The risks of a BYOD policy in Australian independent schools

Since 2008 the learning environment within Australia's schools has become increasingly digitised.

In 2008 the Commonwealth Government instituted its Digital Education Revolution (DER), designed to bring about a 1:1 computer to student ratio for years 9 to 12 in schools by 2012. However, with the demise of funding of the DER program, schools and systems were forced to examine ways of continuing the 1:1 computer to student ratio. For many schools, a BYOD (bring your own device) was considered an attractive, cost-effective alternative, one that leveraged the high rates of device ownership amongst student populations. Oftentimes these devices were superior and more up-to-date than those available via their school.

> In the years since the DER policy was defunded, the digital landscape has become exponentially complex.

> Vast quantities of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is now stored, and the use of multiple personal devices is commonplace.

> Schools are therefore obliged to consistently evaluate the effectiveness and efficacy of their device policies to ensure they are fit for purpose.

What about Independent Schools?

If the movement towards BYOD policies in schools was influenced in large part by budgetary concerns and a lack of funding, what about the Independent School sector?

In research conducted this year with IT professionals working in Independent schools throughout Australia, we found that **13/20 had a fully BYOD or Hybrid device policy in place** within their secondary cohort (years 7-12).

Key Statistics*

➤ **65%** **of Independent Schools surveyed had a hybrid or fully BYOD device policy in the secondary years within their school**

➤ **Of these, 85% expressed a preference for a fully managed device policy for all year groups within their school**

Despite a desire to transition, there are three main reasons why independent schools are not currently adopting a fully managed device policy...

1. The prioritisation of other projects
2. Ideological Attachment to their device policy
3. A perceived preference for BYOD within the school community

"I would transition to a fully managed policy tomorrow, but stakeholder engagement is our biggest barrier" – **ICT Director; Hybrid Policy**

1. Prioritisation of other projects

The transition to a managed device policy is framed as a transformation instead of a way to address existing vulnerabilities in the school's IT environment. Therefore, In the absence of a significant cyber incident, the belief that the current BYOD policy is good enough prevails.

These schools have invested significantly in the IT infrastructure required to support a BYOD policy, so can be reluctant to examine an alternative.

2. Ideological attachment to BYOD

Some schools take pride in their decision to opt for – and remain – a school that consults with and listens to its community members, and the feedback from the school community is a preference for BYOD.

Some believe that a fully managed device policy is akin to wrapping students in digital cotton wool and doesn't do them any favours once they leave high school.

There are also some that believe that stringent security polices will only motivate children to access places they shouldn't.
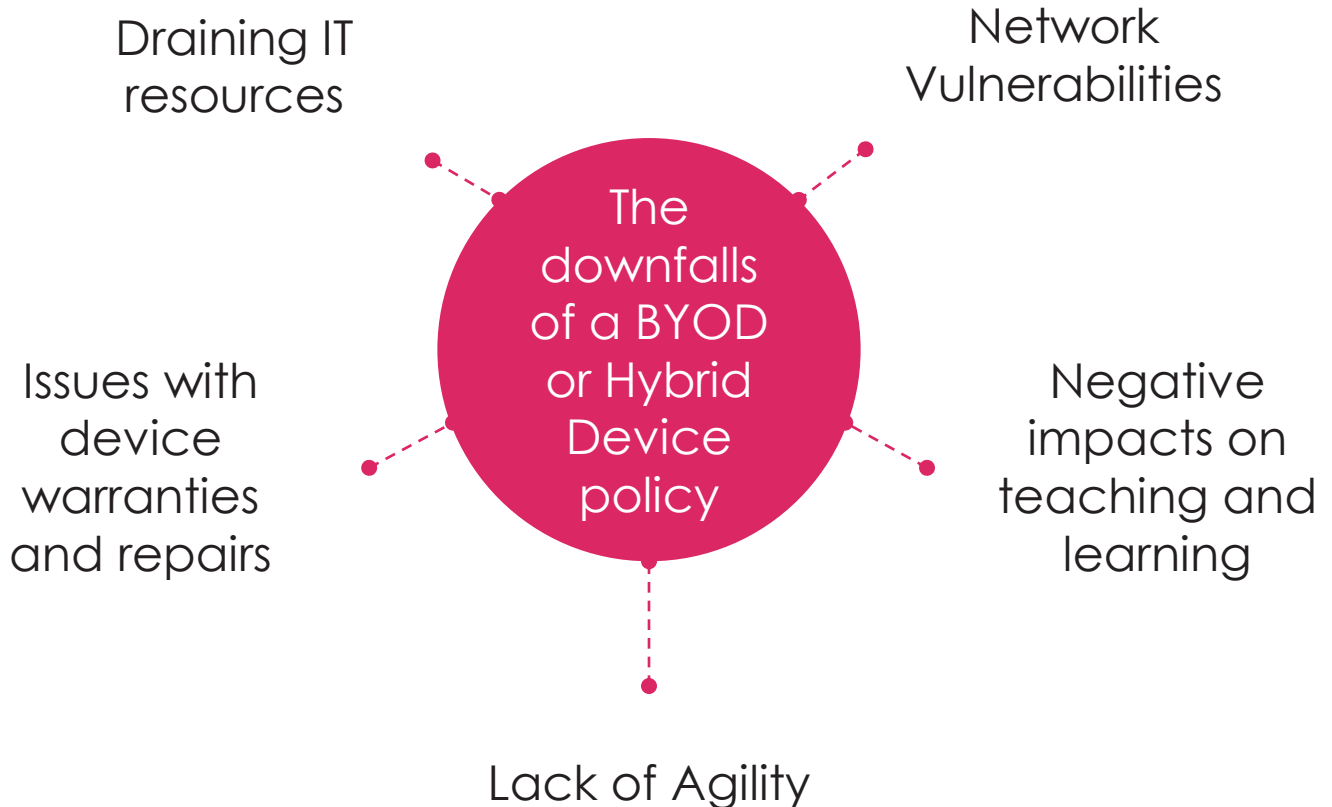
3. School community preference

