



Secondary School Real Story

The Swanage School

BlueSky



Raising standards of teaching and learning at new coastal secondary school in Dorset

BlueSky solution proves to be a powerful teacher development and accountability tool

About the school

The Swanage School is a small community secondary school in Swanage, Dorset, for 300 11-16 year olds. Having opened in 2013 as a free school, with years 7, 8 and 9, it is now an academy. There are 30 teaching staff, including teaching assistants. The Swanage School believes that relationships are at the heart of good teaching and learning and aims to provide its students with continuity of teaching, particularly from year 9 to year 11. It is a 'human scale school', meaning that strong, genuine relationships – within school, with the local community and the wider world – are at its heart.

What were the challenges?

Jenny Maraspin has been Deputy Head Teacher at The Swanage School since it opened. "There were obviously lots of challenges involved in setting up a brand new school, but in particular we wanted to set clear objectives and to hold teachers to account for them," she explained. "I was already a big fan of BlueSky, having used it at my previous school, so I knew it would do a good job for us."

The school's initial aims were to achieve a 'good' rating from its first Ofsted inspection, which it

achieved, and to become one of the best performing schools in the county. It is now top of the Dorset league table with regards to Progress 8 score and in the top 6% of schools nationally.

"We wanted to ensure that all our performance management had a direct impact on teaching and learning in the classroom," said Jenny. "And to help us raise standards we needed to track the impact of continual professional learning (CPL) throughout the school."

How is BlueSky helping?

To support its objectives, the school began using BlueSky's modules for lesson observations, continuous professional learning (CPL) activities and performance management.

"We wanted to track the impact of continual professional learning (CPL) throughout the school to ensure that all our performance management activity had a direct impact on raising standards of teaching and learning in the classroom," said Jenny. "Tracking and reporting on objectives can take a lot of time and effort and is difficult to achieve consistently. BlueSky is a clear way to record evidence against objectives

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Jenny Maraspin, Deputy Head Teacher, The Swanage School.



and allows us to monitor and develop performance continually.

“I find that using BlueSky means we get deeper and more thoughtful objectives and enables us to think through their impact too. For example, after every lesson observation there’s an expectation that the ‘observee’ will create a CPL activity relevant to any points raised. In this way, our observations become more developmental and not just judgemental.

“So, for example, if you say to someone ‘develop your questioning’, they then create a CPL activity, which in turn generates some evidence to say that has happened.

What is the impact?

“This structure means that we always have evidence, which makes measuring impact more manageable, and ensures that the feedback from observations has a direct effect in the classroom.

“We plan ‘BlueSky time’ into teacher’s PPA time, and this keeps the momentum going. Teachers are able to write up their CPL activities, say what they’ve done, and why, and share good practice. It facilitates a positive up-cycle of observation, reflection, development and sharing and is a very powerful teacher development tool.

“We also use the training calendar very successfully to set up events and invite attendees. This feature automatically schedules follow up sessions where we discuss the impact of the training.

“BlueSky saves administration time and gives value for money in that it elongates the impact of our in-

house CPL. The fact that teachers have created and discussed their activity helps them to remember it. BlueSky is definitely the vehicle that gets teacher development embedded and raises our standards of teaching and learning – without a doubt.

“We can monitor and track everything to support whole school priorities – so it’s a good accountability tool too.

“I believe it makes for a happier body of staff who are really aware of pedagogy and things that effect teaching and learning – it’s definitely promoting reflective practitioners.

Ofsted commented that ‘school leaders hold staff rigorously to account for students’ achievement’ and ‘are assiduous in their evaluation of the quality of teaching’.

What’s next?

“We work collaboratively with a local primary school and I can see an opportunity for us to begin using the Projects area within BlueSky to design and manage some cross-school collaboration,” said Jenny.

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