

Free School/MAT IT Strategy

When I ask schools “what’s your 3 year IT strategy?” they can’t usually answer because 9 out of 10 schools don’t have one. Especially in times of shrinking budgets, having the right IT strategy can save you from making reactive, poor and expensive IT decisions.

For an IT strategy to be successful, it needs to be simple and easy for everyone to understand and get behind. Anything too technical won’t be understood and will be ignored. Anything too low-level doesn’t inspire or have meaning to staff, students or parents on a day-to-day basis. IT is one of the cornerstones of school success. It impacts teaching, learning and the smooth running of the school. Get it wrong and there is frustration, complaints, lost opportunities and anger. Get it right and creativity, excitement, collaboration and growth all can flourish. It’s important therefore to get it right.

If you don’t have a strategy, here’s a starter that you can use for free. Adapt it, change it and mould it to your own school circumstances. It’s designed as a pointer and a conversation starter. If you’d like to know more, please contact me at neil.watkins@think-it.org.uk.

The CATS IT Strategy

Vision – A 21st Century School

A school where the staff have the tools to be 21st Century Professionals and the learners can develop the 21st Century digital skills they need.

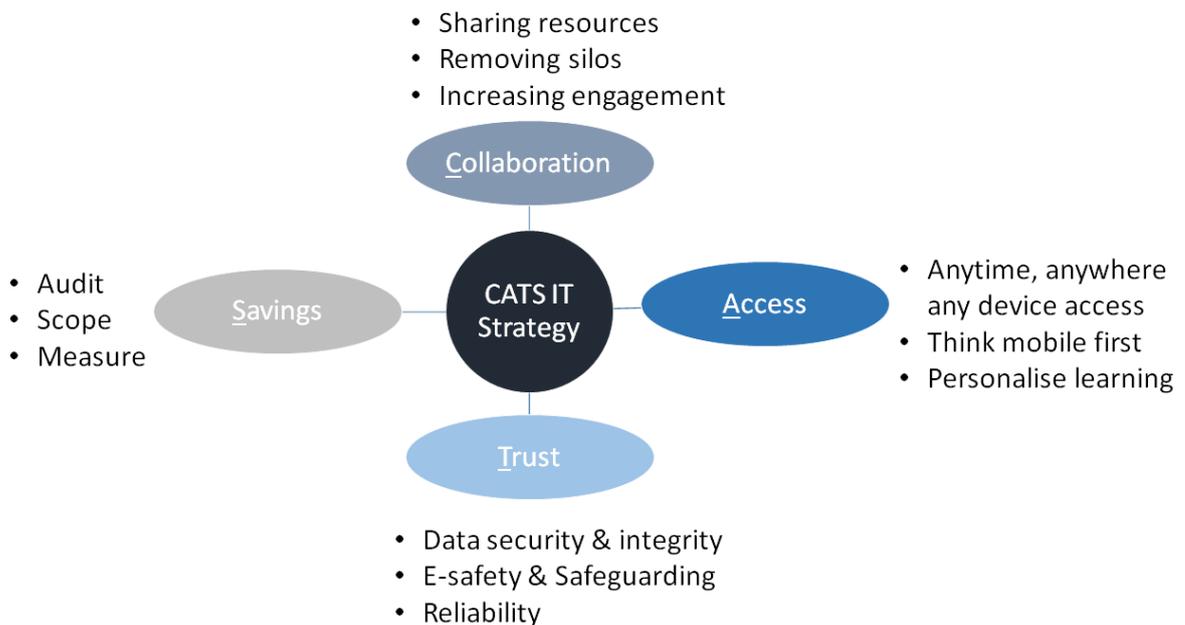
The CATS strategy – Collaboration/Access/Trust/Savings

To be successful we need four overarching outcomes:

- **Collaboration**
 - Sharing - Sharing of resources, content, data, equipment and people
 - Removing Silos - No more applications or equipment that encourages or enforces silos, and removing those that already exist
 - Engagement - increasing engagement with students, staff, parents, employers and other stakeholders

- **Access**
 - Access - being able to access your productivity tools, applications and data anytime, any device, anywhere

- Mobile – access is enabled by a ‘mobile first’ approach – when considering new tools, ensuring they can be accessed on a mobile device
 - Cloud - it means moving legacy solutions to the cloud, and using cloud-based solutions to drive collaboration, increase access and reduce costs
 - Learning - identifying teaching and learning resources that can personalise learning, in and outside of the classroom;
 - Reliability - resilience and reliability, technology has to work first time, every time.
- Trust
 - Data security – protecting your precious data from hackers, malware and ransomware, and ensuring it can only be accessed by those who need it;
 - Data integrity – knowing that the data is correct, input only once and is useful in decision making;
 - E-safety – ensuring that students and staff are protected and know what to do when they suspect grooming or are being bullied
 - Safeguarding – school staff are front-line for spotting, reporting and monitoring abuse, radicalisation and mental health
- Savings
 - Identify – regularly audit for areas where savings can be made now, e.g. print, power, licencing, re-purposing devices to extend their useful life
 - Scope – when considering buying new technology, think first about the outcomes you want to achieve and the impact change will have - you’ll make better buying decisions
 - Procure – use a DfE compliant framework to get access to expertise and save time and money on procurement
 - Measure– ensure new solutions are successfully integrated and have the impact and return on investment expected



CATS IT Strategy Implementation

Having a strategy is great, but how practically do you go about implementing it? Here are 6 tips for implementation:

1. Appoint a senior person internally to lead it. If you pick an external person there will never be the buy-in the organisations needs to make the strategy successful.
2. Don't underestimate the amount of time, effort, money, heart-ache, sacrifice and commitment required to make IT projects successful. At their core, these projects are about people, and if you don't bring the hearts and minds with you, they will fail.
3. Start with the Central Team. This is often where efficiencies and improvements can be made quickly, and that have a big impact on the running of the organisation.
4. Pick the people and areas most able, adaptable and up for change. Make exemplars of them and praise their efforts and success. This will drive improvement when other areas want the same benefits and recognition.
5. Evolution, not revolution. Big bang approaches often fail, not least because the IT required to run a large organisation like a school or a MAT is increasingly complex with lots of interconnecting and interdependent parts. Test thoroughly and get your users to formally sign it off.
6. Build strong relationships with suppliers – you're going to need them when things go wrong. I say when, not if, because it's only a matter of time. Where there are people and technology involved, at some point someone will press the wrong button or something will break, and it will have big implications. When your entire network goes down, you need friends who know what they're doing to get you back up and running as fast as possible.