Outstanding OFSTED report underlines Chorlton Park Primary School's use of Virtue Technologies' expertise for wireless network platform

Background

Schools are increasingly requiring their ICT users to have mobility across their site. With laptops replacing desktops, students are used to devices that enable them to carry outwork anywhere within the school, not just ICT suites. Such an environment requires a secure and innovative wireless platform to enable new uses for ICT networks that just aren't possible with wires. Such a situation was faced by Chorlton park primary school in Manchester. With over 700 students and being based on a spread-out site, the school knew that going wireless was not a straight forward task as Lizzie Wray, assistant head at the school, explained. "We had previously had a couple of wireless access points installed but these were very limited in range and simply could not reach certain parts of the school buildings. We wanted a solution that could securely overcome this problem as well as being future-proof to support the school going forward."

The Solution

Chorlton Park had been dealing with Virtue Technologies for many years for ICT provision and support and being happy with the service approached them for their advice. After carrying out a thorough site survey and holding several meetings with school management, Virtue's consultants recommended the installation of Meru virtualised wireless LAN.

Wireless LAN virtualisation is a fundamentally different way of designing and building networks, using technology designed from the radio layer up to make wireless equivalent to or better than wired in every way. The Meru platform pools physical resources together and then partitions them in ways tailored to match each individual user or application. Where legacy networks cover large areas using a patchwork of microcells, Meru offers a seamless Virtual Cell that extends enterprise-wide. Where others depend on hub-like contention for access, Meru pools resources in Virtual Cell, resulting in a seamless blanket of coverage, and partitions them into Virtual Ports, each tailored to match each individual user or application. This brings power and versatility formerly unheard of in the wireless LAN and gives users on-demand connectivity.

Outstanding School

This investment in ICT has been recognised in a recent OFSTED report that ranked the school as outstanding. A key factor in achieving this was the way that ICT has been extremely well used across the curriculum, supported by the wireless platform. Having achieved the ICT mark in July 2007, the implementation of the wireless network enabled the school to become a Becta Specialist Hot House of online reporting. This is part of the leading Next Generation Learning initiative which links with the SSAT Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement (EPRA) initiative.

Meru's network architecture makes the wireless LAN more like Ethernet. Every user gets a private, personalised Virtual Port that has all the security, performance and predictability that applications expect from a wire. Meru's advanced radio technology also makes the network as reliable and scalable as Ethernet, while virtualisation makes it even easier to maintain.

With physical layer security alongside encryption and authentication, it can be more secure than Ethernet. And, by avoiding upgrades to edge switches, Wireless LAN virtualisation saves money when compared to wires.

The solution was installed in late 2009 by Virtue consultants. Commenting on the new wireless platform, Lee Burnett of Virtue Technologies said, "The Meru wireless network allows for easy management, offers improved stability and does not have the same issues as some other Wireless systems where contention and bandwidth can be major problems. Additionally it allows IP telephony to be integrated and so provides the future-proofing that Chorlton Park was looking for."

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