Secondary School Real Story
The Chalk Hills Academy

BlueSky

A large and swiftly improving academy pairs quality of teaching with school-wide improvement

The Chalk Hills Academy uses BlueSky to identify best practice – and rapidly improve quality of teaching and learning

About the school

The Chalk Hills Academy is a large secondary school and sixth form with 120 staff, located in an area of relatively high deprivation with more pupils than the national average receiving pupil premium. The academy is a part of The Shared Learning Trust and embraces the collective principle of 'Strive, Achieve and Believe', with a focus on each individual achieving their personal best across the curriculum, whether this be academic, a sporting achievement or extracurricular activity.

The Chalk Hills Academy is proud to be rated 'Good' by Ofsted and thrives on a culture of high expectations, for both staff and students.

What were the challenges?

Prior to the implementation of BlueSky, Chalk Hills used an on-site teaching school to produce reports on the sequality of its teaching. However, these reports were not tied to whole school improvement and had little impact on teaching and learning practices.

Adam Porter, Vice Principal, recognised the need for a solution that would enable them to link teaching and learning practices to whole school improvement and one that would also help them to simplify the performance management process.

"My mission was to find a more effective way of maintaining a record of activities, judgements and development programmes related to the quality of teaching. This had to be intuitive and easy-to-use and one that would reduce administrative workload.

"Previously, this had been monitored by an on-site teaching school which prepared occasional audits on various departments and individuals and attempted to track trends. However, there was no consistent narrative – just a very contrived set of reports which weren't measurable, meaningful or up to date and went largely ignored.

"My priority was to find a platform which would enable us to create a meaningful strategic overview

and analyse teaching and learning. We wanted to evaluate the quality of teaching, develop action plans and measure their impact. At all times the practices of individual staff needed to be linked to whole school improvement."

How is BlueSky helping?

"After reviewing a number of solutions, it became clear that BlueSky, with its wide range of features and benefits, was the right option.

"The level of integration in each of the modules was excellent. At the click of a button I can tie an objective from an improvement plan to a particular report or see a staff profile or team overview. The reporting mechanisms are also exceptional: with BlueSky it's easy to pinpoint the relevant information quickly.

"Another significant benefit of using BlueSky is that it helps us to save time and reduce workload. We have a number of staff who really engage with the solution; even for those who aren't so proactive, BlueSky still maintains their profile which builds despite the level of engagement – we never have a situation where a member of staff has an empty folder. BlueSky really is a supportive tool."

What is the impact?

"BlueSky has been invaluable for improving teaching and learning. I am no longer forced to wrestle with unwieldy spreadsheets – instead, we can take a more holistic approach to staff appraisal. At Chalk Hills we don't grade our lesson observations; however, as an institution we need to monitor the quality of teaching.

"BlueSky's Self Evaluation module has allowed us to create a rubric outlining priorities – as specific or as broad as required. This allows us to review the standard of teaching by feature or characteristic and the quality of feedback. Instead of grading individuals, we review the strengths of group practices – something which is far more useful when it comes to developing an effective CPL programme. Staff feel more engaged with the process, because the module supports a bottom-up evidence-based approach.

"As a result, teaching and learning over the past two years has improved significantly. This is largely due to BlueSky, which has enabled us to readily pinpoint specific development priorities.

"When I look at the time I used to spend building, managing and inputting data, rather than developing strategy based on outcomes, it is clear that BlueSky has been hugely beneficial and cost-effective.

What's next?

"The other secondary school within our Trust has just begun using BlueSky. We hope that this will allow us to begin using the new Partnership module to advertise CPL opportunities across both schools.

"BlueSky is so extensive there is always a further element we can use to our advantage."