



## High School Real Story Model Farms High School, New South Wales



## Shifting the culture of professional development

### How BlueSky is supporting Model Farms High School's staff to engage in collaborative needs based professional learning linked to school priorities

#### About the school

Model Farms is a comprehensive high school, in Baulkham Hills, a suburb 31 kilometres North West of Sydney. The school employs 98 staff, including Principal Christina Bennet. Its 1000 students include three support classes and a small percentage of students from Aboriginal and multicultural backgrounds. The school has strong academic, sporting and performance initiatives.

Principal, Christina Bennet explains, "As principal, I try to help students be the best they can be by providing the best teachers and support within my means. I believe that leadership isn't just about being at the front. You need to get inside the transaction of teaching and learning, realise when students are ready for learning and develop an understanding of learning. We have to become better equipped so we are always aware that we are contributing to students achieving their full potential.

#### What were the challenges?

"At the time, staff identified the value of professional development but they appeared to be passive receivers of it. I wanted them to take a more active role and be responsible for designing and seeking their own learning and growth, based on their own identified needs. We all know that the learning needs of students are changing and I wanted staff to acknowledge this and recognise what this meant for their teaching practices."

“ At the push of a button, I can tell what goals my staff have set for themselves, how they meet the school's strategic targets and how they link to the National Teaching Standards. ”

**Christina Bennet, Principal**

## How is BlueSky helping?

“To support the culture shift, we threaded professional learning throughout our strategic directions for 2015 to 2017. Direction two is explicit in expecting all teachers to identify their professional development needs through a personal and professional learning plan. I heard about BlueSky from Principals Australia Institute (PAI) and saw that it could support our school priorities and enable us to monitor, design and drive professional development.

“All staff have a BlueSky portfolio where they can begin the academic year by reviewing themselves against the National Teacher Standards and record three professional development objectives. We analyse these reviews and their objectives to tailor the professional development activities available on staff development days, TPL meetings and during our whole school conference. Staff are given time every term to achieve these objectives and log their own professional development and upload evidence that they can use for their accreditation and for the Performance and Development Plans (PDP). For professional development purposes, and to meet the requirements of the PDP, we record classroom and leadership observations in BlueSky.

“Throughout the year, but particularly during term four, staff use BlueSky to reflect on the achievement of their professional development objectives and to record evidence of their achievements. Staff have used this for their accreditation and maintenance process and are now seeing how this can help them complete their PDP.”

## What is the impact?

“I am immensely impressed with what BlueSky enables me to do as principal. At the push of a button, I can tell what goals my staff have set for themselves, how they meet the school’s strategic targets and how they link to the National Teaching Standards. I can see what professional development they have engaged with and through their evaluation and impact statements, how it has changed, enhanced and improved their teaching practice and student outcomes.

“I use the information, from staff reviews against the standards and our own skills audit, to design professional development that specifically meets self-identified needs. Through BlueSky, we can pair staff with identified strengths, with those seeking to improve in certain areas.



Sharing practice has never been so easy. The information that BlueSky provides, enabled us to organise our first whole school conference. The conference aimed to meet the collective and individual needs of staff and their feedback was so positive, we are doing it again this year. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to develop collegial and team approaches to teaching and deeper professional relationships.”

## What’s next?

“I can see how BlueSky will make monitoring and accountability, in the new Performance and Development Framework, a less challenging and more positive experience for staff.

“We will further enhance professional development collaboration between Model Farms High School and other BlueSky schools. We are excited about the prospect of sharing joint projects and collaboratively developing resources. Sharing professional development and resource demands will greatly assist us to meet the needs of a wider range of students in a number of settings.

“We plan to use BlueSky to evaluate the products and practices of our management plan and are tailoring BlueSky’s School Self-Evaluation tool to meet our local needs. Collecting data from classroom observations as well as leadership practices will help us assess where we are in terms of our progress towards our stated goals.

“BlueSky will allow me to continue to show, and engage with, real educational leadership. This is in a future where increased finance and system changes have the potential to become the more demanding focus of my work.”