

CASE STUDY

NORTHAMPTON PRIMARY
ACADEMY TRUST



Tom Rees

Head of Simon De Senlis School and Educational Director for NPAT

BACKGROUND

By 2020, the Northampton Primary Academy Trust (NPAT) will have grown to 12 schools including a new free school.

"There is a real mix of schools", says Tom Rees. He has been Head of Simon de Senlis School, one of the original five Microsoft Showcase schools, for six years. Now, as well as being the Executive Headteacher at the school, he is Education Director for the Trust.

The schools in the Trust range from an outstanding Church school to one about to be rebrokered into the Trust in Special Measures. Together, they consist of around 3,000 children and almost 600 staff.

NPAT was a pilot for Groupcall Analytics.

THE KEY ISSUE

With that many diverse schools, obtaining data that they could use as a basis for decision-making presented a challenge. As Rees says, "A good analytics program won't make up for poor quality data. You know the old computer saying: garbage in, garbage out."

For Rees and his team, each school had its own way of measuring and formatting assessment, and other data, and its own timescale for reporting.

But does any of that matter?

THE POINT OF DATA

As Rees puts it, the whole point of data is being able to understand better what's really going on in the schools to make meaningful comparisons and predictions.

"We didn't want to analyse only year 6 results, because that's just like looking in a rear-view mirror. If you get an insight into kids that aren't

doing brilliantly when they're 8 you've got time to do something about it. We wanted to be able to use the data to predict when things were likely to go downhill for a pupil, and then stop that from happening. For example, we want to be able to compare individual children's attendance with their school's average attendance, and have early warning flags to indicate persistent absenteeism. And to have that in place across the board."

There was also the need to make meaningful comparisons between schools, and to do so over a range of data.

Having a wide range of data and having confidence in it are crucial. The bottom line is that decisions about the deployment of resources are made on the basis of the data available. Resources are expensive, so even from a purely financial perspective it's important to get the numbers right.

But of course it's about much more than that.

"Schools and Trusts are successful or not on the basis of their decisions and you can't make good decisions without good information. That's what having analytics and access to data can do: give you visibility to good information. With good information we can make good decisions, which help our Trust to get better - make it a better place for kids to go to school and for teachers to come to work."

Good data on a range of aspects makes it possible to explain why something has happened. It can even give early warning signs which enable interventions to be made.

BENEFITS IN ACTION

Groupcall Analytics has made a number of things possible which would not have been so before. While visiting a school to conduct a review, Rees, was able to pull up the average standardised maths scores of the class he was in, and compare them to those in

the Trust.

"I was able to get a snapshot of what the data said about that class, as well as what the books were telling me and what I was seeing from my eyes."

Similarly, Groupcall Analytics makes inspection far less daunting. During a visit from Ofsted, Rees sat with Groupcall Analytics on a screen in his office and was able to drill down into different pupil groups and answer questions from a lead inspector.

