

International School

The British School in the Netherlands



Powering a global view of professional learning for all staff across five campuses

How BlueSky supports one of Europe's largest international schools with their professional learning programme and objectives setting process

About the school

Based in The Hague area, The British School in the Netherlands (BSN) has a diverse international community across five campuses with over 600 staff. BSN staff are supported and encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities through their International Leadership Academy. They strongly believe that this has a significant positive impact on their pupils' education. BSN is the only school in Europe to offer a full British and International curriculum with a choice of five pathways, A Levels, BTEC, International Baccalaureate Diploma, IB Career Programme and a mixed pathway.

What were the challenges?

"As a large school with five campuses it was difficult to coordinate and ensure consistency when it came to professional learning. We needed to find a mechanism to streamline the way that people set their professional learning targets each year that also needed to work for all staff - teachers, support staff, our central services staff and leaders," says Sue Aspinall, Head Teacher at the Junior School Vlaskamp campus.

"We had just created the International Leadership Academy (ILA) and one of the core drivers was to try to centralise and streamline the range of CPL providers we were using, and ensure our courses and programmes were in line with the school priorities. We set up a working group to review a variety of options for how to do this and BlueSky was by far the best."

"I would recommend BlueSky as a way of fostering a professional learning environment, particularly if you have a large complex staff structure like ours, across different campuses. It was really helpful during remote learning."

Sue Aspinall, Head Teacher, Junior School Vlaskamp at The British School in the Netherlands.

“The support from BlueSky is fantastic. If we ever need help or assistance, especially at the beginning of each academic year, the BlueSky team is available to support us. It’s a really fast and quick turnaround.”

Sue Aspinall, Head Teacher, Junior School Vlaskamp at The British School in the Netherlands.



“We could see that BlueSky was a way of making sure that we had the mechanism for all staff to have access to an application process, which previously had been ad hoc and difficult to manage, and provided staff with the ability to link their CPL requests to their professional learning objectives and have everything manageable in one place,” says Sue. “We launched BlueSky at the same time as the ILA with one lead per campus and one for central services. It was their responsibility to disseminate the training and information in terms of the operational side of it to their teams. There was a timeline set so everyone knew what they had to do and by when.”

How is BlueSky supporting The British School in the Netherlands?

“The professional learning cycle starts in September when everyone sets and records their objectives in BlueSky. There is a mid-year and an end of year review, both recorded in BlueSky,” says Sue.

It has helped staff to be more consistent with objectives setting. Sue says, “Professional objectives were being set in a variety of ways. There was a lot of variance in terms of how clear those objectives were for staff. Now there is the expectation that there is one objective, which has an element of professional learning included, and is the main focus for the staff member throughout the academic year, and that’s worked well. We have also pushed back the dates for when objectives need to be set. Staff need time to get to know the cohorts, and if new to the role they need time to settle in before objectives are set.”

What is the impact?

Sue explains, “We have a much more filtered and consistent process now, and that’s reflective of the level of professionalism across the school. Staff are much more aware of their responsibility to keep their practice under review, evaluating it on an ongoing basis and looking at specific aspects of their practice that they are going to work on during the academic year.”

“Staff are much more accountable and line managers have a better way of being able to check very quickly at a macro level what training and development staff have undertaken and what they are working towards,” says Sue.

“The processes are well embedded now. We have built in time for staff to have their mid-year and end of year evaluation reviews. All of our training in the ILA goes through BlueSky which is a great mechanism for communication with colleagues too,” adds Sue.

“As a school leader I find it really helpful to have easy access to an overview of these aspects for my campus. Whilst there are a number of different line managers, I can easily check and be reminded of how staff objectives are linking into the whole school improvement priorities.”

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“BlueSky makes it easy for senior leaders to have robust conversations about what has happened on each campus, what the impact has been for students, and how professional learning is supporting teachers’ progression.”

Sue Aspinall, Head Teacher, Junior School Vlaskamp
at The British School in the Netherlands.

“BlueSky makes it simple and accessible for everybody. For me, it’s having the accessibility to see how everyone is doing. Teaching Assistants, Student Supervisors and support staff use BlueSky as well and really pride themselves in what they are working on with their projects and showing that through the evidence they upload. Staff are really conscientious in their use BlueSky,” explains Sue. “Colleagues link their objectives as closely as possible to the campus foci, for example, administration and concierge teams will make sure they link to customer service or the enhancement of the environment.”

Sue adds, “BlueSky is the mechanism that encourages the conversations that happen around the process. The discussions around what has been happening at your campus, what the impact has been for students, how is learning for the staff and how to move forward are invaluable. Conversations middle leaders have with their teams are captured in BlueSky, so you know as a staff member that the conversations you have been part of will be what informs decisions by the senior team.”

Sue continues, “Our Senior Leadership Team updates our school development plan having collected evidence within BlueSky from all the different stakeholders within the campus, and it works really well.”

What’s next?

“We are moving towards undertaking more collaborative inquiry professional learning. Currently this is being evidenced in BlueSky as part of our professional learning records and objectives evidence, and some colleagues use the Journal area for additional information. There has been some use of Projects for cross-campus work, and we may look to embed that practice further,” says Sue.

Sue adds, “We very much don’t want to lose sight of the fact that professional development equals student outcomes, so professional learning will always be at the centre of what we do to support our staff and, as a result of such, our students. Staff can see the link between changing and developing their practice and student outcomes.”

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