

A **BEST** Success Story

#9 – BEST and PEL: A Long-standing Partnership

Autumn 2024



Back row, from left, BEST Operations Manager Alison Austin, PEL Director Matt Hulbert, BEST Chief Financial Officer Kim Rowe. Front, from left, BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith and PEL Managing Director Matthew Perrett come together to mark the signing of our new ICT contract

The relationship between the Bedfordshire Schools Trust and Partnership Education (PEL) runs much deeper than a standard IT support service.

Our relationship is a deep-rooted one, stretching back nearly a decade-and-a-half.

In that time, PEL has immersed itself into the wider BEST community, over and above helping to maintain over 4,000 devices and other pieces of equipment across our network.

The partnership includes strategy development, the offer of virtual reality experiences to our pupils, and an apprenticeship scheme which has opened up career opportunities for BEST alumni.

In September 2024 BEST and PEL signed on the dotted line for up to five more years.

The award of the multi-million pound contract is a true endorsement of a joint commitment to work together for the benefit of everyone in the trust.

This is the story of BEST and PEL: A Long-standing Partnership.

OUR PARTNERSHIP AT A GLANCE

- 14-year working relationship between PEL and BEST/our schools
- New deal is third formal contract as part of comprehensive tender process
- 11 PEL employees are alumni of BEST schools

As our longest-serving MAT, we have grown and developed together as organisations, to deliver high-quality IT services to BEST schools

– Matthew Perrett, Managing Director, PEL

TECHNOLOGY IN NUMBERS

4300

Total devices across BEST – including 2800 student Chromebooks

State-of-the-art technology bringing learning to life in our classrooms

From interactive teaching screens to virtual reality worlds, utilising technology to benefit staff and pupils lies at the heart of the relationship between BEST and PEL. For pupils, PEL technicians bring the 'wow factor' by providing VR headset experiences to enhance the curriculum offering.

These sessions also feature at open evenings at some of our schools, allowing prospective families and the wider community the chance to view our learning through this unique lens.

For staff, our ICT contract has improved the tools they have at their disposal to bring learning to life.

This has included the installation of state-of-the-art screens in every classroom, including Clevertouch and BenQ boards, the development of Google Workspace to allow for cloud-based collaboration, and the management of digital signage systems at our larger academies.

The strong working relationship that BEST and PEL have developed over the years has been a critical factor in ensuring the IT provision has been of the highest quality.

Now, the new contract will build on these existing ties and ensure even more service benefits and improvements over the coming years.

BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith said: "As a growing trust, it's key for us to work with partner organisations who can grow with us and understand our culture.

"PEL's focus has always been to work with us and make sure that our end users get what they need. So, teachers can function, learners can learn – that's the key determinant for us all the time."

PEL Managing Director Matthew Perrett said: "BEST is our longest-serving multi-academy trust and we have grown and developed together as organisations, to deliver high-quality IT services to schools across the trust.

"We are delighted to have been chosen as BEST's preferred IT supplier once again, and we are excited to continue to work with the trust and all schools to benefit all staff and learners."



Pupils at Gothic Mede Academy get to grips with a virtual reality world in one of their lessons

Case study: Pix Brook Academy

The largest project BEST and PEL have undertaken together is kitting out the Pix Brook Academy new build in 2020.

The entire ICT infrastructure for the 1,260 place extended secondary school cost nearly £1m – with PEL commissioned to deliver this element of the overall build project to extremely tight deadlines.

Technical features included:

- Full active IT infrastructure fit-out
- Engagement with local authority, build contractors and mechanical/engineer consultants
- AV and digital signage systems through building
- End user devices, hardware and software installation
- Server, storage and back-ups
- Fit-for-purpose ICT, music and design technology suites



Apprenticeship career pathway for BEST pupils

Partnership Education is part of our 'BEST family' in more ways than one – for 11 of its employees are actually alumni of our schools.

Many of these have taken advantage of PEL's apprenticeship scheme to start their careers in the IT industry, and are now working as technicians in the schools they used to study at.

The scheme provides a pathway right to the top – as Matt Hulbert's journey shows.

The former Etonbury and Samuel Whitbread student completed his apprenticeship with PEL and is now a company director and the network manager for BEST schools.

He said: "I started as an apprentice and moved up to technician, engineer, senior engineer and then into the role I am in now."

"There's lots of different options and routes you can take through PEL and BEST has helped to facilitate these through our ICT contract."

“It's key for us to work with partner organisations who can grow with us and understand our culture

– Craig Smith,
BEST Chief Operating Officer

Future-proofing IT provision across BEST is all part of PEL's service to our trust. BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith said: "We're very keen each of our schools has an ICT strategy to plan for future use and what they will require in terms of technology and support."

"Partnership Education has been instrumental in ensuring our schools have these bespoke strategies in place, can plan effectively and essentially get what they need, when they need it."

PEL Managing Director Matthew Perrett said: "Strategy development is part of our service to BEST and takes into account each school's individual context, key risks and SLT's vision of how to use technology to support teaching and learning."

"It is a long-term planning process that broadly comprises a rolling replacement plan for devices and classroom technology, as well as proactive planning for projects and budgeting."

"We also do a significant amount of work with the trust's central team that the schools don't necessarily see, but helps to keep them safe and secure."

"For example, cyber security is an ongoing topic at monthly board meetings where a number of workstreams and projects arise to improve the suitability, awareness and protections across the trust."

WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- High-quality IT service provided over number of years and continues to improve
- Staff and pupils reaping benefits in classroom with state-of-the-art technology available
- Ex-BEST pupils taking advantage of IT apprenticeship opportunities
- PEL expertise being utilised to future-proof IT provision in schools

