



The White Horse Federation

Location
Swindon – England



The White Horse Federation

More Resilient Security for Pupils and Teachers with Cisco Umbrella

About The White Horse Federation

Founded in Swindon in 2012, [The White Horse Federation](#) is a multi-academy trust made up of primary schools, secondary schools, and special schools across Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire. The White Horse Federation combines a holistic, consistent approach to teaching across its schools, while also accommodating the unique needs of each local intake and community.

The White Horse Federation's priority is to provide the best possible education opportunities for pupils as they progress through school and prepare for the world of work.

The Challenge

The White Horse Federation has an 18-strong IT team led by IT Director Mark Weller. Mark wanted to ensure all data and networks across the Trust were better protected.

“We originally wanted to develop one central security system for the whole organisation over a period of time,” says Mark. “However, when a security audit concluded we could do more, we had to act quickly – yet we also had to make sure we had made the right choice both from a feature and cost perspective.”

The search was therefore on to find an adaptable solution that would deliver better protection while taking into account each school’s unique security needs, from the smallest primary to the largest secondary.

Balancing the Books

Cost was also a major consideration. Understandably, staff from different disciplines – academic, facilities, and IT, to name a few – have very different priorities, making any purchasing decision a balancing act for schools.

“It could boil down to deciding between a new teaching assistant or improving your IT systems – even when your school actually needs both,” says Mark. “Spending money on something that doesn’t appear to derive obvious educational benefits might not be top of the agenda for many colleagues, but the audit had demonstrated that we were vulnerable. A security breach has the potential to hugely affect teaching and learning, which could lead to loss of confidence and reputation.”

Enter Cisco Umbrella

[Cisco Umbrella](#) is a cloud security and web-filtering platform that protects any device, anywhere. Built into the foundation of the Internet, it combines fast, safe, reliable Internet services to pupils, and staff, with maximum threat protection on and off-campus.

Importantly for IT leaders like Mark, Cisco Umbrella gives users complete visibility into online activity across every location, device, and user, detecting attacks before they happen.

It also blocks threats over any port or protocol before they reach network or end points, protecting users against malware, phishing, and command-and-control call-backs.

The White Horse Federation soon began rolling out Cisco Umbrella site by site, starting with 10 primary schools and its central system, all based in Swindon. Another 20 schools will follow shortly, also deploying [Umbrella Roaming Client](#), which will protect devices even when disconnected from the network. The Roaming Client also offers employees protection off the corporate network and protects users wherever they are working.

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Mark Weller

IT Director

Benefits

Safe and Secure

“Since installing Umbrella, we’ve been able to see the potential security threats to our network in a clear and measurable way, which is exactly what we wanted to achieve,” says Mark. “It also gives us confidence that we’re better prepared for any future threats.”

Ease of Installation and Low Maintenance

“Umbrella is very simple to set up and use,” says Mark, “plus, the accompanying documentation is clear and very straightforward to understand.”

Cisco Umbrella’s cloud-delivered service also means that there is no hardware to install or software to support, resulting in minimal maintenance for IT teams.

Flexibility

The Cisco Umbrella solution can scale to a single campus or multiple locations, and optional add-ons such as the Multi Org Console give IT leads visibility and control across each campus; perfect for multi-academy trusts like The White Horse Federation.

Security issues will vary from school to school in any multi-site organisation, but Cisco Umbrella’s inherent flexibility means the IT team is now equipped to cover all bases, creating different policies that cater to each school’s unique requirements. This includes minimising issues related to VPN tunnelling.

GDPR-Ready

Thanks to Cisco Umbrella, a recent external [GDPR](#) compliance audit reported very positively on The White Horse Federation’s GDPR readiness. Failure to comply with GDPR can result in financial penalties and reputational damage, so it is vital for any educational institution to ensure they act in accordance with this law, which has been in force since May 2018.

Role Reversal

As we all know, the best working relationships are reciprocal. Mark and other members of The White Horse Federation team have worked closely with Cisco to help develop an offering that is both workable and beneficial, while representing genuine value for money, with a finance option that is manageable for any school, academy or college.

Cisco’s Josef Lloyd, who has worked closely with The White Horse Federation team, says: “Mark’s proactive partnership has helped us ensure our Cisco Umbrella offering is right for the academy space. For me, it has been great to work hand-in-hand with a customer who is willing to share their experiences to help us fully understand their environment, especially as this has resulted in us being able to offer them a product that delivers for them.

“And for Cisco, it’s great that we can work with the education community and support it in implementing high-quality systems and solutions in what is traditionally a complex and costly area of security.”

Issues and Lessons Learned

It’s always easy to be wise after the event, but apart from installing Roaming Client at the start rather than later in the implementation, Mark says that he would change very little if The White Horse Federation had the opportunity to start its Cisco Umbrella journey again.

“Inevitably, some people take to new systems more quickly than others, which can make implementation a challenge. However, the overall response to Umbrella has been very positive,” Mark says. “In fact, most staff have noticed no difference at all, which is exactly how it should be for non-technical colleagues. They are fully on board and want to be involved in Umbrella’s evolution and implementation across the foundation.”

Conclusion – Safe and Secure in a Challenging Digital World

Mark and his team are continuing to roll Cisco Umbrella out across the Federation, with a total of 30 schools about to benefit from full functionality.

“I can stand in front of our trustees and tell them that I am confident we have a good level of protection across our systems, which is essential when operating in a sensitive, child-focused environment and a sector where every penny counts,” says Mark. “Cisco Umbrella provides a level of protection to our systems, which reassures me that schools are more secure from cyber threats.

“And when the next WannaCry emerges, I won’t be worried because I know Umbrella offers that additional, vital layer of security and that our data is protected.”

