



## Watford Grammar School for Girls



# Custom approach to appraisal designed to enhance staff development

### About the school

Watford Grammar School for Girls is a well-renowned academy with 1400 students. Despite the name, WGGGS is only partially selective, with 25% of students taking an entrance test and 10% accepted on musical ability. The school has a long tradition of academic excellence, achieving some of the highest GCSE results for a non-grammar state school in England.

### What was the challenge?

Watford Grammar School for Girls (WGGGS) introduced BlueSky Education in early 2022, with the aim of streamlining their appraisal processes - moving away from a paper-based system that often caused delays and made it difficult to track progress.

"When deadlines for appraisal paperwork were approaching, people would say 'I'm not in today, so I can't sign it' and

### Key takeaways

- Customisation features deliver tailored processes that align with school culture and engage staff
- Staff retain autonomy while gaining enhanced access to support and professional development
- Online system creates a more efficient and accurate process, with all records kept in one place

there were lots of pieces of paper floating around" says Deputy Headteacher Chris Wilshaw. "We realised it would be much better if it was all done online, so there were fewer delays and no signatures required - once it's entered in BlueSky, it's completed."

“ I found the whole implementation process very supportive. Although BlueSky Education could be used off-the-shelf, it can be customised, and I think I've asked for everything to be customised! ”

Chris Wilshaw, Deputy Headteacher



The school has a fairly unique approach to people management, with around 35% of staff on part-time contracts, and a strong belief in autonomy. Chris explains: "We've worked hard to recruit and retain the best teachers, and that's partly why we have so many part-time staff. We are able to offer more flexibility and more autonomy than other schools where recruiting is difficult."

WGS has been rated outstanding by Ofsted for a significant period of time, which attests that teaching is already of a high standard. However, the school's existing process was limiting how staff approached their professional development: "With the old process, people were writing huge documents to evidence their achievements, but we felt that this wasn't really having an

impact that enhanced teaching and learning. Part of the reason for implementing BlueSky Education has been about changing the practice, so it's more focused on 'improve, not prove.'"

Chris emphasises that when they rewrote their appraisal policy this year, they didn't want to bring in a 'standard' performance management model that made staff feel that they were being monitored. "Staff don't want high levels of scrutiny; we aim to treat them as professionals because we know they are performing well – getting high GCSE and A-level results. We needed to design a system for our appraisal process that allowed for more autonomy than you might have in other schools."

“ If you're trying to make incremental improvements, it's much better to have a system like BlueSky where you can log everything rather than lots of bits of paper that can float around and get lost. ”

Chris Wilshaw, Deputy Headteacher



### How is BlueSky supporting the school?

After reviewing alternative solutions, BlueSky Education was selected as it offered the highest level of customisation and support with onboarding. Chris has been impressed with how easy it was to start using the platform and with the ability to tailor BlueSky to fit with the school's culture and specific appraisal process.

"That was one of the important reasons we chose BlueSky – we needed something that could be customised for us as a school. Through a number of planning meetings, our account manager helped us to design the appraisal process we wanted to implement, and then to create bespoke pro-formas and templates, and has delivered targeted training for staff ahead of our appraisal deadline so they could use it to record their appraisal and set their objectives for the coming year."

### What is the impact?

Although the school is still training staff to use the system for appraisal, Chris has already seen improvement in the way that professional development activity is being recorded. "People have only just started drafting their objectives, but they are already logging CPD that they've done. That's great – the pandemic has really changed how they approach this, with more staff accessing CPD online, webinars etc. Previously we

wouldn't have known about this, because there wasn't really anywhere for them to log or record it."

The platform has also allowed school leaders to share key documents, such as the school development plan, in a central location where all staff have access. "Staff have to base their individual targets, or year group or department targets, on the school development plan, but previously they would have to search for it," Chris admits. "Now it is in BlueSky – the place where you are thinking about what you are planning to do – it is much easier to make that link."

### What's next?

Chris is looking forward to using BlueSky to get a more holistic understanding of staff capabilities and areas for development, which simply wasn't possible previously. The school's Teaching and Learning lead will be able to gain an overview of the objectives staff are setting, and identify strengths or areas for development.

The online system will improve efficiency, meaning the headteacher can review evaluation forms earlier without having to chase paperwork, while quality assurance processes such as lesson observations can be typed directly into BlueSky, enhancing accuracy and immediacy of feedback.

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