



St George's Primary School, Merseyside

A flexible online platform helps turnaround staff retention and supports a thriving workforce

About the school

St George's Primary School, Merseyside is a large primary with over 900 children enrolled, from Foundation 1 to KS2 (Year 6). The school's mission is to enable all students to excel across all areas of the curriculum with an enriching range of opportunities to learn and grow.

Over recent years, the school has rapidly improved in all measurements and is recognised as a Voice 21 Oracy Centre of Excellence, holds the Carnegie Silver Award for Mental Health and is a lead school with partner agencies for phonics, science education, computing, phonics and many other areas of school life. St George's has used BlueSky Education since 2017.

Why did the school choose BlueSky?

When headteacher Bernard Cassidy joined the school, there had been a significant turnover of staff, which was affecting the school's ability to provide a high standard of education.

"Staffing was a critical issue - 70% of the curriculum staff had left in the preceding 18 months," says Bernard. "That of course had led to a lack of joined-up leadership, and had impacted the quality of teaching and pastoral care."

Bernard realised that the school needed to implement a systematic approach that ensured the staff felt valued, understood and supported in order to stabilise the workforce.

“ What has made BlueSky transformational for us is the customisation tools; we've been able to tailor the platform to the way the school works. We built up our use of the system over time, with support from the BlueSky team. This has helped ensure it is integrated with our appraisal cycle, with forms that are tailored to different roles. ”



Bernard Cassidy, Headteacher

"We knew that we needed to get a handle on developing our staff. BlueSky was actually one of the first programmes we introduced, because we wanted a system that could help us to understand the needs of our staff and identify the way forward."

St George's is a large Primary school with around 160 staff in total, including up to 90 curriculum staff. It runs a teacher training programme, offers nursery provision and the Dragon Club breakfast, after-school and holiday club, and manages catering in-house. "We're open 51 weeks of the year," says Bernard. "With all those components and aspects of staffing, we needed a strong, systematic approach."

"BlueSky is valuable in any school, but as a large school, we needed a tool that would help us implement a new approach to staff development, in a way which was informed and effective."

How is BlueSky supporting the school?

The BlueSky Education platform is used to support the professional development of all school staff (except lunchtime supervisors), including trainee teachers.

"We use BlueSky as the one place where we're all logging every CPD activity, recording line management meetings, and well-being surveys," says Bernard. "It means we can analyse different teams, whether that's curriculum or non-curriculum staff, or different key stages, and it helps to build a picture of their development."

"The whole point of having a record of CPD is that we want our staff to thrive. We don't want it to be accidental that they get the training they need in their role. BlueSky also allows us to analyse whether the training they're accessing is relevant to either their current role or their aspirations for the future, whether that's a teaching assistant who is thinking of doing an apprenticeship or a teacher looking to move into a senior leadership role."

“ In terms of being able to properly analyse and share an evaluation of your whole staff workforce with external stakeholders, whether that's Ofsted or Governors, BlueSky is an incredibly powerful tool. The school's strategic priorities are embedded in BlueSky, so we are able to use these as KPIs and demonstrate that 95% of staff professional development was directly linked to the school's four main aims. You couldn't do that without the BlueSky platform. ”

Bernard Cassidy, Headteacher



"We have found the Opal Review 360 feedback feature very helpful for senior leaders to evaluate their behaviours and how they practise the values of the school. We ensure those 360 reviews have at least 18 members of staff responding which makes it really powerful."

Unlimited CPD opportunities with BlueSky Learning

All school staff are entitled to a minimum number of hours of CPD, which Bernard believes is essential to supporting individuals to do their jobs. "If you're not giving staff entitlement to high quality training and checking that that's being done, you're just setting those people up to fail."

"We make sure that we deliver CPD within the paid hours of their job and have a minimum number of hours for all roles, but we also emphasise that we offer unlimited opportunity for training. It comes back to this idea that you want your staff team to thrive."

"BlueSky Learning is invaluable for that approach. The quality and breadth of the content means that we can direct staff to particular BlueSky Learning modules, but we can also happily allow our staff to access whatever they want. It allows us to be responsive to different needs which emerge, or personalise learning for individuals in line with different roles."

"For example, there could be an ITT member of staff who, despite the input of their mentor, is still really struggling with behaviour management. Sometimes they just need a different approach to training. With BlueSky Learning they can access both the theory and gain practical guidance on behaviour management from experts."

"The bite-size format also makes it easier to fit into the working day or share in a staff meeting, and it's easy to assign modules or for staff to create a new CPD activity through

BlueSky Learning because it is integrated into the BlueSky platform. As a school leader, it allows you to simply find the solution without any of the obstacles of traditional CPD."

What is the impact of BlueSky?

Bernard highlights the importance of documenting all conversions around staff development and performance, which can be quickly recorded in BlueSky: "I always say that if it's a valuable conversation, we should keep a brief note."

Transparent and fair processes

"I like the transparency of those records in BlueSky. If I write feedback on someone on the platform, they can see that and have the right to reply. If I write your objective and you disagree, then that's recorded and it's noted. If there's a lesson review or a work scrutiny, we have clear evaluation criteria for that and the space for the member of staff to respond to that in BlueSky."

"There's transparency and fairness in this approach, but there's also professionalism and diligence which goes both ways for staff and managers."

"I'd say we grant over 90% of CPD requests but if there's a reason we don't approve something, say if there's a resource issue, we can document the reason in BlueSky and be clear about the other steps we'll take to support that member of staff. If they disagree with that plan, they can make a note of that too."

"We have created staff voice surveys with BlueSky's customisable template, which allow us to gather feedback, and as a leader, I find that is incredibly helpful and powerful."

"I want all my staff to be thriving, I want them to be enjoying their work and performing as well as they can. We want to be celebrating their development and achievements, but at the same time, if staff are struggling, I want that same fairness and transparency so we can support them."

Easy evaluation of staff development needs

BlueSky is instrumental in helping Bernard and his team identify training needs and defining the professional learning strategy for staff in different roles.

"It helps us to identify training needs for individuals but also across teams. For example, I can run a report for the

catering team; there are so many things that they have to manage and it's a tough job so we are conscious we need to support them."

"With BlueSky, I can quickly run a report on what their training offer looks like, where we're up to with reviews and evaluations, and even the status of hygiene and food standards certificates. It gives you that informed picture of what is going on straight away, both for individuals and for teams."

"In terms of being able to properly analyse and share an evaluation of your whole staff workforce with external stakeholders, whether that's Ofsted or Governors, BlueSky is an incredibly powerful tool. The school's strategic priorities are embedded in BlueSky, so we are able to use these as KPIs and demonstrate that 95% of staff professional development was directly linked to the school's four main aims. You couldn't do that without the BlueSky platform."

Tailored approaches to support growth

Over the years, St George's leadership team has been able to expand and adapt the flexible features of BlueSky to support staff engagement and meet the changing needs of the school.

"What has made BlueSky transformational for us is the customisation tools; we've been able to tailor the platform to the way the school works. We built up our use of the system over time, with support from the BlueSky team. This has helped ensure it is integrated with our appraisal cycle, with forms that are tailored to different roles. Now we record everything in BlueSky; we use it to log CPD, record evaluations, gather 360 feedback and staff can self-review against national standards."

"I'm a real fan of the BlueSky platform, but if you ask me what the best interaction with the company is, I feel that the support we've had from the Customer Success team in achieving our ambition has been absolutely great. They understand that schools sometimes need to work backwards; we needed to know what was possible with the platform and then we could define our process, and they helped us to get to that point."

"I would stress that it's really helped us to achieve our ambitions for a thriving workforce."

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