CASE STUDY

BRYANSTON

REDEFINING NETWORK BOUNDARIES TO DELIVER EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

The initial approach to Bryanston School is undoubtedly impressive. Visitors are taken along a mile-long drive, uphill to the last stately home built in Britain, set in 400 acres of Dorset countryside.

“But the thing I always tell visitors,” says Mark Mortimer, headmaster of Bryanston, “is don’t be seduced by the buildings and the setting. Schools are more than the grounds and the facilities. They are about people and relationships.”

So how does a boarding school, home to 700 students and 180 teaching staff, continue to excel when the buildings are closed and the children are sent home?

REPLICATING THE BRYANSTON EXPERIENCE REMOTELY

Bryanston’s aim is that students ‘will leave as well-balanced 18-year-olds, ready to go out into the wider world’. Pupils are encouraged to experience a wide range of academic subjects and extra-curricular activities; each pupil benefits from one-to-one tutoring throughout their time at Bryanston. More than 10% of students come from overseas.

The challenge around Covid-19 was how to replicate this experience remotely.

“My concern was how to ensure the development and education of the pupils was not disrupted to an extent where it would be significantly disadvantageous for them to be taught remotely,” says Mortimer. “We wanted to retain all of those elements that differentiate a Bryanston education.”

With a month between lockdown and the start of the summer term, Bryanston needed to provide a full curriculum of teaching to students around the world, plus a level of pastoral care. And it needed to involve all stakeholders: the students, the staff and the parents.

“Bryanston is a full-on seven days a week experience,” says Mortimer. “Education is not just what happens in the classroom.”

LEVERAGING AN ESTABLISHED TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM

The school benefits from years of sustained investment in IT infrastructure. The Aruba architecture comprises 400-plus access points blanketing the campus, managed by two 7000 Ser-

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**REQUIREMENTS**

- Enable the operating model to change overnight without disruption
- Redefine the school boundaries to a global scale
- Maintain the education and development of pupils
- Ensure the continuity of the Bryanston experience during lockdown
- Uphold the academic and pastoral continuity for pupils

**SOLUTION**

- 802.11ac Indoor & Outdoor APs
- Mobility Controllers
- Aruba Campus Core & Access Switches
- Aruba ClearPass for access control
- AirWave Network Management
- Aruba VIA VPN clients

**OUTCOMES**

- Enables seamless streaming of school assemblies and classes
- Provides high performance Teams meetings or Zoom from the school
- Allows IT staff to remotely and securely maintain the network
- Opens up new possibilities and practices post-lockdown
- Transforms the school for fresh digital experiences, unlocks wider potential

We’ve proved we can deliver a Bryanston education to 700 students, in all four corners of the world.

MARK MORTIMER
HEADMASTER, BRYANSTON SCHOOL
ries Mobility Controllers. Aruba AirWave and ClearPass provide network health and management. The network core and access provide the backbone for uninterrupted and scalable traffic within the school as well as for external communications, particularly during lockdown.

It means there has always been a digital element to the school’s operations. Homework can be managed through online collaborative areas, there is an app for marking work and engaging with tutors, and a tool for tracking the whereabouts of students and devices on campus.

“Our staff are proficient in the use of technology,” says Andy Barnes, the school’s director of technology. “Technology has always been transparent here. We know the network to be fast, reliable and easy to use.”

SUPPORT, ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION
The bigger issue, Barnes continues, was establishing new class management policies. Over an intense ten-day period, the school devised a new digital etiquette. This established ground rules for class disruption, online chat and the use of video.

“We want lessons to be collaborative, but we needed to create new social norms,” says Barnes. “It’s quite easy to pick up visual clues in the classroom as to a student’s mood. It’s not so easy online. We’ve created more reasons to engage, increased the number of online interactions and used video extensively.”

There was also a support network for teachers. While all teachers were familiar with Bryanston’s technology infrastructure, some were more comfortable than others. The school worked to share tips, advice and best practise.

Mortimer and Barnes agree that classes were perhaps the simplest aspect to replicate online. Pre-lockdown, Bryanston already made use of audio/visual content, flipped learning (where students come to class prepared to give feedback on homework), and online feedback from teachers.

“The life and soul of the school is communication,” says Barnes. “We had to work hard to develop the ‘social glue’, the reasons to stay in touch. And this had to be light-hearted. Not all conversations have to be heavy. The greater the trust in the relationship, the easier it will be to have those tough conversations.”

To that end, assemblies, house newsletters, cooking classes, quizzes and remote concerts have all continued online.

EXTENDING HORIZONS AND RAISING AMBITION
Three months on from the start of lockdown, and Mortimer is delighted at the way teachers, students and parents have adapted:

“We’ve proved that we can deliver a Bryanston education to 700 students in all four corners of the world at very short notice. Technology has enabled us to make this change, but the thing I’m most proud of is the change of mindset. People have stepped out of their comfort zone, tried something new and found that it has worked.”

One aspect of the Bryanston philosophy is for students to “intelligently challenge convention”.

“This has been the most significant and disruptive challenge Bryanston has ever faced. It’s a unique moment,” says Mortimer. “Covid-19 has given our students a real-life opportunity to demonstrate they can think creatively. And they’ve surpassed expectations.”

There will be long-term implications, he continues. New practices applied in lockdown will be applied when things eventually return to normal. Online communication has meant there has been more dialogue with parents, short video chats between students and tutors have proved popular, audio/visual lesson content is a hit. All will continue.

“We’ve conducted surveys with parents to gauge their feelings on how well their children are doing,” Mortimer adds. “We’ve had a 93% satisfaction rating. Parents feel we’ve supported their children academically and emotionally. And we feel more connected to parents.”

Other ideas continue to be developed. With audio/visual content proving popular, Bryanston is looking at recording more lessons. There is no reason this year’s content could not be used in the future, says Mortimer, freeing teachers to engage students in new ways. Long-term, the school could develop and broadcast a range of teaching content.

“Our teachers have responded brilliantly, but I’m hoping this event inspires a new approach to teaching,” says Mortimer. “This event has energised good teachers.

“All the evidence suggests that through tumultuous times the great organisations look to the future. This event has extended our horizon, yet throughout we’ve remained authentically Bryanston.”