REAL STORY

Secondary School Real Story
Walbottle Campus

BlueSky makes performance-related pay progression simple and straightforward for Newcastle secondary school

Walbottle Campus, secondary school in Newcastle upon Tyne, chooses BlueSky's management reporting system for its staff appraisals and training

About the school

Walbottle Campus is a large secondary school in Newcastle upon Tyne, with 1,650 students, 120 teachers and 80 support staff. Its vision is to be a 'school of first choice' and to promote excellence so that all students achieve. It is an improving school, working its way to good from a current Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement'.

What were the challenges?

Tracey Gray is Director of Support at Walbottle Campus where her responsibilities for business management include the school's IT and technical infrastructure. Her work ensures that students and staff are well-supported to achieve their potential. She provides strategic vision and input into the development of National Professional Standards for School Business Management.

It was while attending a ISBL event that Tracey first saw BlueSky's management reporting system and spotted its potential for use at Walbottle Campus.

"We wanted a system of management reporting which would allow us to map individual targets against our school development plan," said Tracey. "I had come across a couple of other systems, but they were clunky and not so user-friendly or as clear as the BlueSky solution, which is a Windows-style that we like.

"With the system for performance-related pay having changed in the past couple of years, we needed to have a method of tracking evidence and records over a year and to let staff have equal and fair access to their appraisals and training.

"We also wanted to be very clear with staff and produce an evidence base that could be sent to governors if necessary.

> “Our teachers like the fact that they effectively have ownership of their own development and can access the system on and off-site.”
>
> **Tracey Gray, Director of Support at Walbottle Campus.**

How is BlueSky helping?

“Our favourite elements of the BlueSky solution are the appraisal and training modules,” continued Tracey. “BlueSky is allowing school managers to have a very clear reporting system, which they can easily keep up to date by attaching evidence to each teacher’s profile ready for appraisal.

“It is really easy to use, on all sides, so teachers have no problems in uploading information of their own. It also covers support staff, who are also set appraisal targets aligned to the School Improvement Plan which is linked to our Ethos of Excellence. This enables all members of our teams to understand and feel a part of whole school improvement.

“All our Business Leaders have developed their own improvement plans and have linked their appraisal targets to meet these as we drive for excellence across a range of areas. As a monitoring tool for leadership we are able to effectively run reports and log CPL activities which also ensures that staff have ownership of their own CPL records.

What is the impact?

“From a management perspective, the reporting element is proving invaluable. It is enabling us to be very clear with staff, particularly in cases where we may not be recommending them for pay progression.

“It’s a better system because staff are confident they are developing and any difficulties can be dealt with mid-year, rather than at the end of the year.

“Our teachers like the fact that they effectively have ownership of their own development and can access the system on and off-site.

“It is also saving us time – which automatically means we are saving money. BlueSky has also been very keen to work with us as a school to develop bespoke elements to the programme where we have found that the set system isn’t working for us. This has meant we can avoid duplication of other documentation which is more time-effective for leaders.

“I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend BlueSky – in fact I have done so many times! For people who have no system – you have to have a system. For us, it works and is easy for managers and staff to use.”

The school’s latest Ofsted inspection also praised the fact that Walbottle Campus has ‘highly effective systems in place to manage the performance of staff, which link to their progression through pay scales’.

What’s next?

For the future, Tracey Gray wants to look at using BlueSky to manage continuous professional learning across the whole school.

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> **Tracey Gray, Director of Support at Walbottle Campus.**

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