



essa

Foundation
Academies Trust

The installation of a digital two-way radio system is helping ESSA Foundation Academies Trust better protect the children in its care whilst improving staff communications.

ESSA turned to Avoira when looking to overhaul internal communications systems across its sizeable Bolton campus. The site hosts secondary and primary school academies, as well as a nursery, to serve well over 1,000 pupils.

ICT manager Paul Gartland was keen to modernise communications which had previously been reliant on mobile telephones. Despite the trust's location in urban Bolton, signal coverage could be erratic, meaning that both every day and, crucially, emergency communications could be compromised.

avoira
fluent in technology



Business Needs

"We needed to overcome a number of safeguarding and communication issues," explains Gartland, noting that schools need consider situations and protocols that previously wouldn't have been on the radar.

"Following recent terrorist events we were looking at a lockdown scenario and how we would implement it. Today it's common for every school to have a lockdown procedure."

Those grim comments are grounded in an awful reality with colleges in Bury and Tameside put on lockdown after receiving threats via social media in 2017. Whilst thankfully hoaxes, the authorities nonetheless had to act to protect students and staff.

Gartland says preparation for statistically highly unlikely events is good practice. "I think Ofsted would certainly be interested to see that there is a lockdown procedure that can be implemented. It obviously proves that you've taken safeguarding seriously and thought about a plan should something happen."

Our Solution

To ensure ESSA could respond appropriately and effectively, Gartland asked Avoira to devise an effective and affordable solution. We recommended installation of a system comprising an antenna, receiver and a Hytera RD965 digital mobile radio (DMR) repeater to ensure strong site-wide signal coverage. These support some 30 Hytera PD375 compact digital two-way radios for use by teaching and support staff.

The radios are used by a broad range of staff, from teachers on gate duty through lunchtime supervisors, caretakers and the site team responsible for estate management.

It has, agrees Gartland, provided an "efficiency bonus." The system is integral to ESSA's emergency lockdown protocol.

"Those panic alarms and the emergency broadcast channel help us to communicate across the two sites," explains Gartland. "If we had an incident where we have to go into lockdown, in addition to telephones we will have radios so we can keep lines of communications open on a secure channel."

Business Benefits

The solution has proven particularly effective. Despite the sprawling nature of the ESSA site signal quality is, says Gartland, "amazing."

Staff are much better placed to respond with incidents which can blight the day in any school, even ESSA where Ofsted has rated both the safeguarding and behaviour of pupils as good.

"We've not seen a system that is as robust and works as well as this right across the Trust. We can now communicate anywhere on site all the way up to the road, without any break in quality. It's really opened up the lines of communication."

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