An ICT Technician’s perspective

www.netsupportschool.com
Hi! I’m Andy and I’m a school ICT technician. We’ve been using NetSupport School here for a while now and I want to tell you how it works for us...

Most people think of classroom management software as being just for the benefit of the students and the teachers. Most of the time, they’re right. It is usually the case – and we technicians only get to be involved when something goes wrong with it!
With NetSupport School though, they’ve created a unique feature specifically for ICT technicians: the Tech Console. It’s great that finally a manufacturer recognises that technicians have an important part to play in keeping all of the school’s computers running effectively and ready for the teachers to use in their lessons. And because we can do the majority of the school’s PC maintenance through the NetSupport School Tech Console interface, it means we can streamline the total number of software packages we need to use.
From the comfort of the Tech Console we can check on all the school’s PCs. We can view them clearly on the screen and change the thumbnail layouts to reflect the arrangement of PCs according to the lab or classroom.

We can also see at a glance all the PCs on the network and group all the computers by classroom or location if we want to. It’s also easy to see which students and teacher PCs are taking part in an active class. It’s great to be able to monitor all the PCs this way and keep a running check that they’re all working as they should be.
Another great feature of NetSupport School’s Tech Console is that we can Power on, Power off, Reboot and Login to PCs remotely. So if any are left powered on at the end of the day, we can simply shut them down - regardless of where they’re located - and do our bit towards the school’s energy conservation initiative.
Remote functions are where the Tech Console excels. We can take full remote control of any PC if required, as well as review all the client security settings. And it’s a great way to be able to fix PCs quickly without physically having to visit each classroom.

I can view the status of all the teacher and student PCs in the school at a glance as a list or as thumbnail images – and if I view a PC in Report Mode, I can instantly see more information such as the user name, IP address and current applications and websites running on that particular machine.
If a teacher finds they need technical help during a lesson, they can alert us by clicking on the “Get Support” button on their console and we can then look at the issue remotely. This is really handy for the teacher as they don’t need to leave the classroom to ask for help, and handy for us too as we can often solve the problem quickly and easily by remote control with minimum fuss and minimum lesson disruption for the students.
We can also chat with a teacher or student online. This can really help save time with problem solving, as we can ask for more details of what has gone wrong which helps us fix it and move on to sorting out the next one!
We can also send messages to all PC users. Let’s say we need to announce that the email server will be down for 10 minutes: we can easily broadcast that message to all logged on users. There are even pre-set messages that we can send. This means that all logged-on PC users see it instantly, whatever they might be doing on their PC at the time. We find it’s more effective than sending an email (which some of the teachers admit they never read anyway!)
It’s great to be able to generate a full hardware or software inventory for a selected PC – you can’t do that from most other classroom management software packages! We use these to investigate issues in greater depth and ensure that every one of our school’s PCs is kept up to date and running smoothly.
When we’re providing remote support for a teacher or student on more complex issues, sometimes we need to see the services, processes and applications running on each PC. We can see and control these through the NetSupport School Tech Console, as well as see what hotfixes have been applied to each machine.
Our school’s policy is to allow students access to the internet in a designated lab over lunchtime. Of course, certain sites are permanently blocked, but in the interest of developing responsibility, the students are allowed some degree of freedom.

We can use the Tech Console to monitor their activity online, and also monitor the applications they’re using. If there’s any hint of students getting up to something they shouldn’t, (oh yes, we can see any applications running in the background too!) NetSupport School lets us close and kill applications remotely as well as shut down any dodgy web pages.
One of my favourite features of the NetSupport School Tech Console is its file transfer and distribution functionality. And what’s great about NetSupport School is that it is optimised to ensure fast and efficient transfer of data in both wired and wireless environments (with minimal impact on the rest of the network) using UDP for Broadcast or Multicast delivery.
Another handy feature of NetSupport School is that we can see the USB memory stick status on all of the classroom machines. Sometimes the pupils bring in games from home and upload them at school, but it’s against school policy to do this. Some still try it though, but Netsupport School’s monitoring feature means we can easily spot who it is and take appropriate action.

It’s also handy to see who’s left their USB stick in the PC at the end of the day after they’ve saved their coursework. It’s easy to see who was sitting where on the NetSupport School monitoring screen, so we can recover the sticks and hand them back to their owners the following day.

A really useful feature of NetSupport School is that we can apply a school-wide set of internet and application restrictions that are “always on” without the need for a dedicated server. So, for example, if the school policy says that no pupil can play DVDs in school machines, we can set and apply that policy across the school. However, if a teacher needs the pupils to use DVDs in a particular lesson, they can allow the pupils access just for that session.
As the school’s hardware requirements and setups evolve and change, we were concerned that we might have to move away from NetSupport School in the future. Not so! NetSupport School is really flexible and will work on all sorts of thin and zero computing setups including:

- Wyse Zero client
- NComputing
- Citrix
- MiniFrame SoftXpand
- Microsoft Terminal Services

So if your school is moving towards cost-saving technologies like these, you’ll be fine: there won’t be any compatibility issues with NetSupport School.

NetSupport School also supports all of the main platforms – and is cross-platform compatible – so if your school has a mix of desktop and mobile devices using iOS, Android, Chrome OS or Windows 10, then this solution is the perfect choice - so tell your SLT! It also caters for schools that use Mac and Linux computers in their classrooms with its compatible sister solution, NetSupport Assist.
We already have some Android and iOS tablets in our inventory, as well as some Google Chromebooks – all of which are supported by NetSupport School.

NetSupport School’s flexibility means that it’s easy for schools to adopt BYOD policies if they wish, where students can bring in their own iPads, Android or Windows 10 tablets to use wirelessly in class. This isn’t a problem because, as long as the NetSupport Student component is installed, the student can connect to and join the running class session, ensuring that they don’t miss out on a thing.
If a school uses NetSupport School in a Terminal Services environment, pupils bringing in their own laptops can easily connect to a virtual session and join a NetSupport School class. Connections like this can also be controlled by Active Directory – like in our school – where pupils bringing in their own devices for the first time are directed to a webpage where they can download the software that they are required to use in school.

NetSupport School’s set of security features ensures that it can only be used by the people authorised to do so - and in a way that adheres to school policies.

Configuration settings are protected, meaning that all settings and passwords can be stored centrally and automatically applied from Active Directory. The configuration file is stored on our central server, which means we can apply global settings for our school which are automatically applied to the tutor and student profiles.

Each teacher can also personalise their profile – setting the software options to reflect the way they want to work in NetSupport School. They can then protect this with a password, so that every time they sign into their profile they get their own settings by default. So, for example, the web or printing restrictions they’ve applied will be there each time they log in, meaning they don’t have to set them up from scratch for each class.
We can also configure NetSupport School through Active Directory policies to provide extra information for users. For example, today I created a policy to create a custom message on the teacher’s screen when another tutor tries to connect to them or their class. This means that teachers are always aware of who is connected to them.

NetSupport School also employs security keys to create a self-contained network. This stops any potentially mischievous students from being able install a demonstration version of the tutor console to try to override the teacher and disrupt the class.
What Technicians think of NetSupport School!

We’ve found that NetSupport School is the ideal instruction and monitoring tool for our school, and the Tech Console really was the icing on the cake for us. The program is so easy to install and set up in just a few steps – it really set the tone for how easily the rest of it worked!

I think it has made the ICT Support department more efficient – especially as we’re now running a mix of desktop and mobile devices in the school. With NetSupport School, I can monitor devices and identify problems across the school network – irrespective of platform – meaning we have capacity to fit more in as a result.

And that makes our Head Teacher very happy.