Connecting individual staff performance and school-wide improvement

Hempstead Junior School uses BlueSky to link and bring clarity to all elements of staff performance and monitoring.

About the school

Hempstead Junior School is a three-form entry academy for children aged 7 – 11 situated in Gillingham, Kent. The school is judged 'good' by Ofsted and is an open-plan school, meaning year groups operate in a 'free-flow' manner from class to shared areas.

Despite its large size – over 350 pupils and 19 teachers – the school is proud of its 'village feel' and community roots. The school also has a high level of pupil involvement with a school council, head boy and girl, peer mediators, junior play leaders, junior first aiders and junior road safety officers contributing to the school's close-knit feel.

What were the challenges?

Prior to BlueSky, Hempstead Junior School operated a paper-based system to track and manage the performance of its teachers.

Headteacher, Paul Cross, was keen to modernise the school's approach and make it more efficient.

"I was already familiar with BlueSky, having used it in a previous school. At this time we were looking for a way to manage and track appraisals for teaching staff without the hassle of keeping track of paperwork, checking everyone has signed and agreed everything and keeping it all confidential. BlueSky ticked all these boxes.

"On becoming deputy headteacher and later headteacher in my current school, I became frustrated by the mass of paper we were using! It was outdated and so as one of my first initiatives I introduced BlueSky as the core appraisal and monitoring tool.

"Our key objectives were to map individual targets against the school improvement plan and the school's bespoke professional standards. We also wanted to connect lesson observation information and feedback with the school's standards. Thirdly we wanted a system that enabled us to monitor CPL need and evidence against the school's bespoke teaching standards for appraisals."

How is BlueSky helping?

"Quite simply, BlueSky helps us to join everything up."

"The two biggest gains are being able to keep track of the entire appraisal process and ensure that everyone has followed the appropriate processes – this can then be easily summarised and presented to governors at the pay panel. Governors can then be confident that the correct procedure has been followed."

"For teachers the biggest benefit of BlueSky is that it is far more efficient. Having used BlueSky in the past I was aware of its worth however it was important that all staff bought into the solution. This wasn't difficult as everyone could clearly see the value of an updated system. 90% of teachers' time should be spent in the classroom. Anything which helps reduce that extra 10% and save teachers time is valuable."

"Finally, BlueSky is also paperless which means outcomes of appraisals and monitoring is all to hand online rather than in cumbersome folders. As a result, my monitoring file is empty!"

What is the impact?

"BlueSky has allowed us to fulfil our original objectives of modernising performance management so that individual targets can be tracked against the school's development and evidence can be collated for appraisals.

"However since implementing the solution, changes to the appraisal system and the need to tie processes together have led to us discovering so much more in BlueSky.

"In the past year we have begun using its Projects, Journals and Self-Evaluation modules. This means we are now able to manage all our monitoring and feedback through BlueSky, and link everything to our school development priorities and appraisal standards.

"BlueSky is also used to support our own performance management initiatives.

"The Projects and Observations modules are instrumental in our Talk4Teaching initiative which consists of Learning Walks – a more informal style of lesson observation – and Lesson Reflection where a team visits a class for a whole lesson. BlueSky allows us to record the findings against a proforma and then be used for wider school improvement.

"All staff use the Objectives tool, including TAs and admin staff. However, it really comes into its own for teachers as objectives can be linked to self-reviews. The facility to link objectives to school development priorities and relevant standards is also brilliant."

What's next?

"There is much more scope for subject leads to use the journal for recording evidence of their monitoring."

"The PLP tool is also something we want to explore to co-ordinate staff CPL needs. Last year this was done on paper in the form of a questionnaire so we're keen to update this".

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