

## From Special Measures to Microsoft Showcase School



Vicky Redhead became substantive principal at Bishop Creighton Academy (BCA), Peterborough, in April 2015 when the school joined the Greenwood Academies Trust. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average (Sch 66.8 Nat 20.7). The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average (Sch 35.8 Nat 24.3). The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those with an education, health and care plan, is well above average. The deprivation indicator is almost double national levels. The journey from special Measures to Good was predictably challenging.

Vicki and the team worked relentlessly to change the ethos of school; to refocus on the importance of positive relationships both within the school and between the school and external stakeholders. Within this positive ethos serious work was done to place sound pedagogical practices at the heart of the pupil experience. Strong leadership at all levels, combined with a rigorous approach to teaching and learning led to the school being recognized as Good in February 2018.

What strikes you when you visit BCA is the positivity and the absolute determination of every adult in the building to make a difference to the lives of pupils in the school. In May 2018, BCA were onboarded to the GAT Digital system. Vicki describes this as '...being given a remarkable gift, I wanted staff and pupils to benefit.' Historically, IT use was limited to desktop computers running a limited range of learning packages for pupils. What had been clear was the pupil's willingness to engage with technology and the increased levels of engagement that came from this. The school initially invested in laptops on a 1:2 basis and Trust led CPD around use of the Microsoft Office 365 suite was rolled out to the school.

Early gains came from collaboration through Teams and OneDrive. Suddenly, sharing documents and working on them collaboratively became a quick and easy process. Staff felt empowered by the changes, yet, this was just the start of a journey that rapidly gained pace once BCA was invited to join the Microsoft Showcase Schools pathway in Autumn 2018. After attending the launch event at Microsoft's London headquarters, staff were made aware of the Microsoft Educator Community, the MEC. This was a critical stage in the journey as Vicki committed all staff to engaging with personalized CPD through the MEC. There was no 'one size fits all' approach, instead, staff upskilled themselves in their own areas of interest. The areas which they felt would make the biggest difference to their practice. This ability to choose their own focus meant that staff engaged fully with the CPD.

By January 2019 the Year 6 lead teacher was reporting back to SLT that the use of OneNote for lesson planning and delivery was leading to real time savings and greater levels of engagement from pupils. It became clear that 1:2 ratio of devices wasn't going to be possible if the online exercise books were taking the place of paper ones. Consequently, all devices were moved into the year 6 classrooms. A further set of laptops were purchased for year 5. With budgeting implemented to ensure that the programme could roll down to year 3 and 4 in time. It is interesting to note that when the recommendation was made, Vicki was in the position that she knew all the staff had a shared understanding of expectations and standards. The T and L policy was embedded so

she was in the position that she trusted her team. In addition, the high visibility of Vicki as a leader meant that she was seeing progress being made through the daily learning walks that she undertook. In addition, the GAT IT Curriculum advisor, Natasha Epton and the Senior Education Advisors of the Trust, Darren Price, Claire Willerton and Charlotte Krzanicki were all involved in providing an additional level of quality assurance.

By March 2019, all year 5 and 6 lessons were being planned and delivered through a single OneNote canvass. All marking and feedback were done online, and paper exercise books were replaced by digital ones. Teachers found that they were saving significant amounts of time as the use of the technology cut out the need for laborious low-level administrative tasks. Instead this time was spent on planning and feedback. The unexpected outcome of this approach was that pupils were engaging with their work outside of school. Pupils collaborated with each other, responded to teacher feedback and set quizzes for one another using MS Forms at home. The most able pupils supported those who were struggling and a team approach to school work led to greater engagement and positivity in the face of looming SATs. Access issues were addressed through early morning opening and nightly homework club.

When you talk to Vicki and her team you hear that the EdTech is a tool for learning and not a panacea for school improvement. The work that had already been done to stabilize the school, change the ethos and secure pedagogy meant that BCA was able to





use the EdTech to its fullest potential. Teachers weren't teaching in a different way, they were exploiting the tech to increase pupil engagement with the aim of improving outcomes.

In May 2019 the SATs results were published and BCA's combined attainment rose by 26% on the academy's previous 3-year average, to 55%. The gap to the national picture is now only 10%. By Summer 2019 the use of EdTech was embedded in literacy, numeracy, themed lessons, and homework activities. The next step for BCA is to develop the creative arts subjects through EdTech. Plans are already at an advanced stage to work with a Virtual Reality Artist to create a virtual Sculpture Park in the grounds of the school. The journey with EdTech continues.

### What can we learn from BCA?

- Start from a position of clarity about what it is you want to achieve; priorities differ depending on context – choose what will work for you.
- See IT as a tool not the panacea - Nothing can replace strong leadership and clarity over what constitutes great teaching and learning
- You need to go on the journey yourself, whilst you can learn from others you have to invest in CPD for yourself and others and above all engagement with the MEC.