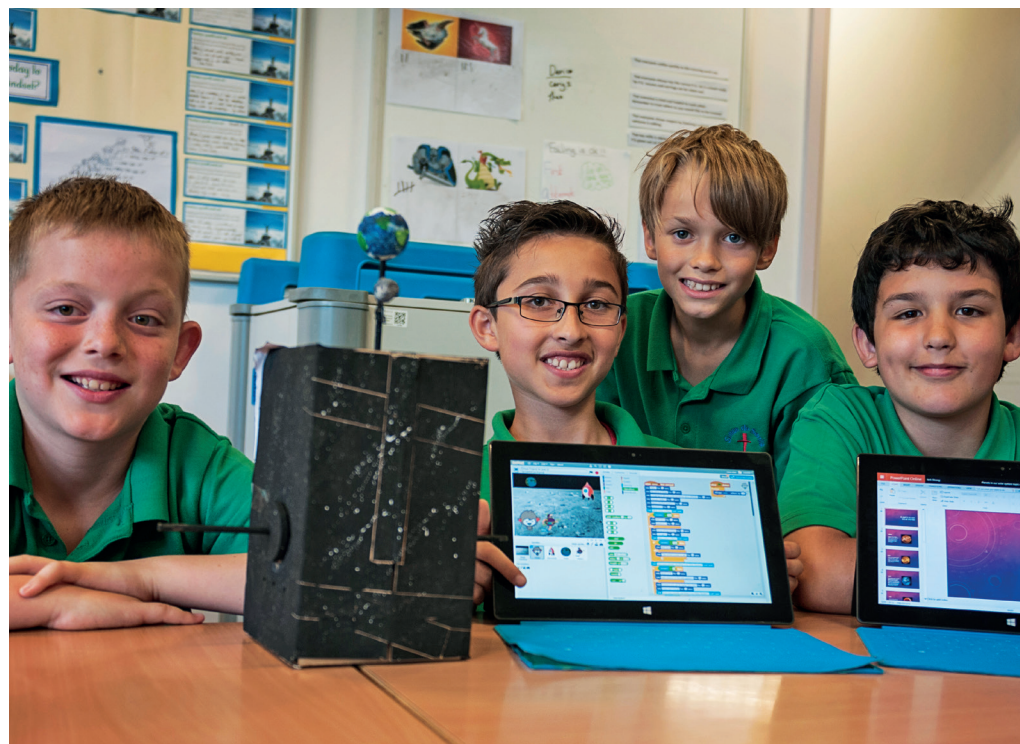
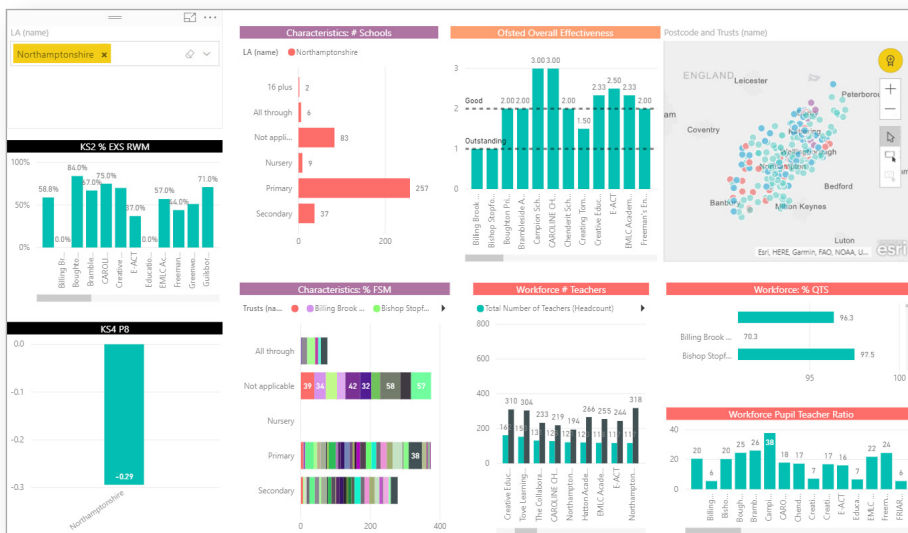
And it's not just the Heads who are benefitting:

"Today, for example, 3,000 children's data is being entered into their local SIMS system and tomorrow my CEO can press a button on her phone and read a summary of how the attainment performance looks across the Trust and how that's changed since December. That's pretty revolutionary!"

As well as good outcomes for the children, having a central 'place' for each school's data improves efficiency and cuts down on cost. This means just one data manager is needed rather than a dozen.

Where Groupcall Analytics comes into its own is in allowing the Trust to include contextual information and the results from other tests such as CATs and GL-Assessment's PASS survey. Having that range of data, which you

National public dataset showing information on Northamptonshire schools



can slice and dice in several ways, enables you to take a much more considered approach:

"We're trying to analyse more intelligently - attempting to think about assessment in education more like a consultant doctor than how we have previously. Just as someone's health can't be expressed in a simple number, learning can't be captured in a single measure or grade. For doctors, a range of different reports and tests are considered together leading to good decisions based on a more holistic view of the situation. Likewise, meaningful assessment can lead to greater understanding of gaps in learning and effective tailored

teaching and intervention. Groupcall Analytics allows us to start doing the early intervention where you have signs that certain things might be going wrong or - and this is what's really exciting, where you can start to predict what things might go wrong.."