There are schools that claim students want the ability to select their own device, so provide guidelines instead of mandates. In other schools, IT teams believe parents present a significant barrier to changing the device policy and wish to own the device their child uses at school.

Furthermore, there are some schools in which inertia has set in and is the lack of progression to transition to a fully managed policy is a result of a top-down culture of stagnation and 'making do'.

However, in the context of today's elevated cyber risk, a fully managed policy is not in opposition to these concerns, but a tool that helps schools teach responsible online behaviour in a safe context, because all our experts agreed that the risk of a cyber incident within their school was a matter of 'when', not 'if'

Even amongst schools that rationalise their BYOD policy, the following 5 downfalls are easily identified…

Draining IT resources

Network Vulnerabilities

Issues with device warranties and repairs

The downfalls of a BYOD or Hybrid Device policy

Negative impacts on teaching and learning

Lack of Agility

1. The impact of BYOD on the security of the school's network

Most IT members within independent schools are fully aware of the compromised position their BYOD policy puts their school network in. The impacts of this are broad-reaching, from an inability to fully enrol the device in the school's endpoint management software (frequently InTune), to an overreliance on firewalls as the only line of defence, to rendering student, school and family data vulnerable to ransomware attacks.

Many of our experts can recount stories of other schools that have suffered the effects of a cyber breach ranging from the relatively minor (bad press) to the existential (paying millions of dollars in ransoms).

What type of independent school is this most relevant to?

- Schools with leaner IT teams
- Schools not currently using InTune
- Less prestigious schools in rural or regional areas who struggle to attract IT talent

2. Negative impacts on the teaching and learning experience

BYOD places additional demands on teachers who must navigate the inconsistencies between theirs and their students' devices. The learning experience of students can suffer as a result.

The participants in our study speak to three main impacts: the classroom time wasted when teachers must spend time troubleshooting on an unfamiliar student device and the distraction this can have from a teacher's core job; the upskilling required of teachers who must become familiar with the multiple operating systems and devices present in their classroom and the increasing sense of frustration felt by both teachers and students when such problems are inevitably encountered.

What type of independent school is this most relevant to?

- Schools with looser guidelines around device purchase
- Schools without a BYOD portal or who do not mandate purchase via the device portal

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There's no excuse for schools to be unlike any other organisation because we hold a huge amount of personally identifiable information about students, and about their families. We have incredibly high demands on our staff with regards to their use of technology, and parents also want visibility over the device their child is using. In the same way that teachers need confidence in the device that they hold, they need confidence in the device that the students in front of them are holding as well –
ICT Director; Hybrid Policy

3. The impact of the lack of agility that BYOD creates

BYOD schools struggle to adopt and update their IT environments with speed and ease, which has several knock-on effects.

