



L.E.A.D. Academy Trust

Lee Jepson, Director of IT

Tell us a little about L.E.A.D. Academy Trust...

L.E.A.D. Academy Trust was created by Chief Executive Diana Owen with a few schools in Nottingham. Over the years, we grew and took on others within the city – as well as schools in Derby, Derbyshire, Lincoln, Leicester and Sheffield. When we took on a secondary school in Derby that had its own IT Sold Services arm, it meant we had to merge that into the Trust and that's when L.E.A.D. IT Services was born. So we now have two groups of schools to look after: one group is our 24 schools within the Academy Trust and another group is the 69 schools outside of the Trust that we supply with a managed IT Service. We are expanding all the time, and have four more schools joining us early next year.



What are some of the main IT challenges you have faced?

Our main challenge has been around centralisation; standardising products and services in our schools – whether it's internal or external to the Trust. For the Trust schools, it was easier to implement a standard of devices and solutions that would be used across all of them. However, that wasn't the case for our other schools. They all had different types of devices of various ages, plus different solutions in place – so we had to be creative in how we tried to bring certain schools up to the level of the others to enable us to work with them efficiently.

For my team, getting reports initially was a nightmare, because we had to know every single system in every single school and it really didn't work very well. We decided see what solutions were out there that could help us operate over multiple sites and give us and the schools the access and control that was needed. So we looked at the market: what vendors could offer, were the solutions centrally managed or was there one in each school, and so on.

What we really needed was a solution that would work in the cloud and when we trialed NetSupport DNA we knew we could do that – although it hadn't been done on this scale before! We now run NetSupport DNA in the cloud on Azure on one single server and that gives us exactly the flexibility we were looking for. It has allowed us to phase out multiple old solutions and connect all the schools to one system. It's great to finally have one system that all the team understand and know how to use easily – and it was also easy then to show the schools how to use it.

Has NetSupport DNA helped with supporting your safeguarding efforts?

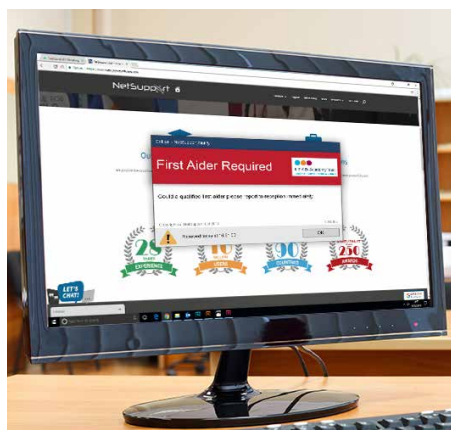
Massively! For us, it was essential to have a product that would do safeguarding across all of our sites because ultimately we are responsible for safeguarding in all of them; even if the schools don't buy into it themselves, they still get that service as part of our sold services. We report back to schools and DSLs on safeguarding and, in addition, DSLs have access to their own level of DNA in their school, even though we run it on just one server. So every school sees just what's relevant to them, even though we can see all of them.

The multi-language capability for tracking keywords was a huge bonus for us because we have a real mix of schools that we support. Students were finding creative ways of getting round firewalls and filtering in different languages, but DNA has really helped with that. It's great that it gives the translation of terms for the teacher or DSL, so they can see exactly what they mean; that's really handy.

Another feature that we use a lot is monitoring vulnerable students via groups, so we can report on that each day and notify the DSLs, or they can see that themselves. And schools love the keyword cloud!

NetSupport DNA includes NetSupport School classroom management. What feedback do you get from teachers?

In my experience, teachers tend to use it mostly in their IT classrooms and the more creative teachers seem to use it most often. The ability to use mobile devices is key – as we use DNA to cover those as well. Teachers especially love having control of creating their own internet lists as well as practical measures such as turning off printing – which are all things that really help keep the students focused.



How do you use NetSupport Notify?

We knew we couldn't have one system of Notify across all of our schools, as notifications in our Academy Trust schools would go to our non-Trust schools, which wouldn't be ideal. So we operate a split system where the Trust has its own system for all of its schools – and the others have their separate ones. It works better that way and the schools feel more comfortable with that setup.

It's very much become part of our Disaster Recovery plan, our Emergency Evacuation procedure and our Bomb procedure. So if staff get a notification, they read it, act on it – it's all part of the policy now, so Notify is embedded in all of our schools.

How do you use NetSupport Manager?

Our helpdesk team use it daily for remote support – pushing out apps, doing registry fixes, things like that; it's a really flexible solution. We use DNA as more of a logging tool and asset inventory – and that's how the two work together for us; they complement each other really well. Having both meant we could phase out other solutions, so now everything is unified. It's made a huge difference and means everything is standardised: the products look familiar across the board and do a lot more than you think!



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How have you found working with NetSupport?

The Sales team was really helpful from the start in getting us to a price point that we wanted so that we could offer DNA to our schools as part of our service. They were already our customers and already had paid contracts. We wanted to add this on but needed to find a way to absorb the cost. So the Sales team really helped to get us to a price point that was realistic for both of us, and allowed us to get the solutions rolled out to all of our schools.

The Support team has been great! As we're techies, we generally try to fix things ourselves and then when we can't, we call to see if there's a patch or fix or something that we need. We got some guidance from the team on how we could deploy DNA in the way that we wanted – and it has been really successful. But what is really great is that NetSupport listens to our feature requests and suggestions. For example, we asked about filtering based on user groups, and as soon as we asked for it, it was done!

How do the NetSupport solutions compare to previous ones you have used?

“Everything all under one roof” is the best way of putting it; everything is accessible from one system, which is great and has helped us so much. Having an overarching view of all of our sites without having to remote into a server to use a standalone product on that particular system is a huge benefit to us. That was something that caused difficulties for us before: if a technician was on a server fixing a problem and another one needed to get a report, they had to wait for the first technician to finish before they could do anything. Having it all unified now for NetSupport DNA means any technician can get a report – whether they're onsite, on the mobile phone or in our office – at any time. So it has made things a lot easier for reporting and allows the schools to log in themselves from anywhere and access all of the reporting mechanisms too.

How do you see NetSupport supporting your schools into the future?

Now that everything is centralised with NetSupport solutions, it's so much easier to bring new schools on board. And it's a bonus that they support Ofsted requirements. The safeguarding frameworks are constantly changing and most recently schools are asking us, “Can you show me what this student has been doing on this PC today?” Many don't have access to a product that will tell them that. So we try our best to advise schools, show them the word cloud, the power of it and the benefits of it from an Ofsted point of view. The IT team can do it, but ultimately they are responsible for safeguarding the children, so NetSupport helps ensure we can give them the tools to do that.



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