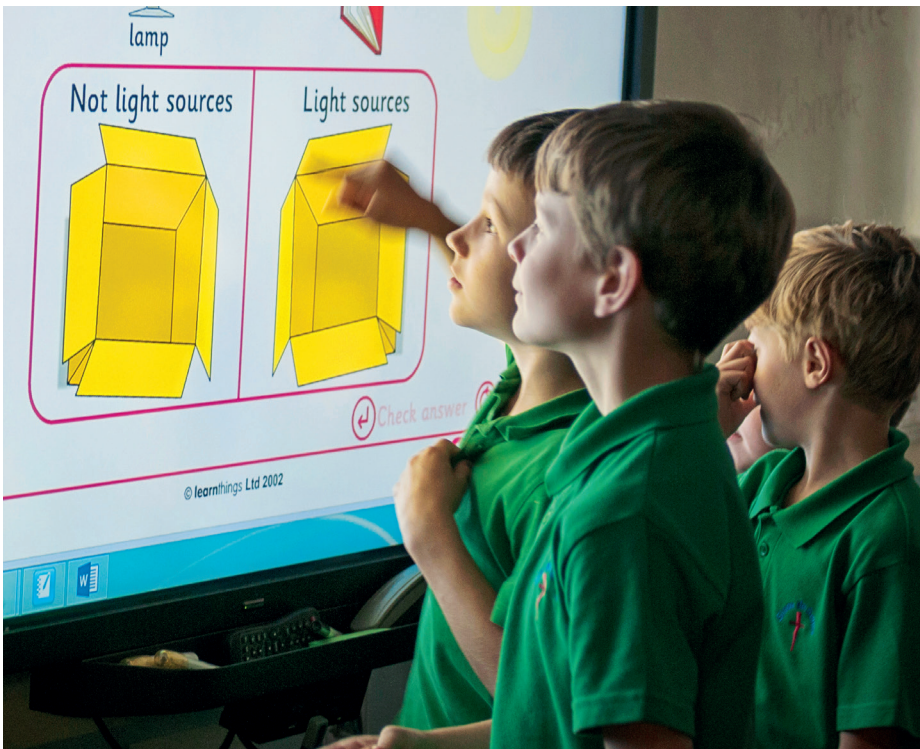
Having the data at their fingertips has made it easy and relatively costless to look at information like the costs of leadership teams and any discrepancies in pay based on gender, across the whole school.

THE CHALLENGES

Realising these benefits was not just a case of installing Groupcall Analytics and waiting for the magic to start. A number of decisions had to be made first.

Initially, each school was making assessment judgements of the children according to their own criteria, so the first move was to bring in standardised tests at particular times of the school year. That led to rich conversations looking at questions like "What are we teaching?"; "What are we measuring?"; "How do we measure it?"; "How do we look at how we compare to other schools?"

The 'what' aspect was key. Groupcall



Analytics lets you measure anything and everything, but as Rees says, it's important to measure only what is likely to be useful.

"Tracking every objective and coming up with a system of grades that are Levels by another name is a waste of time because it makes no difference at all to outcomes."

The format in which the data was submitted also had to be standardised, and the timing of data drops synchronised. This lessened Heads' workload because they were no longer bombarded with requests for information from all sides and at

all times.

Finally, transparency was critical. Each Head can now look at the data from any other school, and where necessary act proactively and quickly.

THE DECISION TO USE GROUPCALL ANALYTICS

In the case of the NPAT, it was a demonstration of an early version of the software at Bett which convinced them to adopt Analytics. As Rees points out however, when it

comes to evaluating the costs and benefits of a program like Groupcall Analytics you have to look beyond the ticket price:

"You're not trying to find what's cheaper, but you're trying to find value in its broader sense. So what's the value in having access to real-time information from every school? And what's the cost value that we can attach to not having to manually create lots and lots of reports? And what's the cost of making poor decisions because of poor data?"

WHAT NEXT?

Rees is excited about what the future holds.

"As we start to engage with more sophisticated analytics tools such as machine learning and artificial intelligence we will start to gain more insights from our existing data, and then use these to make proactive interventions. The technology really will have a great part to play."

So how would Rees sum up the value of Groupcall Analytics?

"Having the ability to analyse and investigate trends across the complete spectrum of data sources across different schools allows for meaningful enquiry and analysis at the press of a button. Making problems visible for early detection and intervention in this way is an analytics revolution for Multi-Academy Trusts".



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