

# State of the art infrastructure for Priestnall School

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**Gary Pearson**  
Network Manager, Priestnall School



## Key Benefits

- Network resilience and redundancy as standard
- Dedicated virtual servers for each learning-critical service
- New storage driving changes to how teaching tools are delivered
- Desktop PCs offering greatly improved reliability to pupils

*Priestnall School has a local and national reputation for excellence and high levels of achievement. Effective learning and attainment is at the heart of their philosophy, creating a climate which nurtures ability and develops strengths. The school is rightly proud of its achievements - examination results at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE level are high and increasing year-on-year.*

With proven improvements in attainment, the school's Headmistress Jo Morgan realised the need to ensure that IT systems could keep up with the secondary school's fast-moving aspirations.

For the past few years, the school had been running a well-known network and classroom management system from another company. The main issues surrounded the hardware, with old outdated servers presenting critical issues that significantly affected the teaching and learning experience.

Network Manager, Gary Pearson, explains: "We were suffering from massive hardware problems. If any of our servers developed a fault, we could be without mission critical services such as Email or print servers for 2 or 3 days whilst we sourced the relevant parts and we went through a total of 27 HDDs on one server alone in 3 years. Managing the storage space was a weekly balancing act that would see us manually clearing out log files on the server. It was madness."

The school wanted to move on a network architecture that would reflect the forward-thinking attitude of the school and its pupils. They wanted a solution that was state of the art - something that no other school in authority had.

## Becta ICT Infrastructure Services Framework

Once the decision had been made to rip out the poor performing network, the ICT team at Priestnall began to assess the Becta website for suitable partners to help deliver their vision of the future. 6 Becta accredited suppliers were invited to tender for the work, including Ergo.

Iain Faulkner, Assistant Network Manager, says "I'd heard glowing reports from a friend at another school who had used Ergo's infrastructure service in the past."

Once the tender responses had been received, it became clear that Ergo offered the best overall value proposition.

Gary continues: "Ergo were chosen because in addition to offering one of the lowest prices – everything was done in-house. The account management, the building of the PCs, the infrastructure consultancy - Ergo did it all under one roof."

"Other suppliers on the shortlist were sub-contracting out the infrastructure part and we were keen to have a single point of contact for the entire project."

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## Virtualised reality

As a self-fulfilling ICT department that takes pride in managing their own network and IT estate, Priestnall School wanted to install a vanilla Windows network. Although this was clearly set out in the invitation to tender, other suppliers still tried to force their network management solution onto the school at every opportunity.

Driving the entire solution from the outset was a fully virtualised VMware ESXi infrastructure. Comprising of 3 physical servers, the school now has 15 virtual servers to take forward their learning-critical ICT services.

Given the previous issue of network downtime affecting operations at Priestnall, network redundancy was central to ensuring that systems at the school are always highly available.

Gary says: "Ergo's solution means that if hardware does fail, we can failover to another server until other one is brought back online. We can get back up and running in a matter of minutes as opposed to days. The fact is though, since Ergo installed our new network we haven't had to failover at all. We have suffered no unscheduled downtime."

## Shared storage delivering true learning benefits

Shared Storage was another key component of Ergo's next generation infrastructure solution. 2 Hitachi SMS100 SANs were deployed – one to supplement the virtualisation and another for user data storage.

This has resulted in marked efficiency improvements to the way that curriculum learning tools are delivered. For example, the Science department previously had a very manual process for video-based learning tools. A teacher would have to book out a DVD, meaning that only one teacher could use a particular video at any one time. With the new SAN configuration videos are stored electronically and streamed on-demand direct to the teacher's device – giving a greater flexibility in the way teaching materials are used in the classroom.

Completed over a 2 week period in the summer holidays, the overall implementation went very smoothly with a slight compatibility issue between

the oversized server cabinet and a narrow doorframe proving the only temporary obstacle.

## Desktop of the class

As part of the summer project, Ergo also equipped the school with 370 Ergo MiniPC desktops offering high performance and one of the lowest warranty return rates in the industry.

Iain explains: "Our previous desktops from another manufacturer were always being repaired for something. The Ergo Desktop PCs have proved much more resilient against the testing day-to-day usage of a secondary school. Out of 370 machines, only a handful have had any problem in 8 months."

## Why Ergo?

Gary and Iain conclude: "We've already recommended Ergo's infrastructure services to several schools. They have an honest approach and really take onboard what it is you're trying to achieve. Ergo took the time to understand where we wanted to take teaching and learning at Priestnall School then looked at a solution to help meet our specific requirements.

"Other suppliers were obsessed with trying to install an infrastructure that was right for their needs, not ours. Ergo offered us a way forward that will future proof our network for some years to come."

