



## Advance Learning Partnership, County Durham



# BlueSky Education supports consistent school improvement priorities across a rapidly growing trust

### About the trust

Advance Learning Partnership (ALP) is a multi-academy trust made up of 5 primary schools and 6 secondary schools across County Durham. The trust's values emphasise treating every child as their own, ensuring that every decision is focused on securing the best outcome for each and every child. This educational blueprint is used to transform the educational standards across the trust, which has rapidly expanded its primary provision this year.

### What was the challenge?

The Advance Learning Partnership has been successfully using BlueSky Education for several years, using the platform to establish consistent approaches to appraisal, professional development and quality assurance across the 11-school trust. BlueSky was first introduced at the original

### Key takeaways

- Established BlueSky client uses BlueSky to embed trust priorities in new schools
- Online system ensures consistent appraisal, professional development and quality assurance
- All staff benefit from engagement in developmental practices, delivering improvement in student outcomes

school, Parkside Academy in 2014, after the Head teacher saw it in use at another school and realised the impact it could have on their own systems.

“ The philosophy of the Trust is to secure excellent education through collaboration, which is why BlueSky Education is the ideal platform for us in terms of achieving consistency in how we evaluate, support and develop staff, and ultimately, how we secure the best outcomes for children. ”

Catherine Taylor, School Improvement Partner, Advance Learning Partnership



"We wanted staff to be able to manage their own professional portfolio online, we wanted to reduce the amount of paperwork we had in school, and we wanted to have a consistent system for our performance management across the school" explains Catherine Taylor, School Improvement Partner.

Stefanie Emmerson, Head of Governance & Compliance, describes how BlueSky Education supports trust growth: "The trust has grown quite quickly over the past year and we are now relying a lot more on the information that we collate on BlueSky."

Stefanie emphasises the importance of supporting schools to use BlueSky Education to fully maximise the benefits for the trust – and individual schools. "I support schools in their use of BlueSky and this underpins work on our trust's key priorities but I also encourage schools to look for strategies that could potentially roll-out into a trust-wide initiative. If there is something that is working well, we are always interested in exploring how that could be transferred across all of our schools."

Catherine agrees: "What we've been able to do is take the benefits of our initial implementation of BlueSky and transfer that across our trust to build a sustainable growth model."

“ I absolutely recommend BlueSky. It is a solution to achieving consistency across a Trust and is a universal tool that can be used in so many different ways to support school improvement and development, which ultimately has a positive impact on student outcomes. ”

Catherine Taylor, School Improvement Partner, Advance Learning Partnership



### How is BlueSky supporting the trust?

BlueSky underpins a consistent approach to performance management that aligns the appraisal objectives of nearly 700 staff with trust priorities: improving literacy, supporting SEND and disadvantaged students, and the use of research in improving teaching and learning.

"Our objectives are used consistently across our Trust and they are documented in BlueSky. We have a comprehensive overview of how our objectives are linked to the teachers' standards and headteachers' standards and share performance criteria across all of our schools to support our staff in securing continual improvement in the quality of teaching and learning" says Catherine.

BlueSky allows the school improvement team to evaluate the impact of all professional learning as staff are able to record all internal and external activities in their personal portfolio. The improvement team runs an extensive programme of professional development, including bespoke courses to develop leadership abilities of staff at different stages of their careers, from Early Career Teachers to Executive Leaders.

Catherine explains "We encourage staff to record and evaluate all internal and external CPD. Staff sometimes move from one school to another within our trust, and BlueSky provides a portfolio that they can take with them, which I think is so important in terms of their professional

development and leadership journey. It also gives staff ownership of their own career progression and professional learning."

"BlueSky is not only a personal portfolio for staff – it creates a dialogue between staff and their line manager, and enables our teaching and learning leads to monitor and evaluate the impact of CPD. Evaluations are used to inform changes to the programme and or understand where they can share best practice."

Additionally, BlueSky helps the trust to identify areas of development, says Stefanie, "Being able to run trust-wide reports means we can see where we should target trust-wide CPD".

The trust has moved towards a quality assurance model based around a coaching model of developmental drop ins, rather than graded lesson observations. Using BlueSky, the school improvement team have been able to adapt the process and create bespoke forms to record observations from the coaching conversations.

"We've been able to develop our own bespoke framework for how we want coaching sessions to be recorded on BlueSky. The teaching and learning lead can draw down a report which evaluates these sessions, linked to our Teaching and Learning Principles," says Catherine. "We can see at a glance where there are examples of best practice

of and staff who would benefit from development in that area can be paired up for coaching. It's been beneficial for recording the information, but the most important factor is how we use that information to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There's an increased emphasis on personalised coaching for staff which provides precise guidance on how they can develop their practice."

This is a new approach for the trust, which is yet to be adopted by all schools, but Catherine feels that the gradual roll out is another benefit of using BlueSky: "We are mindful of ensuring that schools implement systems in a timely manner which is relevant to their context, and BlueSky provides the flexibility we need to support schools in meeting their individual needs."

### What is the impact?

Catherine is certain that BlueSky Education has a significant impact on raising standards and supports the trust's mission to work collaboratively to provide outstanding learning experiences and opportunities. "It enables us to evaluate effectively and analyse key information, but then also use that information to support the professional development of colleagues and make sure they receive the guidance and training that they need. Ultimately this helps colleagues to develop their skills and become more effective practitioners in the classroom, which will then have a positive impact on the children and their outcomes."

"The key benefit of BlueSky for performance management is the ability to continually update and add evidence, rather than wait until a review point," says Catherine. "Staff appreciate having regular conversations, and having the time with their line manager to discuss their professional development, talk about their training needs and how they want to progress in their career. BlueSky

provides a supportive structure for our performance management system across our Trust."

Stefanie agrees: "I think it definitely helps as staff feel invested in; we are very much focused on developing every single person as an individual, so that they know that they are getting support and time to be able to develop themselves. Not every organisation offers this investment in people but at ALP we prioritise the professional development of our team."

### What's next?

Ahead of the next school year, the School Improvement Team are planning how they can achieve greater consistency in the use of BlueSky across their schools, to maximise the quality of intelligence that can be produced. Stefanie confirms: "We are working hard to get everyone working to the same standard so that we can increase our use of the brilliant reports in BlueSky."

As the trust has grown, the school improvement team has worked closely with colleagues at BlueSky to ensure that new schools are quickly brought up to speed with the platform. "Over the years we've developed a close partnership and we know that we can get in touch with the BlueSky if we need training or advice," says Catherine. "As a growing Trust, we want to ensure that we are using the best products to meet the needs of our schools. We've always maintained that BlueSky meets our needs in the best way."

Stefanie adds "I think the BlueSky system works best for us; BlueSky seems to cover everything whereas some other systems only do parts. It is working well and we want to make sure that it's being embedded further across all of our schools to make sure they all have the same standard of use."

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Stefanie Emmerson, Head of Governance & Compliance



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