

Special School

Oxfordshire Hospital School, Oxford



Education establishment moves from 'Special Measures' to 'Outstanding' in one academic year

In April 2019, the school won a prestigious TES Schools Award for its innovative use of technology to influence outcomes

About the school

Oxfordshire Hospital School is a local authority community special school for pupils aged 5 to 18 with medical conditions. It operates across multiple sites and a diverse geographical area with some staff based in small teams in in-patient units in Oxford and others as lone workers, working across Oxfordshire as part of the school's outreach provision.

The school promotes access to high-quality education, ensuring pupils are thoroughly prepared for their next stage in education: personalisation is a cornerstone of their pedagogy, identifiable in both their ethos and working cultures, and importantly frames the successful learning pathways enjoyed by their young people. Adopted as a whole school responsibility, their commitment to co-constructed personalised learning is demonstrated through the work of every teacher in every subject. Central to this work is a continuous cycle of planning, teaching, assessment and evaluation that takes account of the wide range of abilities, aptitudes and interests of our young people.

What were the challenges?

The 2016 Ofsted report pinpointed a lack of a one-school approach.

“BlueSky has enabled the school to give staff ownership of their development. They are encouraged to add notes to their objectives, record their reflective feedback after lesson observations and actively engage with their appraiser via the system throughout the year to supplement face-to-face sessions. Being able to look back at the record of all your performance management is very important for staff.”

Helen White, Assistant Headteacher
at Oxfordshire Hospital School in Oxford

“To have this one tool that everyone can access whether they are lone workers, in a small team or working across Oxfordshire as part of outreach teams has been incredibly important to us because we do so much remote work.”

Helen White, Assistant Headteacher
at Oxfordshire Hospital School in Oxford



Policy and practices needed to be more consistently embraced and understood by staff across all of the school's sites and contexts.

Helen White, Assistant Headteacher, says “Ofsted has highlighted that, because we operate on several sites geographically, there were pockets of good and excellent practice in most areas across the school but there was a lack of a unified approach in key areas such as whole school improvement planning.”

As part of its turnaround plan, the school used BlueSky to tackle this issue.

How is BlueSky supporting Oxfordshire Hospital School?

BlueSky has helped to bring together and share best practice across the whole school. Between September 2016 and July 2017, the school went from being in special measures to outstanding in every category.

It has been especially helpful with CPD.

“We have a very clear structure whereby anyone who wants to go on a training course puts a request onto BlueSky which then goes automatically to the leadership team. It's my responsibility to sift through them and we then discuss the requests and how they align with the school's strategic needs and the development needs of individuals and teams before a decision is made,” says Helen.

“Using the evidence on BlueSky enables us to pinpoint these needs very accurately,” she adds. “We can identify staff who may need some extra support in a key area or who may not be applying for many courses. It also helps us to ensure everyone is getting their fair share of training opportunities.”

The school also uses BlueSky extensively for performance management. Performance targets, lesson observations, and a summary of review meetings with line managers are all recorded on the system, giving a comprehensive and easily accessed overview, far removed from the cumbersome and insecure paper processes of the past.

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All new staff are given a BlueSky account and an introduction to the platform as part of their induction and the BlueSky icon features on the school's website landing page for easy access.

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The school has also found the system’s portability useful when staff join from schools where they previously had BlueSky accounts.

“Being able to look back at the record of all of your performance management is very important for staff,” says Helen, adding that moving accounts across from other schools to our BlueSky account was also very straightforward.

What is the impact?

In July 2017 when the school was rated outstanding by Ofsted, inspectors commented explicitly on the school’s success in unifying best practice and a sense of common purpose.

“We showed the inspectors a lot of anonymised BlueSky evidence such as how we were linking CPD, performance management and learning walks. They saw that as one of the major elements of unifying the whole school,” says Helen.

“With lesson observations, for example, we showed how we put together a bespoke lesson observation tailored to what it is we want to observe. It might include the staff development point or we might want to look at the quality of questioning. It means that, when it comes to quality assurance reports, I have all of my evidence there on BlueSky from across the school - what the strengths are and what the development points are and these insights are used to inform bespoke lesson observations for the next round. That progressive approach is what Ofsted was very impressed by.”

“They saw that there was a very strong link between what was identified in one set of lesson observations and what we had to do in the next ones and that it was all there on BlueSky,” Helen adds.

What’s next?

“There are other aspects of BlueSky that we are planning to use in the future such as the self-evaluation frameworks, including the latest Ofsted model. It’s really reassuring to know that the BlueSky staff are so helpful,” says Helen.



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