Secondary School Real Story
Blackfen School for Girls

BlueSky

Creating a consistent and powerful system for staff appraisal

Blackfen School for Girls streamlines processes with BlueSky

About the school

"Raising aspirations – releasing potential" is the motto at Blackfen School for Girls in the London Borough of Bexley. An 11-18 non-selective secondary school and sixth form with academy status, there are 1,050 girls age 11-16 and 300 boys and girls in its mixed sex sixth form. It employs 100 teachers and 90 associate staff.

In the last inspection Ofsted rated the school as 'good with some outstanding features'. Compared with many other secondary schools in the area, it is one of the highest achieving in terms of GCSE and A-level results. In 2015 75% of the students achieved five or more GCSE A*-C grades, including English and Mathematics, and over 31% gained at least 3A*/A grades.

What were the challenges?

The school faced a number of challenges, namely the need:

- To be more systematic about staff appraisals and to ensure that there was an effective system in place

- To achieve consistency across faculties and to be able to compare the performance of each faculty and see at a glance what needs to be done
- To encourage staff to become involved in the review of their own performance and in doing so become more accountable for their own professional growth.

It was no longer tenable to have a paper-based system for appraisals. BlueSky Education offers a centralised online solution which enables the school to monitor data, review every single member of staff and compare the performance of different faculties.

> 66 The support offered by BlueSky has been amazing too and helped to build staff confidence in this new robust system that meets all the needs of our school. 99
>
> **Kelly Brown, Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, Blackfen School for Girls.**

> " Staff like the BlueSky system because it is electronic and documents are no longer being mislaid. It brings together learning objectives, lesson observations and self-evaluation in one simple package. "
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It was also difficult and time-consuming for the leadership team to make clear judgments when every faculty had its own way of recording evidence. Now all departments use the same process. BlueSky brings together information taken from learning walks, work scrutiny, lesson observations and student questionnaires and correlates results quickly and accurately.

How is BlueSky helping?

One of the benefits of a centralised system such as BlueSky is that the senior leadership team can now monitor data, review every single member of staff and compare the performance of different faculties.

Its self-review facility also enables staff working right across the organisation to understand the expectations the school has of them and to take responsibility for recognising their own personal development needs.

What is the impact?

BlueSky has helped the school to streamline staff appraisals radically.

Teachers are judged against the Government's Teachers' Standards and associate staff are measured against core competencies and job descriptions featured within BlueSky. Its self-review function has proved popular because it provides all staff with a clear overview of what they need to do to move forward and develop excellence.

Now that it is easy to identify areas that require improvement, Blackfen has put in place whole school training that links to its school improvement plan. Individual training is documented in its 'teachers' toolkit.

The Resource Centre in BlueSky has also proved to be a real time saver too. It comes populated with extremely useful help sheets, to which the school has added FAQs that free up time for the SLT.

Groups have been set up for specific sets of teachers so that they can demonstrate their excellence in subject knowledge and teaching skills with links to whole school objectives, as well as evidence of the mentoring they provide.

The leadership team all use iPads to collect evidence during learning walks. The data is instantly available and the faculty leaders can identify which areas need development.

What's next?

Staff like BlueSky because it is online and documents no longer go astray and it brings together learning objectives, lesson observations and self-evaluation in one simple package. It also aggregates all the data and generates reports that allow senior leadership staff to compare faculties quickly and easily. It's a much valued solution that they plan to continue to use.

> " In the past, even a relatively simple task such as comparing two teachers on upper pay grade 3 would have involved sorting through 190 sets of paper records. Now at the click of a button I have all the information I need at my finger tips. BlueSky has streamlined the process beyond recognition. "
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> **Kelly Brown, Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, Blackfen School for Girls.**