

BlueSky helps Congleton High School streamline and strengthen approaches to CPD, performance management and self-evaluation



Intelligence for Ofsted is easy to access, helping the school to tell its improvement story in a simple but powerful way

About the school

Congleton High School in Cheshire is a non-selective 11-18 academy with 1,278 pupils and 120 teaching and support staff. Rated Good by Ofsted in 2018, it was praised by inspectors for its strong team ethos and 'highly supportive' relationships between teachers and pupils. Congleton is also part of The Learning Alliance multi-academy trust with two primaries and a college, all of which use BlueSky.

What were the challenges?

BlueSky was introduced in 2010 to help Congleton improve performance management.

"We wanted more consistency across performance management than the paper-based system we were using," says Head Teacher Jim Barlow. "People were spending too long at appraisal time searching around for bits of paper for evidence of their CPD activity over the year. Plus we were keen to track clearly where people were on our pay scales so that we could check that the targets set for different line managers, for example, were broadly equal and gave them the same opportunity to progress up the scale."

The school also wanted to use BlueSky to align staff targets and professional development more closely with the school development plan.

Key benefits

- Saving CPD records direct to the platform reduces workload for teachers and senior leaders
- Easy to track individuals' development in one place and keep aligned with school-wide priorities
- Reporting dashboard supports quality assurance across the school at any time

"Ensuring performance management and targets cohered with and reflected the development plan was important for us," Jim adds.

How is BlueSky supporting Congleton?

BlueSky enables staff to upload evidence of their performance quickly and easily, an aspect that teachers have greatly appreciated for its time-saving and efficiency. When teachers switch from one line manager to another, it is easy for the new manager to see an individual's trajectory of development.

The school uses it for recording all CPD, encouraging staff to record any CPD event to build up a record over the year.

“With BlueSky we can link each objective to a strand of the development plan, so it encourages people to focus more on whole school priorities, as well as their own professional career development.”

Jim Barlow, Head Teacher, Congleton High School, Cheshire



“Even if it’s just a meeting with another school or a webinar or an article they have read, staff record it on BlueSky. Colleagues who have come to us from other schools who have used the system there can bring the record with them,” Jim says.

“From a manager’s perspective, it’s good for overview of CPD so you can see activity across teams, departments and staff groups such as NQTs, using the flood-fill functions, when you are reporting to governors.”

“Probably the most important benefit BlueSky has brought to the school in the last five years is the support it offers for quality assurance and self-evaluation,” says Jim. “Being able to pull up school, department, key stage or cohort-wide reports was especially useful for the 2018 Ofsted inspection.”

“Ofsted is always focused on impact and in our development plan and SEF we had talked about the impact of marking and feedback, which we had been tracking by using the templates in BlueSky. We have a quality assurance calendar for when middle leaders should use the templates and they are moderated by senior leaders. We can then look across both areas and key stages so we can see, for example, marking and feedback in one subject in Key Stage 3 is not as good as it is in another.

“We were able to show the inspectors the picture 18 months previously and what it was like four terms later. We had broken down the feedback into use of written feedback, response to feedback and other criteria. We were able to show that in September of the year before, one criteria was in amber, which means, not very good, and it had now improved by 32%. Being able to show them that information in visual form very quickly and easily is a huge benefit, and for the short Ofsted inspections, where there is little time, very efficient.”

What is the impact?

“BlueSky helps to keep staff focused on the school’s priorities,” says Jim.

“In the past, people concentrated on their own development needs and were not necessarily linking what they did to what the school needed. Our development plan is a live plan and we remind staff of its priorities all the time, so having that on BlueSky helps as people can easily refer to it so it helps with consistency.”

“Staff see it as a useful tool for organising themselves at all levels,” he adds.

“It has made them mindful of keeping their CPD records up to date and keeping evidence for performance management so they are thinking around career development and adding to their portfolio of evidence across the year.”

For leaders, BlueSky is now instrumental in helping them to keep track of the school development plan and holding people to account.

“I moderate all of the performance management objectives each year so there’s a clear structure for doing that,” says Jim. “BlueSky is very good for ensuring that people at different points on their scales of pay or career are working at levels we expect them to. It’s good in terms of school improvement and helps with self-evaluation.

“The ease of pulling off reports is key. If someone asks me how something has improved, I can very quickly say, well this was the picture in 2018 but this is the picture now.”

What’s next?

Following the success at Congleton High School, the Learning Alliance Trust has now adopted BlueSky across all the schools in the partnership, to support Trust-wide objectives and strategic planning.

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