

HOW THOMAS'S LONDON DAY SCHOOLS ARE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



The Thomas's London Day Schools group comprises of four co-educational preparatory schools and a kindergarten. With a focus on independent learning and self-discovery, the schools encourage pupils to research and read into subjects that interest them. This complements a broader school curriculum, which is characterised by high academic standards and multi-million pound learning facilities. Today, the group offers education to over 1,950 pupils between 2.5 and 13 years old.

Thomas's schools rely heavily on technology. They provide students with shared device facilities as well as individual devices to take home. This means that, collectively, there are hundreds of desktop computers and over 1,000 iPads across the four schools and kindergarten, all used as part of everyday learning. Technology dependence also extends to the staff, who often use laptops, mobile phones and tablets to keep up with their workload, and who access school materials via a VPN when off-site.

However, over the last few years, the school found that it was catering for more tech than it could comfortably handle. Teachers were increasingly using multiple devices concurrently, and students needed individual devices more than they did shared. Also, with the growing number of staff and pupil handsets, tablets and laptops trying to get online, the Thomas's IT team were receiving more and more complaints about service reliability.

It became clear that an updated firewall was needed. Michael Swart, Thomas's London Day Schools' IT Manager, explains: "The problem was that scalability was limited. Our solution required firewalls to be licensed. And this was hugely problematic as we were facing a growing cohort of users. Our before-school and after-school clubs pushed usage traffic up. So did students, teachers and the administration office. So, if there was an increase in devices, there was also an increase in costs due to the license model our previous provider had. This impacted all of our growth plans, because we had a lot more devices coming onto the network than we ever had expected."

The need for a new solution was made especially more urgent when new Prevent and Ofsted legislation were introduced. Suddenly, as well as being ill-suited, Thomas's London Day Schools found that its network security solution was also no longer compliant. There was no product set that would support safe guidance.

"It was clear that Fortinet offered simplicity and scalability to a level that other solutions couldn't match."

– Michael Swart
IT Manager, Thomas's London Day Schools

DETAILS

CUSTOMER: Thomas's London Day Schools

INDUSTRY: Education

LOCATION: London

BUSINESS IMPACT

- Compliance with Prevent and Ofsted legislation
- Reduced time needed for IT support or maintenance
- Scalable solution fit for the future

SOLUTIONS

- FortiGate 300D
- FortiManager 200D
- FortiAnalyzer 400D

“Our heads and principals considered it a business challenge that desperately needed addressing,” Swart recalls. “Because as well as needing to meet the minimal compliance requirements, they also wanted greater visibility on user habits, particularly around application level control. The previous content filtering solution was perhaps fit for purpose about five years ago, but suddenly it wasn’t anymore.”

The need for a better way of working was clear, which is why the schools looked to replace their security infrastructure across their six sites, with a primary focus on firewalls.

SINGLE VENDOR SUCCESS

The school’s decision-making process was relatively straightforward. Swart explains: “When we started to understand what was possible across the legacy network, we also began to think about the future. What would the schools need in terms of Wi-Fi and upgrades? The more we discussed it, the more a single vendor solution made sense.”

When compared with other solutions on the market, Fortinet came out on top. “Fortinet won on its business model,” explains Aidan Bowen, co-founder of Solutions Inc, who was responsible for the solution implementation. “It would allow the school’s network to become scalable and reliable in ways other vendors couldn’t do, and that’s what we clearly needed.”

With that in mind, Thomas’s chose the Fortinet enterprise firewall FortiGate 300D, as well as the centralised security management FortiManager 200D and centralised network security logging and reporting FortiAnalyzer 400D solutions.

Fortinet’s license-free model also sold it for the school. “It helps us deal with the fact that we don’t know what’s around the corner in terms of device density,” Swart says. “It’s better than cherry picking and penny pinching. Thomas’s has made a significant investment, but in the long run, this investment will actually pay dividends. There’ll be less of a need for additional support or headcount in order to maintain the equipment on an everyday basis. It really is a smart move.”

Thomas’s London Day Schools consider the preparatory years as formative to their pupils’ future education and working lives. A strong foundation when it comes to security solutions complements this ethos. As such, the school is already planning to expand its Fortinet solutions out and to take full advantage of the benefits afforded by Fortinet’s Security Fabric. “With the present architecture and analyser already in place, we expect expansion will be seamless,” Swart affirms. “Fortinet has allowed us to plan for the unexpected.”



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