Single tenancy boosts security, improves collaboration and delivers significant savings

Key Benefits

🔒 **Improved security across all sites**

💷 **Significant cost savings**

Collaborative teaching and learning environment

Reduced manual intervention

About Academy Transformation Trust

Headquartered in Sutton Coldfield, the Academy Transformation Trust is a national Multi Academy Trust comprising 21 schools operating across 10 local authorities in England. This large MAT includes primary, secondary, post-16 and further education institutions, employing around 1,700 staff who support over 13,000 students.

Business Drivers

James Howell, Director of ICT at Academy Transformation Trust explains: "Each academy within the Trust was operating its own individual Microsoft 365 tenant. With no centralised management in place, user accounts were managed by local Active Directories and synced to individual tenants. Microsoft 365 was not backed-up due to multiple tenants and management. It was a complex IT environment and challenging to keep secure."

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The ability to access shared resources was very difficult and collaboration was tough.
James continues: "Every time I needed to add a new user, they had to be set up as a guest and invited to the relevant school site. There was so much duplication of effort and work on every single school site which was expensive and time consuming to run."

The major concern for the Trust, however, was security. Schools hold lots of sensitive data and managing 21 different environments presented numerous points of entry for hackers to attack. **James reveals:** "My main priority was to address the security risk of the 21 school sites and find an easier way to manage this. With the right platform and better security in place, we then needed to introduce communication improvements so our teachers, pupils, and the 120+ admin staff could collaborate efficiently to enhance teaching and learning across the Trust."

The AspiraCloud Solution

Having partnered with AspiraCloud for many years for strategic advice and support with individual schools, including a SharePoint on-premises project and cloud adoption, James approached the team again to find a solution. The decision was made to move all 21 academies into one, existing central Microsoft 365 tenant. A four-phased approach was adopted, including a step-by-step check list for each of the four migration phases. Using Microsoft Planner to track the migration progress for each school, the Trust commenced with the primary schools, prior to rolling out the same process across the secondary academies.

James goes on: "By starting with the primary schools, who used fewer third-party apps, we learnt that the email migration tool we had selected was simply taking too long. Based on their experience, AspiraCloud recommended we deploy BitTitan software to migrate staff emails software instead. This automated solution was much more efficient and allowed us to migrate all mailboxes swiftly and seamlessly to the new tenant with very little end user disturbance."

Armed with this comprehensive migration plan, the Trust was able to duplicate the tasks and simply repeat the process across every school. Each secondary academy took around three weeks to complete, comprising 2 weeks to migrate all the data, followed by a week spent reviewing and testing to identify any anomalies or issues.

Business Benefits

With a clear plan in place, the Trust successfully migrated all 21 schools to the Microsoft 365 tenant in just 9 months, with no loss of data and virtually no disruption to the schools. Using SalamanderSoft's AD integration tools, all users, including 13,000 groups, are now synced with the Active Directory and the Trust's MIS. All user accounts and groups remain up to date, and any changes can be rapidly applied from a single, central platform, requiring very little user intervention.

Operating from one platform, teachers now find it easier to communicate and collaborate, both with each other and their pupils. Staff can work from any school site and easily log in with one single email to access and share class resources, documents, and files. With this modern and secure teaching and learning environment in place, the Trust can also confidently improve student engagement and optimise learning in interactive and connected classrooms.

The move to a cloud-based tenant has also reduced the need for on-site servers at the schools. This has in turn delivered several cost efficiencies across the Trust, as they can now make financial savings on energy, storage, air conditioning, and back-ups.

Security has also greatly improved, as the Trust only has one system to make really secure as opposed to 21 individual servers to manage. Holding vast amounts of sensitive data, the Trust has been able ban international log ins to reduce the number of accounts being compromised and introduce Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) with conditional access for all staff accounts - so when staff are working off the network, they are prompted for MFA to keep it secure.

> **AspiraCloud is a knowledgeable team who are passionate about the education sector and really understood our requirements. The Trust now has a centrally managed, yet collaborative and secure platform in place - and made cost savings along the way.**
>
> - James Howell, Director of ICT, Academy Transformation Trust

Why AspiraCloud

As experts in Microsoft licencing, AspiraCloud was able to review the current situation and propose improvements. **James explains:** "Cost savings and security are extremely important for schools. With their extensive experience in the Education sector, AspiraCloud completely understood these core challenges we were facing. Based on their recommendations, we upgraded our Microsoft licences to A3 which offers us additional security and Microsoft Defender. We also purchased additional A5 IT user licences. This licencing restructure has made around £30K in savings for the Trust."

Future Plans

"The success of this migration project has really kick started our plans to move more data into Azure," **concludes James.** "We will be working closely with AspiraCloud in the coming months for strategic advice to increase the use of the cloud at our academies, reduce the quantity of on-site hardware and servers, look at adopting Microsoft Intune for device and endpoint management and subsequently rollout Microsoft Defender for cyber security."