



Outwood Grange Academies Trust

Giving Every Child a Tier 3 Education with support from Node4.



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“We specialise in the transformation of underperforming schools” said Director of ICT, Stuart Jones. “We go where we feel we can make a difference to student’s lives”.

“Our CEO firmly believes that everyone deserves a good education and I’m proud to say we have had a lot of success as several have gone from special measures to outstanding in their Ofsted report. That’s no mean feat. Outwood Academy Adwick in Doncaster was our second academy to ever join and that’s now at outstanding.”

The Customer

Outwood Grange Academies Trust began as Outwood Grange Academy in Wakefield at a time before Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) had become an established method for school improvement.

With an outstanding reputation and Ofsted report, it was asked to provide support to other schools in the area under a National Leaders of Education contract. From there it went from strength to strength.

Becoming a MAT in 2009 was a natural evolution for Outwood Grange Academy given its proven success. Growth started out in a very organic way. In 2013, it had progressed to six schools and a small team for change. Because of its continued and sustained success, it has now grown to include 31 academies at both Primary and Secondary level.

Tech is a massive driver for the Trust. It supports everything. The Trust runs school transformations from Chesterfield to Redcar and Cleveland so covers a large patch. Without tech, it wouldn’t be able to deliver and successfully manage the schools on budget.



The Challenge

In 2013, the Trust leased a whole rack with another data centre provider in Leeds – hosting a virtual solution to manage its HR, Payroll and backup systems. Unfortunately, the IT company had limited stability, with a variety of new owners and a lack of investment. Following numerous IT incidents, the Trust decided it couldn't house its critical systems there anymore, so started to look for a new provider, with lessons learned from the old one.

Budgets within education are famously tight. The Trust's goal is to make sure that every child in the country gets a 'grade A' education and, to do this, it doesn't just maintain good schools but turn underperforming locations around.

With 31 schools, if support systems weren't centralised, there would need to be 31 finance people, 31 HR people and 31 IT staff members. The challenge for Node4 was to centralise everything to offer flexibility and agility to give each academy the same robust support, and to allow continued, agile expansion of the Trust.

The Solution

"We engaged with Node4 because our previous experience made us realise that the cheapest isn't necessarily the best, and we wanted a provider with a history of success which owned its own facility. We were really impressed from the get-go with what Node4 could provide us. Nothing was too much trouble. Anything we needed was no problem, right down to the quirky little intricacies we specified. The team were happy to accommodate us and for Node4, anything we asked for, was just business as usual," Stuart continued.

"With Node4's help we very easily relocated our critical centralised telephone infrastructure, backup systems, e-mail server and HR/Finance and Payroll facilities. This makes our model very cost effective and allows support staff to work across multiple academies. It also means that everyone can get what they want from one location. Without this tech, we just couldn't cover that area with such a lean staff count. We also couldn't allow our staff such flexible, easy working."

There are several administrative and financial benefits for academies that are members of the Trust. Once joined, the first capital project involves implementing a phone system, compatible with other academies so they benefit from free calls.

Key Outcomes:

- Flexible, tailored solution.
- Centralised, cost-effective system.
- Flexible working for staff.

The Feedback

The Trust describes everyone they spoke to at Node4 as professional and knowledgeable. *"No one promised something that didn't materialise,"* Stuart said. *"They always have someone with the credentials to answer our questions. That gives us real confidence."*

The Trust was on quite a tight turnaround because its payroll system was housed in the original data centre and 4500 members of staff needed paying on time. There was only a small window to move systems from the old data centre to Node4's, so it couldn't afford any problems.

"The full move, and everything involved, went ahead as promised. That sounds simple but it's alarming how often businesses don't deliver. It was a totally smooth transition and payroll was up and processing again the next day."

"The systems and agreements that the Trust has with Node4 pays for itself within a year, compared to using any other solution. The uptime agreement it got from Node4 couldn't be offered by many other local providers to satisfy payroll and finance. It had to be a data centre of Node4's capability."

"What keeps us operating optimally is the system's reliability, ease-of-use and central management with no hiccups. Because it's centralised and not fixed, staff can pick up work from home and keep us running smoothly and effectively."

"The key goal of the Trust is to make sure that every child gets the same education. Node4 holds our whole back up and disaster recovery platform, so every night we send 27,000 users' files and folders to be stored securely. We keep all that data for 365 days."

"If we experience any kind of disaster, we can have an entire school back up and functional on our stand-by equipment within 24-36 hours. That's massive. We have had to get a server from back up in the past, but now, with the transit we have with Node4, it only takes a couple of minutes. Node4 supports us so that we can support the children and meet our goals."