

Re: Rationale for EdTech hardware provision at primary

Introduction and vision: 2023-24

The landscape of device and software choices is full of so many possibilities and options for primary education. From the huge tech giants, to smaller EdTech software companies, schools need to remain outward looking and receptive to new possibilities; to look carefully at what can be achieved for staff and pupils as they strive to teach and learn in the best possible way. Schools and MATs need to use knowledge and experience to make critical judgements – at an early stage – as to whether a technology will be worthwhile or not, always guided by a clear understanding of the day-in-day-out demands of busy teachers and classrooms.

Unfortunately, technology has an established history of failed initiatives in schools; failing in its own inadequacies, or before it is sufficiently optimised for purpose, or after initial enthusiasm has waned (or an agenda or purpose changes). Schools and classroom environments are demanding and fast paced – technologies need to integrate with that environment smoothly and reliably; they need to genuinely help, not be an approach that almost worked and was therefore discarded. We need to remain acutely aware of these 'technology traps' and guard carefully against them, so as not to cause frustration or waste the precious time of teachers and children.

When technology shows definite promise and purpose, we should strive to further its impact and optimise its usefulness, embedding it into practice and normalising processes. Well-implemented training, guidance and recommendations, have a clear place in helping teachers to use technologies well and stay up-to-date.

It can be incredibly exciting to work with young children and technology for learning, their endless enthusiasm pushing learning onwards. Yet as self-evaluating teachers, we must temper such enthusiasm by constantly stepping back to ask questions: ***Why am I working in this way? Does this method truly save time and provide children with a worthwhile experience? What knowledge and skills does this way of working provide for children? Does this method of working prepare children for their future in education and beyond successfully? Does this way of working help within the underlying environment of accountability, and current OFSTED framework?***

Tech can, and does, move fast. Yet education staff need a steady rate of purposeful change, not flip-flopping from one new initiative to another. Trialling new technologies on a small-scale before scaling up is essential; being aware of the competition and change that will come over following months can be important. In general, periods of considered thought (and evaluation) create the steadiest and most effective long-term outcomes. Often, we need to resist the urge to jump fully fledged into the next hyped-up initiative, and take time to consider the options and ramifications of such choices.



Devices for learning across schools

As an academy group, we continue to spend time evaluating classroom technology and making evaluative judgements on what will work best within the context of schools. Ease of access, genuine simplicity, and remembering that children are themselves learning the fundamentals of how to use technology – these are clear principals that should continue to drive our approach. No school is the same as another, yet there are well-defined trends when considering the best devices for different age groups and purposes.

Such direction and purchasing choices for a school should never be taken in isolation from conversations with senior leadership teams and appropriate teaching staff. Individual schools will have individual requirements that need to be taken account of, such as:

- Deploying devices in a way whereby they are physically distributed in a school for effective timetabling and easy, quick, reliable access
- A wish to use particular software packages in a lesser or more frequent manner
- Meeting the needs of SEND pupils and cases where individual devices are required for accessibility
- The current preference of the school to balance traditional routines with digital learning and resources. There is no point overfilling a school with tech when teaching and learning is not in a place to use such provision. Indeed, this can result in counter-productive outcomes for speed and organisation

Below are clear points around the different types of devices and how they may be deployed best across a typical primary setting. *Our current strategy does not pick a single, individual tech manufacturer, based on the understanding that different technologies have particular strengths within and across different phases and subjects in teaching. We want teachers to be in control; and have the right tools for the job.*

We also recognise that there is an inherent advantage to children experiencing more than one type of device in their primary years of education. We do want 1:1 device ratios to be easily possible within classes on a frequent and everyday basis, yet issuing children with their own devices – at this point in time – may well carry as many negatives as positives for many primary settings looking for practical and sustainable everyday access.





Chromebooks as a majority device, focussing on KS2 delivery.

