LEARNERs' Trust

The LEARNERs' Trust is a multi-academy trust working with primary schools in Derbyshire, Rotherham and Derby. CEO Matt Freeston explains why they decided to use iAbacus across all the schools in the Trust.

Why did you decide to go with iAbacus?

"When we set up the Trust, I started looking for something that we could use for evaluation and monitoring. There were a lot of risk registers available but they were effectively spreadsheets. They provided statements to rate schools against, but you couldn't share them easily nor compare data across different schools.

"I was looking for something more interactive. That's when I found iAbacus. One of the things we really like about it is the ability to overlay the data for all the schools, so we can see at a glance how we're doing in any one area."

How did you tweak iAbacus to fit your Trust?

"We took the existing framework that comes with iAbacus and tailored it to our priorities, which was easy to do. We divided the criteria into two halves, one focusing on leadership and management and one focusing on standards. That gave us a flexible template.

"One benefit of iAbacus is that the risk register becomes a live document. When something new comes along that we want to evaluate or monitor, we update the criteria. For instance, when we were preparing for GDPR, we added that in, so when we next went to a school, we just populated that section."

How do you use it across the Trust?

"At strategic board level we use iAbacus to look at strengths and weaknesses across all the schools, and therefore the Trust overall.

"Every school uses the same iAbacus framework, which means we can overlay the abaci for all the schools, in order to identify strengths and weakness. That makes it easy to match up schools. For instance if one school needs help managing attendance we can quickly point to other schools that are strong in that area.

"At department level, staff are using it to identify and address factors that hinder improvement. For instance, sports leaders assess their own school's provision against DfE requirements within the iAbacus, and then share their hindering factors with other sports leaders across the Trust. By doing this we have identified joint projects and provision, which is helping all schools improve.

"At whole-school level, middle and senior leaders are using it to identify strategic priorities, by reflecting on teaching, learning, assessment and outcomes. The priorities can be shared and challenged by stakeholders all around the school. This has worked really well when looking at pupil premium strategies and impact for each cohort through the school."

How does iAbacus help accountability?

"The visual nature is very useful. Governors love it. They don't have to go through lots of reports to unpick where the issues or concerns are. They receive one report with all the different areas listed, and a coloured 'bead' against each.

"If the attendance bead is orange, for instance, they go straight to that and say: 'tell me about attendance'. They don't have to wade through lots of paper to pick out the significant points.

"iAbacus is efficient. It's a single tool that we can use at school level with staff, with governors and with trustees. We don't have hundreds of pieces of paper being passed around. We just use iAbacus."

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