

Innovative strategy helps large MAT extend centralised support for fifteen schools

About Northern Star Academies Trust

Based in North and West Yorkshire, the Northern Star Academies Trust (NSAT) is a growing Multi Academy Trust. Having doubled in size in 2024, the Trust now comprises 15 schools, over 1,000 staff and 7,000 students across a range of primary and secondary schools located around the north of England.

Business Drivers

The Northern Star Academies Trust is committed to IT development – although challenged with limited budgets. **Peter Addison-Child, COO at NSAT explains:** “AspiraCloud has already helped us migrate nine schools onto a single Microsoft 365 tenant and we plan to migrate a further six schools with their support in the Autumn term. However, with the Trust growing so rapidly, it has become clear that we need to re-think internal IT resource to manage all our schools effectively. My goal is to ensure every user, in every school, can remain productive and keep the Trust working as a single, collaborative and cost-efficient entity.”

In the face of increasing demand, the inhouse IT team found itself constantly firefighting. **Peter goes on:** “We recognised we had a growing challenge when it came to IT support, without a matching increase in resource. We needed to rapidly redesign how we delivered this service across the 15 schools to find ways to work smarter.”

The AspiraCloud Solution

The strategic remit for the Trust was to refine and systematise their IT support to meet the future demands of a larger Trust – without any significant increase in resources available. Having successfully worked with AspiraCloud for the migration project, NSAT turned to the AspiraCloud Education consultancy team for advice. **Peter continues:** “With no additional resource, we really needed to formulate a working solution to deliver a more efficient IT support service across the Trust.”

After spending some time with the IT team, visiting the schools and interviewing key stakeholders, end users and Business Managers, AspiraCloud proposed a set of strategic steps for the Trust to adopt to achieve its objectives. First and foremost, they recommended that the Trust adopt a centralised IT support model. This new service should feature a dedicated email and telephone service for all IT support requests, regardless of location, along with a core IT Team to work across all 15 schools. This set up would not only offer end users a more effective way to access support, but also help to manage and deploy the IT team better.

The proposal also presented a 3-pronged approach to improving the IT service Trust-wide: looking at individual skill sets and additional training for the IT Team; developing an online knowledge base to encourage end users to self-support; and finally, an upskilling programme across the wider staff network to better manage printers, projectors and other school equipment as opposed to relying on IT support to resolve these issues.

Key Benefits



Improved IT support services



New, efficient ways of working



Reduced manual intervention



Solid foundation to grow the Trust



End user training & development

We want to ensure every user, in every school, can remain productive and keep the Trust working as a single, collaborative and cost-effective entity.

Business Benefits

By adopting a centralised IT support model, where every request is logged and owned, users will become accustomed to a quality service, ensuring that all issues are seen through to conclusion. This new way of working will also highlight any patterns of incidents which can be resolved indefinitely, instead of constant firefighting across all the schools.

Introducing a self-help knowledge base for end users will reduce some of the reliance on in-person IT support. An FAQ and collection of self-help materials should also increase the IT literacy for both staff and pupils. Combined with an 'always available' central IT support function to manage incoming

tickets, this will enable some issues to be resolved remotely, where IT staff can be deployed effectively on site as and when required, without worrying about leaving the IT office unstaffed.

Peter continues: "AspiraCloud also acknowledged our budget constraints and effectively suggested that our front-line IT staff look at the extensive Microsoft Learn online training to develop their skill set, as opposed to formal classroom training, which tends to be expensive. They also recommended a review of all our IT systems and Microsoft licences to identify further cost savings."



AspiraCloud really understood our challenges and proposed a solid foundation for us to build on. The new centralised IT support service will resolve IT issues Trust-wide, ultimately supporting both staff and student learning across every school.

- Peter Addison-Child, COO, NSAT



Why AspiraCloud

As experts in Microsoft 365 and the Education sector, AspiraCloud completely understood the key challenges and core objectives of the Trust. **Peter reveals:** "AspiraCloud helped us develop a plan, aligned with our strategic focus across the Trust to really work effectively. And they took our funding limitations into account to come up several creative ways of working – how to really do more with less. The team showed us that it was as much of a culture issue – not just a new IT solution – that would help to resolve our support challenges. AspiraCloud presented a set of clear, practical steps and recommendations, including re-educating both end users and the IT team, while simplifying the IT support environment, so we will be able to introduce a ticketing system to modernise and futureproof our IT service as the Trust continues to grow."

Future Plans

Following the review of IT support and implementing a new ticketing solution, which is due to go live in January, NSAT is then looking to introduce a new, Trust-wide Management Information System. "AspiraCloud helped us see the bigger picture," **concludes Peter.** "Based on their recommendations, we subsequently want to develop a 5-year vision for IT and a strategy to achieve this vision for the Trust. We already have ambitious plans to become cloud first; by removing servers from all our primary schools, we will be updating our MIS, and we are looking at ways to introduce new Microsoft technologies into the classroom. And not forgetting the success of the migration project, it is all so much easier for the Trust to grow further."



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