

The Friends' School

CASE STUDY



The Friends' School Introduces Efficient HPE Nimble Storage Solution

Objective

As The Friends' School's existing storage solution neared its end of support, they needed to make a planned upgrade. By managing this on a yearly cycle, the school determined that it could reduce risk and increase application performance.

Approach

To keep its position as a technology-smart educator, the school sought potential options that would work to a planned IT infrastructure cycle where it replaces equipment well before it reaches end of support. A number of storage solutions were investigated, with intelligence, efficiency and reliability among the priorities. HPE Nimble Storage impressed, and The Friends' School sought quotes from two providers, with cost, technical capability and trusted relationship the key criteria considered.

IT Outcome

- Newer storage array, featuring intelligent technology.
- Reduced maintenance requirement gives the IT team more time elsewhere.
- Reliable data protection to meet the stringent requirements of the school's sensitive data.
- Increased efficiency to deliver applications quickly.

Business Outcome

- Reduced risk associated with newer technology that is under support.
- Greater system performance allows deployment of performance-intensive applications.
- Reduced system administration time needed to maintain the storage array.

The Background

Founded by Quakers in 1887, The Friends' School ("the school") prides itself on offering a balance of spiritual and intellectual growth to its students. While the spirit of its founding fathers in nurturing young people is maintained, today the school must use technology well in order to maintain its outstanding academic results.

The many exciting educational and business applications used by the school depend on a modern, well-managed core infrastructure. Storage plays an intrinsic role in building the technology foundations that the school depends on in its delivery of services to students and staff.

The Challenge

The school's IT environment depended on Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) disk arrays for its storage, and while they had proven to be a reliable choice, they were nearing their end of life. For The Friends' Schools' Network and System Administrator, it was important to manage the replacement of infrastructure before it becomes problematic.

"It was an older system, and our strategy is to upgrade before things fall apart," said the school's Systems Administrator.

"As equipment ages, there is a higher rate of disk failures. After four to five years, we should replace the hardware."

While any problem disks were replaced by HPE within a 48-hour service agreement, and represented no discernible interruption to staff and student applications, the previous systems demanded management time in a very busy IT team.

"It created an additional administration overhead," confirmed the school's Systems Administrator.

The risk of running unsupported equipment was not lost on the school, and when all related costs were considered, the numbers supported the strategy of planned upgrades. The Friends' School knew it would have cost more money to keep the equipment and pay maintenance, so we wanted to upgrade as part of our infrastructure lifecycle."

Equally important, replacing hardware is an opportunity that the school was keen to capitalise on. New learning systems can place heavy demands on storage systems, requiring speed beyond the capability of the existing disk arrays. While several possible solutions were considered, when the school's Systems Administrator saw HPE Nimble Storage solutions at an industry event, he recognised the potential.

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"We wanted HPE Nimble Storage after seeing its capabilities, and it's inside architecture. We could know exactly how our storage is performing, when it was reaching the end of its capacity, and it offers more intel than other options."

Because the previous storage solution offered little insight into usage, it was determined that the school had more capacity than was needed. With storage in the form of two arrays of five terabytes on two sites, he saw the opportunity to make a better investment.

"We wanted a more efficient and intelligent solution, and we didn't need that much capacity."

IT Outcome

Nine months before the existing platform was due for replacement, the school selected Data#3's proposed solution, based on the HPE Nimble Storage HF20H Array. Work then started with a local Data#3 solutions architect, who held several workshops with the team at the school to fine-tune the plan and prepare for the transition of the storage environment during the school holidays. It was the Data#3 team comprising of a solutions architect, account manager and technical engineering specialist that made the project run smoothly.

"The Account Management team is very good at what they do, they are proactive, and willing to support the customer. In particular, the architect and engineer were a pleasure to work with, very qualified, so I didn't have to sit down and explain everything," explained the school's Systems Administrator.

The HPE Nimble Storage device checked all the boxes for The Friends' School, featuring improved data protection, plus exceptional intelligence that would increase efficiency and reduce administration time needed. Its immediate alerts to problems has proven especially valuable.

"Because the HPE Nimble Storage machine is sending heartbeats to the cloud, we receive email quicker than our monitoring systems can tell us about issues. It creates an auto ticket, and we have a call from an engineer asking if we need help."

The schools' Systems Administrator described the outcome as a 'hybrid storage solution' in that it combines low cost disk storage for less demanding applications and fast flash storage where speed and performance are more critical, all controlled from a single point. The school has further stretched capacity by savvy use of cloud storage to complement its on-premises solution as for some applications it made sense to just let the cloud provider do the work.

Business Outcome

Education is a highly competitive sector, with students, parents and staff having high expectations about use of technology. The school is conscious of its responsibility in preparing youngsters for a fast-changing and digital workplace where every student has an iPad or MacBook Air to support their learning journey.

"We are a tech-forward school. I have worked in enterprise organisations, and the technology we have in place today is very competitive – we have the same brands and technology as big businesses," said the Systems Administrator.

"Corporations would be proud to have this. The school expects us to deliver that level of infrastructure."

The school's strategy of replacing equipment in a planned process avoids the business risks associated with out of support equipment, with the Systems Administrator saying that it would have cost more money to keep the old devices and pay maintenance. As in any corporation, the school depends on its IT systems to deliver a consistent service and, according to the Systems Administrator, when the core infrastructure operates as it should and modern applications can be deployed, nobody notices it.

"Some work can now happen quicker, and the network is faster also – but the business won't notice that. In some cases, we have ten times the performance."

With reduced system administration time needed thanks to the intelligent HPE Nimble Storage systems, skilled staff can focus their energies elsewhere. When help is needed, though, the Systems Administrator has been impressed by the HPE Nimble Storage service.

"When we call, it is answered by one single person, this is the only person we have to deal with, and they'll fix it. We don't get passed around to person after person."

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Conclusion

While the HPE Nimble Storage technology is exceptional, for The Friends' School, a major success factor was having the solution tailored by a strong technology partner. Throughout the engagement, the Data#3 team worked with the school's skilled staff to ensure the right fit and a smooth implementation.

"We have had Data#3 as a partner for a number of years, so we have a good, trusted relationship, and we reached out to them first as they are a platinum partner with HPE. They were competitive and they have the best service," said the Systems Administrator.

While the solution simplifies a complex element of the school's infrastructure foundations, when it came to determining the success of the project, there was a simple measure that Data#3 delivered fully.




"It's just working – as it should. That's the best that can happen, it doesn't stop performing. If you can, go HPE Nimble Storage - and work with Data#3."



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**Klaus Dengel, Systems Administrator,
The Friends' School**

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