

Northern Lights SCITT, Yorkshire

Supporting students and their mentors in high-quality teacher training



Rapid feedback on performance, access to CPD materials and quality assurance across trainee cohorts all made easier with BlueSky

About the school

Northern Lights SCITT (School-Centred Initial Teacher Training) is part of the Northern Star Academies Trust and operates across North and West Yorkshire. Led by Skipton Girls' High School, the SCITT works with Leeds Trinity University which accredits the PGCE element of the in-school training. It provides secondary and primary training and has partnerships with more than 30 schools.

How is BlueSky supporting Northern Lights?

Northern Lights uses BlueSky to log and monitor trainees' progress, to support CPD and for quality assurance. Students themselves engage with the system at least once a week.

"We have 30 trainees on a year-long course who have weekly meetings with their mentors to evaluate progress and set targets, plus they have at least one lesson observation, all of which is captured on BlueSky. For that reason, ours is a much more intensive use than you would probably find in a school," says Tom Wolstenholme, the SCITT's Director.

What is the impact?

Before introducing BlueSky, trainees and mentors produced written notes, which were scanned and uploaded, and then downloaded by the quality assurance

Key benefits

- Saving training notes and CPD records online reduces workload for trainees and mentors
- Line managers can track activity and observation reports in real time, wherever they are
- Progress and development can be tracked against defined standards across the organisation

assessor, usually a line manager. BlueSky has enabled the process to become much more interactive and immediate, as well as less time-consuming.

"In lesson observations, mentors record their findings as a live document into an observation pro forma," Tom explains. "A line manager receives an email from BlueSky notifying them that something has been updated, so they can see the feedback and next steps for each trainee immediately. They are also notified when a trainee adds or changes something. Very often in teacher training, line managers are not in the building or even on the same site – it's always a remote business – but with BlueSky that is immaterial because they can see progress and check quality almost live with one click."

“A subject specialist in history, for example, who is overseeing four trainees, can look at the dashboard and see the number of observations each one has undergone and the outcomes, so they can ensure quality is being maintained across the whole cohort.”

Tom Wolstenholme, Director, SCITT



The dashboard in BlueSky also gives a global view.

Northern Lights uses the national teachers' standards, which are integrated with BlueSky, with trainees as an aid to self-reflection.

“We are not grading them, but they assess their progress and development against the standards,” says Tom. “We then use that information to run reports across the cohort to see which areas need to be worked on during the year. During the pandemic, for example, we noticed from the reports that several trainees had some anxiety around behaviour management, and we were able to respond to it. There are many kinds of reports that you can run, but we tend to keep it fairly simple.”

Northern Lights also uses BlueSky's Professional Learning and CPD tools, which allows the trainees to record activity undertaken outside their university course days, including the SCITT's own training, as well as any offered in school, their own research and reading, or anything from the BlueSky CPD library.

“The students can run their own summary report from BlueSky listing everything they have done, and by the end of the course it's a very extensive document!” says Tom. “It's great to have their development path recorded in one place and they tend to be very proud of their record.”

It has also enabled some trainees to continue to access training and development even when they couldn't be in school, he adds.

What's next?

The SCITT is looking at how to make even more use of the reports function within BlueSky, as well as making more use of the technology in general to enhance what they do for students.

Key to the effective use of BlueSky across the SCITT is the quality of customer support from the BlueSky team, Tom adds.

“The level of support from the company is excellent. They are very responsive, nothing is too much trouble and the staff will resolve any problem, no matter how minor. This is exactly the level of customer service you want when you are in a busy school environment.”

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