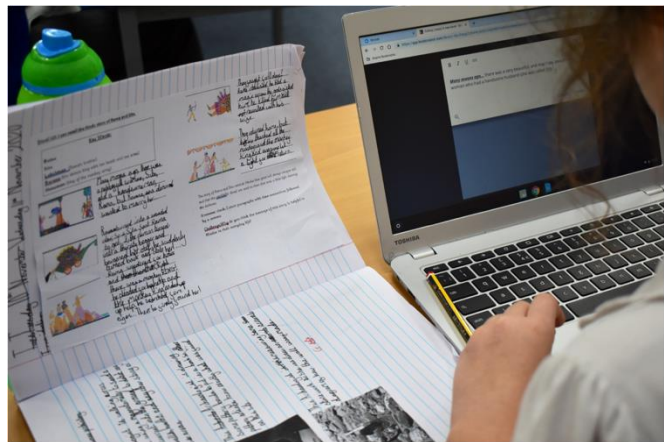
EdTech can be implemented amongst the older children in a primary school more easily and with more obvious purpose, with many teachers at KS2 naturally full of ideas for how the tech could help. Chromebooks, with fixed keyboards and trackpads, are all-in-one units that lend themselves to children's independent mastery of simple-to-use

technologies within classrooms. There is no doubt that they have been well-received by primary education establishments, and in many ways represent the most important update to technology in schools over the last decade.

We recommend devices are stored and charged in whole-class portable trolleys, preferably with at least a couple of spare devices as a contingency. Ideally, mixed sets of device models are avoided for clarity and consistency.

Some clear advantages to Chromebook devices:

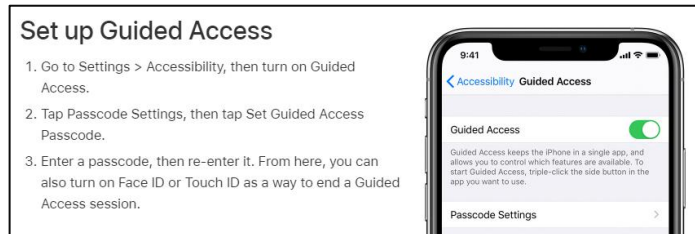
- Great battery life including over longer term.
- Individual children's accounts and autosaving principles built-in to the web-based environment – means that children's work can be saved and recalled effortlessly.
- Remote management by IT departments is immediate and very powerful.
- Quick to start up, low maintenance devices.
- Pricing tends to be very competitive and value-rich over a 4+ year cycle.
- Fixed keyboards promote the gaining of important typed and keyboard shortcut digital skills, allow the written word to be edited in detail, and allow digital learning processes to be integrated into subjects with further ease.



iPads as a further resource – in smaller numbers - to successfully fulfil additional aspects of curriculum need

iPads have a history of usage in schools both by staff and pupils. They carry a number of strengths for teaching and learning, namely:

- Generally robust and long-lasting devices with great battery life.
- Immediate access to apps and internet-based resources.
- Media and sound capabilities are easy, reliable and accessible – filming / video editing / media production possibilities are a key strength. Clamps and stands allow devices to be used in media productions easily.
- Particular Computing curriculum elements such as video and sound can be utilised well with iPads.
- Guided Access gives control over single devices / allows for targeted intervention apps for particular children / groups
- Effective for EYFS and KS1 children to experience digital learning.
- Good supplementary portable devices for staff use / EYFS journaling / photos etc.
- Generally high-quality range of education apps



The negatives of iPads range from the difficulty of using a touch-screen for typing, to the lack of automatic workflow for teachers, to the inflexibility for IT staff managing such devices remotely.

Advised deployment in school.

Particular attention needs to be paid on keeping sets of iPads as a workable, usable resource. Schools **must** consider the routines and processes that need to be kept in place to make sure that devices do not become separated and left in different locations around a school. Timetabling of devices; children as *Digital Leaders* to take care of equipment; adults making sure that devices are returned to one point – these are all techniques that will help keep the resource usable. A set of 8 devices in a portable box, with a charging setup whereby power leads are carefully but robustly taped together, is a useful way to make sure that individual devices are not separated, or power leads go missing. (The leads are particularly vulnerable to being borrowed / broken – they must be carefully fixed in place). Fixed, lockable charging boxes can be useful, though this expense can be avoided if a well-considered portable box setup is created. Robust iPad cases, *not* the folio type, produce the hassle-free, pick up and go approach needed for children, especially the youngest.



An example of typical deployment within a school might be to have two sets of 8 iPads that can be timetabled and called upon strategically by staff. A single set of 8 may work when groups of children are working together with a single device; when the two sets are pooled together, it allows for 1 between 2 access. This builds in flexibility to a manageable, affordable resource.

