Managing school IT systems

Reference Article

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Managing school IT systems: what to consider

AUTHOR

Jim Docherty, UK public specialist at Dell KACE, explores the effective management of
IT systems in schools

ORIGINAL SOURCE

http://bettshow.wordpress.com/2013/01/25/managing-school-it-systems-what-to-consider/

ARTICLE

The last decade has seen a real change in classroom teaching as computing devices have evolved. The
computer in the classroom has gone from being a single bulky machine in the corner of the room to
becoming an Internet-connected tablet or laptop in the hands of each student. Assets and lessons are
delivered with IT supporting the learning experience in the classroom.

Technology has become an ever-greater part of both the curriculum itself and the vehicle by which lessons
are delivered. This means that effective technology management has grown in importance as well. Parallel to
the ongoing discussion about students getting value from their lessons, a debate has been sparked on how to
ensure pupils are getting the most from their schools' IT. How ever teachers want to use IT resources as part
of their lesson planning, the IT team at a school or college needs to monitor, manage, secure, update and
track these new devices that are entering the classroom.

As the school IT landscape grows in complexity, this is more difficult to keep up with. Previously, a school's
systems administrator could manage one set of assets, based on one operating system and a limited number
of applications. However, the growth in new computing devices, including tablets and smartphones, makes
that much rarer, leading to more variation in operating systems and a wider range of applications that have
to be supported. At the same time, different education establishments have different sets of pupils: a primary
or secondary school will have mostly school-owned devices to manage, while colleges and universities will
have to deal with pupil-owned devices in the classroom or lecture hall.

Rolling out an update or patching potential vulnerabilities could therefore cause real headaches for
sysadmins within education. Keeping these new assets up-to-date is becoming progressively more important
as the reliance on them for learning continues to increase. There is no 'one size fits all' model for education
IT, but there are ways in which the processes for support and IT management can be simplified.

Looking at automation for IT processes is a great way to reduce the impact that new devices can have on the classroom. From discovering and tracking assets to remote wiping and security policy enforcement, automating management tasks is one way to ensure that IT can keep up with all the different requirements they have on their plate. Similarly, reducing the manual overhead for systems management around mobile devices can be achieved through more automation of asset tracking, installation and tracking.

Sysadmin responsibilities and workload will continue to increase as the volume, complexity and vulnerability of technology in schools also continues to increase. Without the right tools, resources will be seriously drained. However, if correctly armed, a sysadmin can set and forget the automation of a large proportion of the everyday, repetitive tasks around IT assets. This allows IT to focus on the bigger projects that will drive value to the school and, ultimately, improve the education experience for its student

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