From IT struggles to tech-powered learning

How one Queensland college swapped costly, unreliable devices for a seamless Google for Education solution

School at a glance

What began as a cost-saving exercise for St Michael's College in Queensland, transformed the day-to-day operations for IT, teachers and students when the school made the switch to Google for Education. From clunky laptops that sucked up time and resources, to reliable Chromebooks and dynamic apps and tools, seven years on and the improvements are still being felt.

Challenge

IT manager Victor Bradbury joined St Michael's College as a Grade 4 teacher, but was also soon helping out with technology. "We had PCs in the library, across a few labs, one in each classroom for the teacher, and two trolleys of laptops. With tech support contracted only once every two weeks, I'd step in and help fix a few things here and there. The laptops were the main problem. Out of 20, we'd only have about 12 working at a time."

When Victor stepped into the IT Manager role, he says three quarters of his time was taken up fixing and managing just 20 laptops with constant breakdowns, system failures, user errors, and everything in between. Students and teachers were seeing little benefit, and Victor knew something had to change.

> "
> The whole State should be using Chromebooks. Every school should have access to the resources we have now. Chromebooks work every time, and they're economical. It just makes sense."
>
> **Victor Bradbury,**
> IT Manager, St Michaels

Solution

The turning point for St Michael's came when Victor attended EduTECH, an annual education and technology conference and trade show that brings educators and technology providers together. "At EduTECH, I met the Google for Education team and saw a Chromebook presentation. It was amazing and really planted a seed in my head. I knew this was something we could use."

After Victor trialled a Chromebook, he approached the school principal and suggested the school extend the trial across a class, then a grade. The switch to Google for Education and Chromebooks snowballed naturally from that point, particularly when Victor was introduced to current IT partner, Computer Alliance. "It's been great working with them ever since. Glen and the team are always there, and I can always speak to someone I know directly, which is so important."

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A deep dive into the solution

A reliable, user-centric solution

A lack of reliability and user-friendliness were St Michael's primary concerns with their old laptops and devices, which they were then leasing for use across all grades. With constant breakages and system failures, Victor says students were losing work and any documents saved onto the servers could easily be erased.

"We had generic logins, so there was no way to track who was using a device. If students didn't save their work, there was no way to retrieve it. If they did remember to save onto the server, work could easily be saved over or erased completely. And USB sticks are easily lost or misplaced. In classrooms, the computer was for the teacher and, while roll was taken via that device, and the interactive board was used as a kind of projector, there was no real engagement with tech within lessons."

When it came time to renew the leases for their existing laptops, the school instead chose to roll out Chromebooks. They did so with the Chrome Education Upgrade, which allows IT to manage devices seamlessly from any location. They also moved to Google Workspace for Education Plus, which brought a suite of new tools to enhance student engagement.

From low tech to great tech

What they wanted

- Reliable devices that worked every time, all the time
- More creative and dynamic apps to increase student engagement with tech and improve digital literacy inside the classroom
- Cost reduction related to replacing expensive devices every three years or more frequently
- Negate the need for costly additional staff to provide IT support
- Ease time burden on IT caused by unreliable hardware

What they did

- Did not renew leases for their old laptops. Instead, they rolled out 250 Chromebooks for 1:1 use across Grades 2-6, and a further 40 Chromebooks for shared use across Prep to Grade 1, in combination with the Chrome Education Upgrade
- Engaged IT partner, Computer Alliance, for effective purchase budgeting and ongoing IT support
- Signed up for Google Workspace for Education Plus to explore new ways of teaching and learning
- Moved teacher drives from servers to Google Drive

What they achieved

- Greater control and input into how technology is used across the school
- Significant cost savings (a one-fifth saving on device expenditure alone) which enabled the school to inject funds into other areas of teaching & learning
- Significantly less time spent managing devices for both IT managers and teachers, with the help of the Chrome Education Upgrade
- Increased digital literacy across all teachers and student cohorts through use of Google Workspace for Education Plus and other tools, including Google Admin console, Google Classroom, Google Docs and Google Sheets
- Benefits in literacy outcomes and learning, for children with specific learning needs

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Key Benefits

Having devices that work every time they are switched on and which users can navigate easily doesn't sound like a big ask. But, at St Michael's, it was something they'd never seen before they introduced Chromebooks with the Chrome Education Upgrade. With the added benefits of cost, time, and stress savings, the school has never looked back.

1

Significant time savings for IT

Victor estimates he spent three quarters of every day dealing with broken laptops before changing direction. Now, he says, none of his IT issues are related to Google for Education products. "Before Google, 40% of our laptops were always dead in the water." By using the Chrome Education Upgrade, the IT team can deploy, manage, lock down, and secure devices, all from the cloud-based Google Admin console.

2

A one fifth saving on device expenditure

Victor says it was the financial savings that convinced decision makers at the school to trial Google for Education and Chromebooks at the beginning, with other benefits quickly becoming evident. "The [old] laptops were $1,800 each, and the rate we got for Chromebooks was a fifth of that. Just in a class set of 12 that's a saving of over $17,000." The savings have freed up funds for the school to reinvest in other technology and services to further enhance teaching & learning.

3

Improved engagement and outcomes for mixed abilities

By embracing Google Workspace for Education Plus, the school enhanced experiences for students with specific literacy and learning needs. "We had the Read&Write app, but this year we added OrbitNote and Fluency Tutor. So, the kids in learning support can do everything they couldn't do before. When they need to read something, or search something, they have Assistant functions."

4

Better digital fluency across all student cohorts

While Victor admits the students at his school have always been diligent and respectful learners, it's when they go to high school that the benefits from their daily exposure to Google Classroom, creative apps and Chromebooks are most evident. "I get regular calls and messages from high schools, students, teachers and parents, telling me how well our kids are doing with technology. They are way ahead and performing really well."

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