

# English primary school halves technology costs with NComputing's desktop virtualization solution

## Key benefits

- Widens access to e-learning
- Significant cost savings compared to PCs and competitive desktop virtualization solutions
- Ease of manageability thanks to remote monitoring
- Robust and durable nature perfect for classroom environment
- Performance of and support for multimedia applications

Colyton Primary School is representative of many schools in the UK that are looking to optimize ICT in order to improve teaching and learning, whilst at the same time working within tightening budgets. The school is situated in the heart of the Devonshire countryside and aims to give all of its 135 pupils from in and around the town of Colyton a top quality standard of education. However, it faces many of the challenges that come hand in hand with its rural location, including limited connectivity and lack of dedicated ICT personnel.

## The challenge—implement cost-effective, reliable and hard-wearing solution capable of running multimedia heavy applications

One of the biggest barriers to widening ICT access in schools is affordability and for Colyton, this was no exception. The school needed a way to replace its outdated traditional PCs with a durable, fast and efficient solution that would help widen access to ICT for teaching and learning.

The school previously had an ICT suite in place, comprising of desktop computers that were over 10 years old. This was proving a serious hindrance to lessons, with each PC booting up at different times and server updates taking hours to implement. So much so that Nic Harris, the school's head teacher, was spending his own time during evenings and weekends conducting ICT maintenance tasks and software updates.

The school had been saving for some time in order to upgrade its ICT suite and ideally would have looked to replace its PCs five to six years ago. However, with budgets already squeezed, it was deemed too expensive to replace these computers with brand new desktops. The school was looking to make a long term investment in e-learning systems that were hardwearing enough to avoid the need for regular replacement. They also needed to be able to support a range of education software including Softease and the 2Simple suite, plus web applications running multimedia content from the BBC and Scratch. Quite simply, an affordable but also powerful alternative to the PC was needed. This led the school to consider virtualization as a possible alternative.



## Implementing NComputing's desktop virtualization technology

NComputing was first brought to the school's attention by Alchemy Systems, a provider of ICT business support for organizations in the southwest of England. The school looked at replacing its old PCs with a variety of thin clients but ultimately it was NComputing's vSpace Platform with L300 thin clients which proved significantly more affordable than alternatives on the market. This was the case both in terms of initial implementation and cost of upkeep and didn't compromise on the end user experience. The NComputing vSpace Platform, combined with the L-series, gives schools, like Colyton, the flexibility and power needed to allow straightforward maintenance and management of ICT, as well as use of high quality video within lessons, at a highly competitive price point. For schools, and other educational institutions struggling with stretched budgets and lack



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of ICT personnel, **vSpace** proves the ideal choice thanks to its unified and centralised management capabilities that can be monitored remotely, in this case by Alchemy.

To help Colyton reach a final decision, Alchemy gave the school a number of *NComputing* desktop virtualization solutions to trial. Thanks to their durability, speed and low cost they proved to be a perfect fit for the school.

The roll out was coordinated and run by Alchemy over the beginning of the summer holidays to avoid any potential disruption to lessons and to provide plenty of time to verify that the new systems met all requirements. Alchemy installed **L300** thin clients into the school's ICT suite, running from a Microsoft RDP terminal server. Each thin client is mounted onto the back of the monitors to assist the school with another of its challenges – lack of space. As pupil numbers have increased over the years, space has become an increasing consideration; now though the school doesn't have to worry about big and bulky PCs as thin clients take up far less room.

In terms of maintenance, there have been no issues and thanks to Alchemy, responsibility no longer lies with Nic to ensure the computers are fully updated. The school's ICT needs are fully supported by Alchemy who advise the school when any updates need to be performed. For example, when there was a new piece of software to install on the old PCs, the time it would have taken was excessive. Now the school can simply contact Alchemy, send over a copy of the software and have it remotely installed onto the main server almost immediately. This shows the value of ICT as a managed service. With a shortage of ICT personnel on site, it's important that the school can take advantage of thin client technology to enable the remote management of desktops.

## Reaction from teachers and pupils

The previous ICT suite was barely used owing to its extremely unreliable nature and the disruption this would in turn cause to lessons. With *NComputing's* desktop virtualization solution this situation is now totally reversed. As Nic Harris explains: "There has been a great reaction from both teachers and pupils alike and thanks to the *NComputing* solution, ICT within the school has come along leaps and bounds. It lets me get on with the important task of running the school, rather than having to devote vast amounts of time to maintaining the ICT infrastructure."

The pupils have easily adapted to this new technology and are now enjoying regular lessons which incorporate e-learning. This is a result of the **L300** clients' superior performance and their support for educational software that can now regularly be put to use in lessons. The reliable and robust nature of the virtual desktop solutions have also made them ideally suited to a classroom, where traditional PCs often struggle from daily wear and tear.

## Widening ICT access

Given that the *NComputing vSpace* desktop virtualization solution has worked out at roughly half the cost of fitting a whole new suite of traditional PCs, the school was also able to refresh the ICT lab itself.

Thanks to this new technology, the school has changed beyond recognition, with an improved learning environment for the pupils. This has helped to widen access to e-learning throughout the school and enable teachers to access valuable materials that can enhance the learning experience.

### Colyton Primary School

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