



STEP Academy Trust

BlueSky

A holistic perspective improves strategy and standards across STEP Academy Trust



BlueSky helps leaders to identify talent and expertise that can be leveraged to improve standards across the 18-school Trust

About the school

STEP Academy Trust is made up of 18 primary schools across London and South-East England. The Trust leadership is committed to building a sense of unity and common purpose across all of its schools, sharing good practice between teachers, teams and schools to establish a consistency of approach and ensure that everything they do is focused on improving the life chances of every child in every school. The values are articulated through the STEP Compass.

How is BlueSky supporting the Trust?

BlueSky is used across all 18 of the Trust's academies and it has been instrumental in enabling the Trust to understand the capacity and capabilities of their staff, as well as identifying training requirements.

"It's supporting us a great deal in terms of our people strategy across the Trust," says Jennese Alozie, Director of Effectiveness and Performance for the Trust. "From a leadership perspective, it helps us to understand where the staff capacity is and identify individuals' skills and experience, and whether they are ready for the next stage of their career

Key benefits

- Staff can manage their own professional development activity and goals
- Holistic view enables leaders to recognise and leverage rising talent and expertise
- Additional support and training needs are quickly identified

progression, or need additional support in some areas. Ultimately this is to ensure our pupils receive a high quality education in a thriving learning environment."

All staff use BlueSky to record their professional development activity and learning goals, using STEP Compass priorities and the Trust's own career pathway documentation. The BlueSky observations standards template is used by staff to evaluate themselves and at appraisal time, preparatory notes and outcomes are also recorded in the platform.

"Whether someone is an early career teacher or has just joined the catering team, we want to get a sense of what their skillset is, where they should be heading next and what support needs to be put in place."

“It really helps us to understand our people but, more importantly, empower them to develop their own career pathway as well.”

Jennese Alozie, Director of Effectiveness and Performance for the Trust.



What is the impact?

There are about 900 people in the Trust and keeping track of their progress and development without BlueSky would be very difficult, Jennese says. But besides increasing efficiency, BlueSky also helps the Trust to ensure equity in terms of access to career progression and development opportunities, makes talent-spotting easier, and ensures the roles and responsibilities of each individual are aligned with the Trust's mission, vision and values.

“Without BlueSky, the system would be too people-dependent, dependent on the line manager, the headteacher or head of service to recognise that someone needs support, and then to put that in place. But if there's someone going under the radar, who perhaps hasn't been recognised before, you can see quite clearly through BlueSky where they are in their career, their aspirations and what their next steps should be.”

It also helps to identify experience or expertise which could be shared across the Trust, she adds.

“If, for example, you spot that someone began their career in early years, that's incredibly useful if you are setting up a group to look at the next iteration of the Early Years Framework. No matter what their role is within the Trust, that person could be supporting a Trust-wide initiative.

“Similarly, when we began to build a data analytics team to improve the way we were using all of the data we gather for the Trust, we saw that one of our ICT technicians had expressed an interest in coding, web development and analytics in his appraisal notes. We asked him if he'd be interested in helping and he's now moved to work with that team. That's just one of the ways in which having the detailed knowledge of people's experience and aspirations at your fingertips on BlueSky feeds into development and improvement.”

BlueSky's Observation module has helped staff to gain a much deeper understanding of where and how improvement is required in their field. It is used in

conjunction with the Trust's own set of STEP standards: around 40 criteria that span everything from Finance and Governance to pupil outcomes, pupil progress, the curriculum design. These criteria are used for self-evaluation with a grading for each of 1 (high) to 4 (low).

“Teachers and leaders within the school can use the criteria to identify where they think they are on the journey in relation to any one of those strands. If someone thinks they are a 3 and another school is a 1, you can look at why that is, and identify what's not working well for them. We then form a peer support network to delve into how they might improve.”

“Across 18 schools, you could have lots of conversations but allowing heads, teachers and schools to do the evaluation process by themselves and have that discussion through BlueSky means they can unpick what is happening.”

What's next?

The Trust is planning to introduce a 360 evaluation process as part of leadership development. Jennese explains “We want to identify the types of leadership behaviours that are necessary to improve academies – they're obviously different according to your goals and contexts – and also develop professionalism. We're working with BlueSky to develop a 360 model that teachers and leaders from central team functions and education can take part in to understand how their current behaviours affect their role, positively or negatively, and how to develop and improve better behaviours.

“The efficient way in which BlueSky enables us to capture, use and make sense of our data and other information in a scientific way is going to help us hugely in this next stage of development.”

Tel: +44 1483 880004 | Email: info@blueskyeducation.co.uk | Facebook/Twitter: @BlueSkyMatters | Web: blueskyeducation.co.uk

