructively to manage a transition to the same central Microsoft, ESET Anti-Virus and Aruba network management platforms where possible, as well as agreeing a rollout of ultra-fast leased line infrastructure to every school to support further cloud transition.



## The Result

Both new build projects opened on time and on budget in September 2021 and progress towards the Trust's strategic vision for ICT has been given a boost. Over the next 12 months other schools will benefit from leased line internet connections, paving the way for a wider transition to the Trust's established cloud platform, and eliminating many capital spending requirements like new onsite servers that would otherwise have impacted heavily on budgets

## Key Points

- Agreement on a clear IT strategy simplifies future decisions and allows the IT provider to act more effectively on behalf of the Trust when working with third parties.
- An early investment in building strong relationships is key to dealing with the inevitable challenges of a major build project
- Good communication remains the most important skill when working with so many different stakeholders.

## Client Comment

*Computeam have been an engaged strategic partner since we picked them from the DfE framework in 2020. Their knowledge and experience of ICT build projects was apparent from the start, but what really shone through for me was the ability to support a transition from previous provider to new provider whilst adding greater technical expertise. This was all the more important as we were developing our IT capability against a backdrop of a challenging IT supply chain due to the Covid -19 pandemic.*

**Jane Egerton, CEO**

## Our Statement

*I am always impressed by the dedication and resourcefulness of people working in the SEND sector, and FET was a great example of this. Jane and her team were able to extend the benefit of the relatively modest capital build budgets to equip two new schools AND create a stable platform for the rest of the Trust that will enhance the reliability and effectiveness of ICT everywhere.*

**Owen Napier, CEO**