A BYOD device policy often comes with additional demands on the IT team to quickly become proficient in new apps required to manage the devices. In the absence of a fully managed device policy, a rapid onboarding of teachers is not possible, resulting in lost time and productivity of teaching staff, as well as a drop in morale.

Additionally, some schools struggle to support a BYOD policy on their existing infrastructure, which can result in admins devoting significant Time to troubleshooting

What type of independent school is this most relevant to?

- Schools that are required to undergo significant digital transformation in a short space of Time
- Potentially schools in less wealthy areas, as parents are less likely able to afford frequent new devices for their children

4. The warranty and repair issues created by a BYOD policy

Schools with a BYOD policy struggle to keep up with the constant influx of broken devices for which they are not responsible, which creates impacts for IT team members, students, parents and the school alike.

Some of our participants reported dealing with 7-10 smashed device screens per day on average while, because of the school's BYOD policy, having very little power to do much about it; this creates an unreasonable demand on the school's IT team.

When a student's device is not usable, they will at times have to rely on a sub-standard replacement device provided by the school, which interrupts their ability to do their work. Parents of course must foot the bill for repair or replacement, and the school must budget for a fleet of back up devices, which would ordinarily be included in the contract of a fully managed policy.

What type of independent school is this most relevant to?

- **All independent schools with a BYOD policy** struggle with the blurred line between their IT help desk that can't help with repairs and warranty issues.

5. The drain on IT resources created by a BYOD policy

IT teams in schools with a BYOD device policy tend to be bigger, often with two help desk support staff. The operational, business as usual demands exhaust a lot of their teams, from help desk admin through to IT manager.

Some of the IT teams at our participants' schools boast IT teams of up to 12 people, and even among them we heard reports of senior IT staff being required to perform menial and unnecessary work managing the school's inconsistent device environment, because the learning needs of students comes first.

Some schools are sacrificing major IT projects because they must prioritise the firefighting and troubleshooting that accompanies a BYOD policy

What type of independent school is this most relevant to?

- Schools in remote or rural areas who have a smaller pool from which to recruit quality IT staff
- Schools with a larger number of BYOD devices, which is often a reflection of the number of students in the senior school

Providing a supportive learning environment is a school's stock in trade. There is an obvious commercial aspect to it – in the independent sector the competition between schools can be fierce – but it remains a service.

When a parent pays for their child to attend an independent school, the expectation for support is higher – they are paying a premium for the close attention and superior opportunity that their child will receive at that school.

Like the schools that they belong within, IT teams within schools are a service to support learning outcomes.

Visibility over a school's networks and devices can assist IT teams to improve student wellbeing

In schools with managed device policies, problematic, irregular, or unsafe on and offline behaviour is flagged early, equipping pastoral care leaders with information that they can use to support student wellbeing and learning.

If you have visibility it can help diagnose a problem – at my old school a student never had their battery charged, turned out that kid wasn't safe at home so they weren't charging it overnight
IT Admin; BYOD

INCREASED VISIBILITY NOT LOCKING DOWN DEVICES

Improving visibility over a school's devices and networks facilitates greater duty of care towards students.

Ensuring a consistent learning experience

Schools that have the capacity to monitor their networks and devices more closely report an increased capacity to support the learning of their students through prevention rather than reaction.

Flagging Concerning Behaviour

Quality network and device reports can sometimes be used as one of many resources when dealing with students in unfortunate circumstances or with problematic behaviour.

Enhancing Student Wellbeing

Because schools are communities entrusted with the wellbeing of children, they have a duty of care to their students. If an IT team has visibility over a device's usage and network traffic this information can provided guidance to year coordinators to provide more support to students who need it.

Transition your school to a fully managed device policy with SureDeploy

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Your IT team will have the ability to leverage our library of **800+ pre-configured security policies**, as well as easily setup automated application updates.

Get in touch to arrange a **FREE** demo of SureDeploy today!

THE BENEFITS OF A MANAGED DEVICE POLICY WITH SUREDEPLOY

Enhanced Visibility

Improved Security Posture

Boost IT Operations

Increased Support For Teachers

Ability to Attract Quality Staff

*"Thanks to CNS and SureDeploy, we were able to add 1,400 new devices to our existing environment with very minimal interruption, and **without requiring any additional IT staff.** Application updates and security patches are now deployed automatically, and the entire administration process is now far more streamlined and effective. It was the **smoothest device rollout we have had in over 18 years.**"*

Lyle Corvisy
Head of ICT at St Andrew's Cathedral School, Sydney

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