The challenge
The Leicester Grammar School Trust (LGST) is a family of three independent co-educational day schools based in Great Glen, Leicestershire. The senior and junior school has around 1250 students from nursery all the way up to age 18 – and reliable connectivity in school is crucial.

"Up time and reliability is always the most important thing for us," says James Hickens, the trust’s IT manager. "We rely heavily on our connection because we simply can’t function without access to the internet. Everything we do is tied into online services, cloud services and Microsoft Teams. It’s important that it’s always there and always available."

However, when James took on his role, the school’s broadband was supplied by the local authority – the default arrangement for many schools across the country – and he didn’t feel it was up to scratch. Given that the school was suffering significant periods of downtime, James saw the opportunity to go to market and find out if LGST could achieve a better connectivity arrangement.

The solution
"I’d worked with Janet previously, at a job at Wolverhampton City Council, so it seemed obvious to approach Jisc. When I’ve had Janet connectivity in the past, it’s always been so fast. The connectivity’s always been brilliant. The availability’s always been superb. The ongoing support you get from them has always been brilliant. So, for us, making that call was an easy decision."

Jisc experts worked with James to capture his expectations and requirements, making the process easy to manage: "There are lots of nice online forms, it’s very simple to do and the communication’s always on time," notes James.
Jisc’s status as a non-profit was also appealing. “We’re a charity ourselves, so that sits very nicely with us. The fact that Jisc isn’t making profits from us is a big win. And we know that it’s investing in a network that’s serving education across the country and so we’re actually investing in ourselves in that sense, as well,” he says.

LGST migrated its connectivity to Janet while continuing to manage its firewall itself. It had brought that aspect in-house as part of a network redesign some years ago, wanting to keep the flexibility of being able to make any changes itself, quickly. The connectivity switch was smooth and the result impressive.

“It’s important that it’s always there and always available and it is. I can’t recall a period of downtime in the years we’ve had this connection. It’s absolutely amazing.”

The benefits
Janet’s direct connections (peerings) into sites such as Microsoft, providing even more reliability and the ability to get into those services quickly, was also a win. Generally, the speed and stability is allowing James and his colleagues to spend more time doing the things they need to do, rather than worrying about whether the school internet connection will hold up for staff and students.

“We’re not spending precious IT support time on the phone to people trying to get updates on why networks are down and why kit is having to be re-booted regularly. We’re not spending time troubleshooting other people’s connectivity. Ours works and it works all the time. It never goes down, so we’ve got more time to do the things we’re employed to do. More time to support the school and tackle the really interesting things that you want to do in education and IT. We want to improve youngster’s lives and the experiences they get on the network and we can now do that,” says James.

As a result, he’s keen to share his experience.

“We’re so happy with the service we get and the stability and reliability of our connection. We have no intention to go anywhere else for the foreseeable and I’d 100% recommend Jisc to any of my peers and colleagues,” he concludes.

To find out how Jisc can support your organisation, please:

Contact: customer.support@jisc.ac.uk
or visit https://www.jisc.ac.uk/customers