BlueSky

Saracens High School, Barnet, North West London

BlueSky helps fast growing new school streamline CPD and appraisal workload

About the school

Saracens High School was established as a secondary free school in 2018, and is the first school linked to Saracens Sports Club. The school is located in Barnet, a particularly deprived area of North West London; the school has 50 percent of students on free school meals and 60 percent pupil premium.

The Saracens organisation has a strong focus on developing people and enabling social mobility, which is reflected in the values and aims of the school, prioritising continued professional development and training for all staff.

Key takeaways

- Moving to the online platform has saved SLT hours of work managing and tracking CPD

- BlueSky allows the school to effectively link CPD to appraisal objectives and quality assurance

- Ease of use means that tasks such as observations can be recorded on the go

> " BlueSky saves us hours. It has simplified a lot of tasks around CPD and appraisal. It's given us consistency. It's given us more control. It's given us a better capacity to track what's going on and where things are not going on, and therefore we can respond quicker where we need to intervene. So ultimately, it's been really useful for us. "

Dr Matt Stevens, Principal, Saracens High School

What are the challenges?

Saracens High School launched as a Year Seven six form entry in 2018. Principal Dr Matt Stevens helped to set up the school from the beginning and was instrumental in defining how the school was managed. He was responsible for defining and implementing all of the school's staff management policies and processes from scratch. "As a Principal starting a new school, you do everything, from designing the letterhead to the performance review process," explains Matt.

A large proportion of Saracens High School's students come from deprived backgrounds, which of course brings challenges. "We know this is a tough job, so we focus on supporting and developing our people, in line with the Saracens ethos," says Matt. "One of the things I was most invested in when we started the school was the CPD allowance. So when people ask if they can do a training course or CPD activity, we just say yes."

"We had a small staff initially, so I was managing the whole process manually. I was doing all of the paperwork for performance reviews and CPD training requests manually, spending a good few hours every weekend going through all of the applications."

"The growth took us by surprise. In 2019 we had 40 staff, then Covid hit, but now two years after that, we've got over 170 staff. Managing everything manually at that scale was impossible. I realised I needed a system that could streamline the workload."

"I had first seen BlueSky when it was introduced at a school I was working at years ago. We wanted a system that allowed us to manage all of our CPD processes as well as linking this to objectives and quality assurance. We looked at other solutions and concluded that BlueSky was the only platform that could do this effectively."

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How is BlueSky supporting the school?

Saracens High School joined BlueSky Education in 2022, and uses the platform to support teachers and operations staff with appraisal, CPD and evaluation.

Keeping track of training

Matt and his team use the CPD and Training modules in BlueSky to process and approve all staff requests for training, as well as sharing internal opportunities for training.

"We have a quality of education team that is very strong on pedagogy and subject knowledge, particularly science. We also do a lot of work on culture, as this is important to supporting our students, given the demographic of the school."

"We do a lot of internal training, but we also want people to bring ideas in from outside. Using BlueSky not only helps us to track training requests, but also who is not engaging with professional development, so we can encourage them."

Linking Objectives to school priorities

"One of the things that BlueSky has allowed us to do this year is link performance objectives to school priorities," says Matt. "We wanted teachers to have at least two

performance objectives that were connected to wider school goals, so we uploaded these and asked our staff to adjust them to align with their own practice."

Evaluating quality of teaching

"The area that we use all of the time is Observations. We have periodic formal observations, but all of the senior leadership team are regularly walking around the school, carrying out learning walks so that area is probably used every day," says Matt.

"We see a lot of good things going on in our classrooms, so we make a note on BlueSky and share the feedback with the individual. Our BlueSky account manager created a bespoke form for both types of Observation in the system, which makes it easy to make a note at the time and use that as evidence of people's development."

"I usually do it on my laptop but my Vice Principal does it on her phone."

"Using BlueSky means it is much easier to track feedback from learning walks, and to have that evidence is very powerful."

What is the impact?

BlueSky saves Matt and his team considerable time, particularly when it comes to processing CPD and training requests.

"It's so much easier to do. Previously staff filled in a form, which was emailed to me. I would then check the calendar, check the budget with the Finance Team, then email the staff member back... It was probably taking three or four minutes for each application."

"With BlueSky it takes less than a minute, and ultimately that saves hours a week. It's also much less stressful, knowing that everything is stored in BlueSky where we can easily track what is going on."

An additional benefit of BlueSky is the in-built evaluation process. Matt explains "Previously, once the CPD training was booked, we stopped tracking and there was no evaluation of the outcome, whereas we can build that into the process with BlueSky and get staff to reflect on the impact CPD has had on their practice."

"The reporting and the evaluation capability in BlueSky has brought many benefits, as well as making it a lot quicker to process."

"BlueSky is very, very time efficient. It saves us hours. It has simplified a lot of tasks around CPD and appraisal. It's given us consistency. It's given us more control. It's given us a better capacity to track what's going on and where things are not going on, and therefore we can respond quicker where we need to intervene. So ultimately, it's been really useful for us."

What's next?

Now that BlueSky is fully embedded into the appraisal and CPD process at Saracens High School, Matt is keen to ensure that he and his team deepen their use of the platform to analyse progress and continue to identify new ways they can support staff to develop and grow.

"We've been very lucky that we've been able to recruit some fantastic people who are dedicated to continually improving. We're very proud that we've been able to train and quickly promote staff," says Matt.

"Our exams officer, operations manager, admissions and attendance officer all started as receptionists. We have a number of teachers who started as a learning support assistant and we have a number of people who have gone on to be educational psychologists. We are really focused on growing and developing people, which BlueSky really helps us to maximise."