



HOW TO GET THE RIGHT TECH IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME?

The Golden Thread Alliance Multi-Academy Trust has the answer.

Golden Thread Alliance was established in January 2023, following the merging of The Galaxy Trust in Dartford and Pathway Academy Trust in Gravesham, north Kent. The Alliance now consists of nine primary academies, with 5000 pupils and 800 members of staff. It prides itself on its eponymous 'golden thread' of values, fostering an environment where everyone looks after each other.

CEO of the Alliance, Mr Garry Ratcliffe, describes some of the challenges of IT in the education sector: "Coming from a small Trust of four academies that each had its own IT technician, I knew there was a lack of consistent IT strategy.

"I used to have to carry a little notebook with me that gave me separate log-in instructions for each school in the Trust. I had usernames and passwords coming out of my ears!" he recalls. "The senior team didn't have the technical knowledge to fully challenge our technicians, so little progress could be made in joining up the strategy.

"Meanwhile the prioritisation of IT tasks was difficult, with a lot of fire-fighting to make sure the classroom equipment was working. Ultimately having separate IT arrangements in each school proved very poor value for money."

As Gridserve had already been working with Pathway Trust, it was recommended that Golden Thread Alliance inherit this arrangement following the merger.

"To be honest, I had mixed feelings because I didn't know anything about the company at the time," Mr Ratcliffe admits.

"Nevertheless, they'd been helping Pathway, so I was open to developing a relationship with them."

Our Solution

"It's not a quick fix to get everything right in IT," says Mr Ratcliffe. "It took a lot of patience, sensitivity and really good communication from the Gridserve team to highlight the issues we were facing at the beginning of the merger.

"It was tricky for our staff to separate their perception of legacy issues from the new support provision, but Gridserve handled this admirably."

FIND OUT WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU

For a no-obligation conversation with one of the team, get in touch today.

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Trust-wide Microsoft Platform

"One year in, we are a fully-fledged Microsoft Office 365 site. We are now in the position where every member of staff has dedicated email, sign-in credentials and access to a Microsoft OneDrive and Teams environment where all our information is kept. We are all connected on the same wireless network with the appropriate filtering."

Transfer of personnel

"We wanted to work with Gridserve to understand what they needed to best support Golden Thread, so they told us their required number of triage technicians onsite. Through the correct HR, TUPE and Operational protocols, Gridserve were able to redeploy two of our existing technicians, ensuring excellent knowledge transfer about our IT set-up, and proper orientation for the technicians about our IT objectives.

"We had already invested in the technicians' training and alignment with our culture, so it made sense to transfer them across. They continue to report that they feel valued and well-treated by Gridserve."

Helpdesk and triage reporting

"People only notice IT when it goes wrong. Teachers can be quite territorial about their classroom priorities, but Gridserve's help desk is completely on board with a Pupils' Needs First policy."

Explaining the early resistance, Mr Ratcliffe says: "At the start of our engagement, Gridserve correctly predicted that staff's perceptions of their IT service would get worse before they got better. This is exactly what happened!

"To counter this, Gridserve are prepared with monthly newsletters and reports about the number of help desk tickets, resolutions and fix-times. They also work closely with the technicians, guiding them on messaging and how to behave towards our staff. "This has helped a lot in shifting perceptions and giving people greater confidence in IT."

Outcomes

"Our COO now has a clear 1-2-3 year IT plan that has been greatly enhanced by Gridserve's years of expertise and knowledge.

"They play a crucial 'critical friend' role and are not afraid of pushing back on our requirements if they see benefits in alternative approaches. This results in a very open, honest and transparent relationship, which makes for realistic estimates, rather than over-promising and under-delivering. Golden Thread now enjoys excellent access to an easy to follow IT set up that is well supported with all the necessary documentation.

"It is critically important to our ethos at the Trust that everyone is part of the wider Trust family. There is also a culture of cross pollination of staff and ideas across all the Academies, so having single user logins across all sites, rather than by school, is vital. Gridserve respected this requirement and ensured the security protocols were in place to make it happen."

"Issues receive rapid attention and our technicians are proactively identifying areas to make savings in equipment. This is boosting confidence across all stakeholder groups including the senior, administration and teaching teams, as well as amongst pupils and parents.

"Gridserve are people-focused, and care about our values and what we think. They have been so kind and patient about our legacy issue perceptions - in fact it was this level of insight that really won me over to them!

"They are really invested in wanting IT to work for their customers and are managing their own growth carefully enough so we don't lose contact with their top team."

Looking to the future

"Now Gridserve have helped us get the basics sorted, Golden Thread Alliance is set to bring more schools on board, and is also planning a new-build academy," says Mr Ratcliffe. "They are also researching and helping us understand how we can use AI to increase efficiencies in teaching and learning.

"It's great to have an IT partner we can trust."

