



Multi-Academy Trust Real Story

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT)

BlueSky



A high-performing large MAT uses BlueSky to standardise performance management

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust uses BlueSky to ensure consistent performance management and to collaborate on best practice across schools

About the school

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust, ranked the best multi-academy trust in the country for the performance of its secondary schools by the DfE, is made up of a family of schools that work together to “improve the life chances” of all its children and young people. Its 13 schools – comprising 4 secondary and 9 primary/junior academies – share a common mission to nurture successful children who are confident and can think and act independently.

In addition, the Trust was nominated in the ‘Employer of the Year’ category in the 2018 TES Schools Awards for its innovative pay structure.

What were the challenges?

As a multi-academy trust TSAT faced a number of challenges stemming from the disparate location of its schools and the large number of employees operating within its individual academies and as part of the Trust as a whole.

CEO Stuart Gardner was keen to find a solution which promoted shared thinking across the Trust’s

community and one that didn’t increase workload. After being recommended BlueSky, the system was adopted Trust-wide in 2015.

“For us the main challenge was ensuring consistency in performance management across the Trust. Each of our schools has its own culture, however, as a single employer it’s crucial that performance management is standardised so teaching and support staff don’t feel they’re being treated differently or unfairly.

“With a paper-based system we also found it was incredibly difficult to hold employees to account if the paperwork wasn’t completed correctly or went astray – something which could be a common occurrence.

“Additionally, we wanted to be able to set targets across all of our schools which could be Trust-wide but also take into account the position and needs of individual schools.

“Finding a single platform which met all of these requirements was a struggle and ultimately is what led us to decide upon BlueSky as the perfect solution.”

“ We began using BlueSky purely as a performance management tool to help ensure our processes were aligned across all our schools. BlueSky has helped us to achieve this and is now an important aspect of school life. ”

Stuart Gardner, CEO, The Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT)



How is BlueSky helping?

“We began using BlueSky purely as a performance management tool to help ensure our processes were aligned across all our schools. BlueSky has helped us to achieve this and is now an important aspect of school life.

“We have since expanded our usage and one of the key areas we’ve developed is our lesson observations, so I can summon up reports across all our schools at the touch of a button, to easily measure quality assurance and target CPD in the appropriate areas. BlueSky’s Partnership module makes it easy for us to organise, manage and evaluate information and in addition saves valuable time when it comes to Trust reporting and providing feedback quickly.

“We’ve also embraced BlueSky’s Projects as a way of sharing best practice between our schools. For example, we have a discussion board for maths as well as other subject specialisms which stops departments operating in silos.”

What is the impact?

“BlueSky is now an essential part of school life.

“We have met our original objective to standardise performance management and exceeded our expectations with BlueSky contributing to whole school and Trust improvement in teaching and learning outcomes.

“Talented staff create excellent schools and great performance management is a key element of that. Having the consistency of message, approach and expectation which BlueSky provides helps us to continue driving standards upwards.

“Staff buy into the solution as it is an integral part of everything they do. Pay reviews are simplified as all the evidence across schools is comparable and available at the click of a button, allowing a consistent experience for teachers and non-teaching staff no matter where they sit within the Trust.

“I believe this is something which will become increasingly important for MATs and the education sector as a whole. In days gone by schools may have functioned with a less rigorous approach to performance management. However, recent policy changes such as performance-related pay and increased academisation, not to mention the difficulties schools face in recruiting and retaining staff, make synchronicity of performance management an absolute essential.”

What’s next?

“Over the past couple of years the ability to collaborate within the joint-projects has helped us get to grips with the new 9-1 GCSE grading.

“Our next project is to identify and share expertise across our primary schools to allow cross-Trust use of a scheme called Cornerstone. By using BlueSky to share knowledge we can deliver the best possible educational experience.

“The main thing for us is knowing that if we want to roll something out Trust-wide BlueSky is there to help facilitate this.”

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