

Multi-Academy Trust Real Story

The Portswood Primary Academy Trust



BlueSky streamlines the coaching and appraisals process at Primary multi-academy trust

Allowing teachers to be in charge of their own development.

About the school

Established in September 2012, The Portswood Primary Academy Trust (PPAT) currently comprises three schools, plus a partner school, located across Southampton and Portsmouth. The schools are Portswood Primary School, St. Mary's CE Primary, Stamshaw Junior and Tanners Brook Primary. The Trust employs 74 teachers and educates 1,922 pupils in total. Portswood Primary School was one of the first 100 schools to be designated a Teaching School in 2011.

What were the challenges?

Coaching is used as a key lever for school improvement across the Trust. Lead coaches within the schools help create an ethos where coaching is the foundation for high-quality teaching.

Every teacher has a designated Lead Coach who helps them improve their practice. This includes support with planning, assessment and in-class coaching, where teachers receive real-time feedback on their teaching.

Dr Keith Watson is deputy CEO responsible for teaching and learning at the Trust and director

of teaching and learning at the Portswood Teaching School Alliance (PTSA). He has been instrumental in setting up the teaching school and overseeing many of the programmes delivered, including the extensive coaching programme that supports the achievement of high standards. He holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management from Southampton University, and regularly publishes articles and research on a range of educational issues.

“Our coaching system is unusual in that our coaches go into the classroom and coach alongside teachers during a lesson, rather than co-teaching or just observing,” Dr Watson explains. “I call it ‘parrot on the shoulder’ coaching. The coach is heavily involved in planning and delivering the lesson and everything is recorded in full notes before and afterwards. I initially established a system based around Word documents, which was very successful when I began it 16 years ago when we were just one school.

“But as we grew it became clear that we needed something better fit for purpose to help us adjust to manage greater capacity.

“ Since introducing BlueSky, we have definitely seen the quality of reflection improve and the quality and value of our appraisal interviews rise significantly. ”

Dr Keith Watson, deputy CEO responsible for teaching and learning at the Portswood Primary Academy Trust.



How is BlueSky helping?

“I chose BlueSky to help handle our coaching and appraisals process back in 2015 because of its many capabilities, functionality and the convenience of it being online. It is effective and efficient and the fact that I can look up the notes on any teacher, in any of our schools, regardless of wherever I am, is a massive bonus.

“At the press of a button I can see how many coaching sessions our various lead coaches, middle leaders and vice principals have led each year and produce reports for executive trustees. From a quality assurance point of view, this is really powerful.

“The ‘progress’ function of the Reports section provides me with brilliant summary reports detailing targets, mid-year reviews and all coaching notes, from coaches and teachers, which allows for two-way dialogue. BlueSky customised our system to enable this niche task to complete more smoothly.

What is the impact?

“BlueSky allows our teachers to be in charge of their own development. They gather evidence as they go along, for example by logging lesson plans so that when it comes to their end of year appraisal all the information is there.

“We have definitely seen that the quality of reflection has improved and the quality and value of our appraisal interviews has risen significantly. It was always good, but has definitely got better. Teachers are switched on and the process is more on-going. Joint practice development would not have such a high profile throughout the Trust without BlueSky.

“Vitaly, BlueSky links everything to our teaching standards so that our appraisals and feedback process is consistent. When working across four schools there could be a danger that things are done slightly differently in one school, compared to another. But with BlueSky I can quality assure the targets that each academy principal has set for staff. Otherwise if a principal at one academy sets a middle leader a target to achieve which is wildly different from that set by the principal at a different academy in the Trust three miles down the road, that plainly isn't fair or proper.

“BlueSky is also useful for our NQT programme – everytime there is a training session we upload the relevant materials and resources so that our NQTs can refer back to them later and other members of staff can access them too.

“It's a far more efficient way of managing things – I can't imagine how many Word documents I would need otherwise. It also saves time because teachers are not constantly looking back through documents to find the evidence they need.

“Another great thing is that when appraisals are done I can then report on where all the teachers are in regards to their targets. It helps me compile good reports for our executive board and trustees who can all rest assured that the process is being handled properly.

What's next?

“We are using the ‘Journals’ function with our second year teachers to see how it helps to develop dialogue. We also plan to increase our use of the ‘Resources’ function during personal development meetings”.

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