

The Streetly Academy brings collaborative learning to every classroom



thestreetlyacademy

At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Provide equal access to devices and hardware
- Improve learning via small changes that would add up to large impact
- Allow teachers to personalize lessons

What they did

- Provided Google Apps to all teachers and students
- Added 1:1 Chromebooks for years 10 to 13
- Used Google Classroom to streamline class assignments and provide ongoing feedback

What they accomplished

- Change teachers' mindset to one of collaboration and ongoing student feedback
 - Saved £60,000 on hiring of substitute teachers
 - Stemmed student departures
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Background

The Streetly Academy, based in Sutton Coldfield near Birmingham, United Kingdom, is a secondary academy serving almost 1,400 students ages 11 through 18. The suburban school is on a journey to improve learning and results, following a change of management in 2010. During its 2012 Ofsted inspection, the school achieved a second consecutive year of outstanding results in categories including achievement of pupils, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety of pupils, and leadership and management.

Challenge

As The Streetly Academy began to identify ways to boost academics and create a stronger culture of learning and collaboration, educators turned their attention to small improvements that would have significant impact. "Our goal was marginal gain, which could come from many places and could add up to real change," says Andrew Caffrey, assistant headteacher for data and technologies at The Streetly Academy. He and other Streetly educators realized that technologybased learning could help the school lift achievement, values and teamwork – everything it was striving for.

The Streetly Academy's headteacher, Billy Downie, traveled to a partner school in Malaysia to glean ideas from its digital learning project. The school was heavily using Google Apps for Education as well as Chromebooks, and we saw the potential for our own school," Caffrey says.

Solution

The Streetly Academy was using several productivity solutions, but only teachers and students with the correct devices and software could access shared resources. The school had computer labs, but that only solved a small part of the access problem.

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*—Andrew Caffrey, Assistant Headteacher for Data and Technologies,
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"After we added a wifi network, we allowed students to bring in laptops or tablets under our new BYOD policy," Caffrey says. "But teachers couldn't plan lessons around the class all having devices. It would be unfair to tell students to create a project using PowerPoint when not everyone student could afford a laptop." And the reverse was also true: students might want to send a digital spreadsheet or document to a teacher for grading, but if teachers didn't have devices themselves, they'd have to ask a student to print out the work.

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In 2011, after adopting Frog as its virtual learning platform, the Streetly Academy began using Google Apps for Education. "Google Docs was quickest to be adopted, followed by Google Slides and Google Sheets – especially for coursework-heavy subjects like geography and business studies," Caffrey says.

As part of its goal of improving the school, the academy had established "Project Streetly" to get students more involved in school initiatives – including student "digital leaders," who are enthusiastic about technology. When the school decided to purchase 800 Chromebooks for students in years 10, 11, 12, and 13, the Project Streetly digital leaders tested the devices and gave feedback to Caffrey and his colleagues. "They love the fast startup of the Chromebooks – they lift the lid and they're working," Caffrey says. "Some of the older laptops we had in our computer labs took forever to start."

To give students flexibility in managing their Chromebooks, the academy allowed them to buy their devices or take their Chromebooks home if they paid a small deposit. Otherwise, students could use the devices at school but had to leave them there at the end of the school day. The academy also has a trolley with 60 backup Chromebooks, in case students forget their own devices.

Benefits

Teachers began using Google Classroom in September 2014, connecting their Google Apps tools in one place for easy management of homework and class projects. Right away, teachers saw changes in studentteacher interactions. "We realized we could use Google Classroom to see work as it progressed, so students and teachers could get involved in creating a project at a much earlier stage," Caffrey says.

Caffrey saw these changes in his geography classes. "Let's say I've assigned a report on earthquakes," he says. As a student works on her report within Google Drive, Caffrey can view it and add comments with feedback. "If the student didn't pick the right earthquake for the subject, I can suggest another one. This is about giving advice during the project – a big shift in teachers' mindset. There's not much use for feedback after a student has completed a project – but feedback during the project is very useful."

The success of The Streetly Academy's use of Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks is inspiring expansion; Caffrey says educators are considering extending the 1:1 Chromebook program to grades seven through nine.

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a suite of free, secure tools that includes Gmail, Calendar, Sites & Documents. Use it for collaboration and communication no matter where you are or which device you're using. Over 40 million students, faculty, and staff in schools around the world have gone Google with Google Apps for Education.

www.google.co.uk/edu

About Google Chromebooks

Chromebooks are designed to help students and teachers get things done quickly and easily. Devices start at £159 and are simple to manage at scale through a web browser. With several devices to choose from, it's easy to find a Chromebook that meets your students' needs. You can learn more here:

www.google.co.uk/edu



Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks also help the academy use its resources efficiently. For example, the school saved £60,000 in its first year of Chromebook use, since it hired few fewer substitute teachers (also known as cover teachers).

"Today, when their regular teachers are absent, students bring their Chromebooks to the school dining room and do the work that their teachers already assigned to them," Caffrey says. "This is an enormous change – the time is productive." More savings came from a decision to stop printing student planners, the notebooks in which students keep track of their assignments. "That saves us £1,500 each year," Caffrey says.

The school can also better use the space it previously set aside for computer labs. Instead of shuffling students from one room to another for a lab session, leaving the first classroom unoccupied, teachers and staff can schedule classes in more spaces.

The Streetly Academy's technology initiative is also improving parents' and students' perceptions of the school and its academic culture. "In the UK, when students reach 18, they're allowed to change to a different school," Caffrey explains. "You don't want students to decide to leave at that point, because we lose funds."

When the school's performance was not as high several years ago, some students did indeed make the choice to leave the academy. Today, with Chromebooks creating an engaging environment in almost every classroom, Caffrey says, "we've kept the student base stable, despite competition from local schools. We believe they're enjoying the communication they now have with their teachers, and that we're making school more interesting."