

FITS case study

Thornleigh Salesian College,
Bolton

Improving delivery of ICT technical support

Thornleigh is a secondary voluntary-aided comprehensive school with sports college status. Having about 1,670 pupils aged 11 to 18 plus 113 teaching staff and 69 associate staff, it is a large school. Yet the school's network manager, Kevin McAleer, does not have the air of someone struggling to keep his head above water coping with the myriad problems that can arise in a complex school network. Part of the reason lies in Kevin's belief that buying good quality equipment – preferably all from the same manufacturer – gives fewer headaches and more value for money in the long run.

About FITS

FITS is a set of best practice processes designed to provide a structured framework upon which to build the ICT support provision in a teaching establishment.

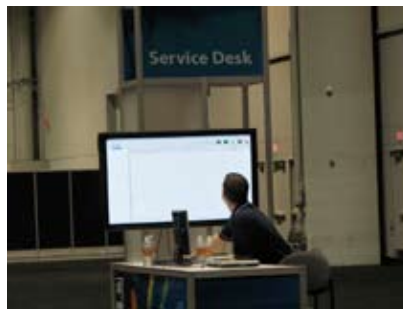
The FITS processes cover the four main functional areas of technical support provision:

- Reactive Processes
- Proactive Processes
- Change Processes
- Strategic Processes

The advice given within the Fits guidelines is neither definitive nor prescriptive and is of benefit and applicable to all schools irrespective of size or the technology in use. We recommend that the guidelines be adopted and adapted to fit each school individually, based on the school's resources and needs.

FITS
ICT Advice

Another reason for the calm is the adoption of Becta's FITS programme. It all began when Kevin attended an 'Implementing FITS' expert workshop. There, the participants assessed their current ICT support processes and analysed their needs to help determine the best order for them to implement FITS processes.



teacher's screen.

For Thornleigh, the implementation of just one process, the Service Desk, paid dividends almost immediately. Instead of collaring a technician in the corridor, teachers now call on Mike, who staffs the service desk, where they explain the problem. More often than not, Mike is able to resolve the issue there and then, either by talking the teacher through it or by taking over the

"We've worked out that Mike deals with 60% of the issues straight away," enthuses Kevin. "That leaves us more time to keep the hardware and software up to date, and make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible." Interestingly, Kevin has found that while the FITS approach is very useful – it is comprehensive, consistent and logical – the systems themselves do not have to be tremendously sophisticated. For example, the incident knowledge base used by the service desk is a simple spreadsheet. Kevin explains: "The important thing is to get a system in place that works. Start small and build up from there."

The key message we want to reinforce is that ICT services are there solely to support the school and its efficient and effective delivery of teaching and learning.

It is possible to begin by implementing any process within the framework. However, we recommend that you work through the FITS getting started processes first. Even if you currently have a means of recording and monitoring incidents, we believe that some benefit may be gained by working through the FITS getting started processes to identify whether there are some areas that you could improve on.

If you are a primary school or school that relies on an external provider for the majority of their ICT management and support, you will find that in most cases this will be all that you need to implement to make a major impact on the control and management of ICT services in your school.

Secondary schools and larger primary schools that undertake their own technical support will benefit from implementing all of the FITS processes.

Getting started with Fits is very easy. At The Fits Foundation, we maintain a register of approved trainers that can take your support staff through the Fits material and prepare them for the accreditation examination.

To locate a training provider near you and more information about the Fits accreditation, email customerservices@becta.org.uk, call 0800 877 8777.

Our 10 main process topics



So has it been worth the expense of employing someone to sit behind a desk for several hours a day? At first some staff were sceptical, but the benefits became evident very quickly. The Service Desk is just one of several processes Kevin has introduced through the FITS programme. For example, software and hardware upgrades are not implemented on an ad hoc basis, but through a rigorous process that minimizes disruption to people's work.

Although it has taken time to implement the changes, the results have been noticeable. Staff often tell Kevin that the service they enjoy from his team is second to none, and all the other secondary schools in the area recognize Thornleigh Salesian College as a beacon of excellence as far as technical support is concerned.

Kevin agrees that it wasn't a completely smooth ride, because there is inevitably some resistance to change. "People often want something done immediately," says Kevin, "and don't appreciate the value in going through a proper process. But ultimately they see the benefits in reduced 'down time' and less risk of disasters occurring."

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