

DAVID ROSS EDUCATION TRUST

HOW ONE OF THE LARGEST MATS IN THE COUNTRY MAXIMISES THE IMPACT OF THEIR MIS

OVERVIEW

The David Ross Education Trust (DRET) is a network of unique and diverse academies, committed to becoming one of the top-performing multi-academy trusts in the country. Recognised as one of 11 system leaders nationwide, the Trust works with 34 primary and secondary schools across the country.

We spoke to their Data Manager, David Sands, about how DRET has utilised Bromcom to make a positive impact across the Trust. He explains in his own words how they use Bromcom Cloud-MIS for a wide range of applications but most importantly, how critical it is to have an MIS supplier work with you as a strategic partner.



David Ross Education Trust
Broadening Horizons

“It’s about using technology to be innovative, and education for too long has been a bit slow with it. People like me coming in are hopefully able to keep banging that drum and driving forwards, improving efficiencies and allowing teachers and support staff to spend more time on student level issues not complex reporting and printing.”

DAVID SANDS
TRUST DATA MANAGER

INTRODUCTION

My role is Data Manager for the trust, but as anyone who works within data management knows, it can become a bit of a catchall. In essence it is not just data management, but the information systems that use it as well. As a result, Bromcom is the biggest system in terms of harbouring student level data that we use. The main points of my role are to do with data management, its efficiency, accuracy, and then quality analysis to

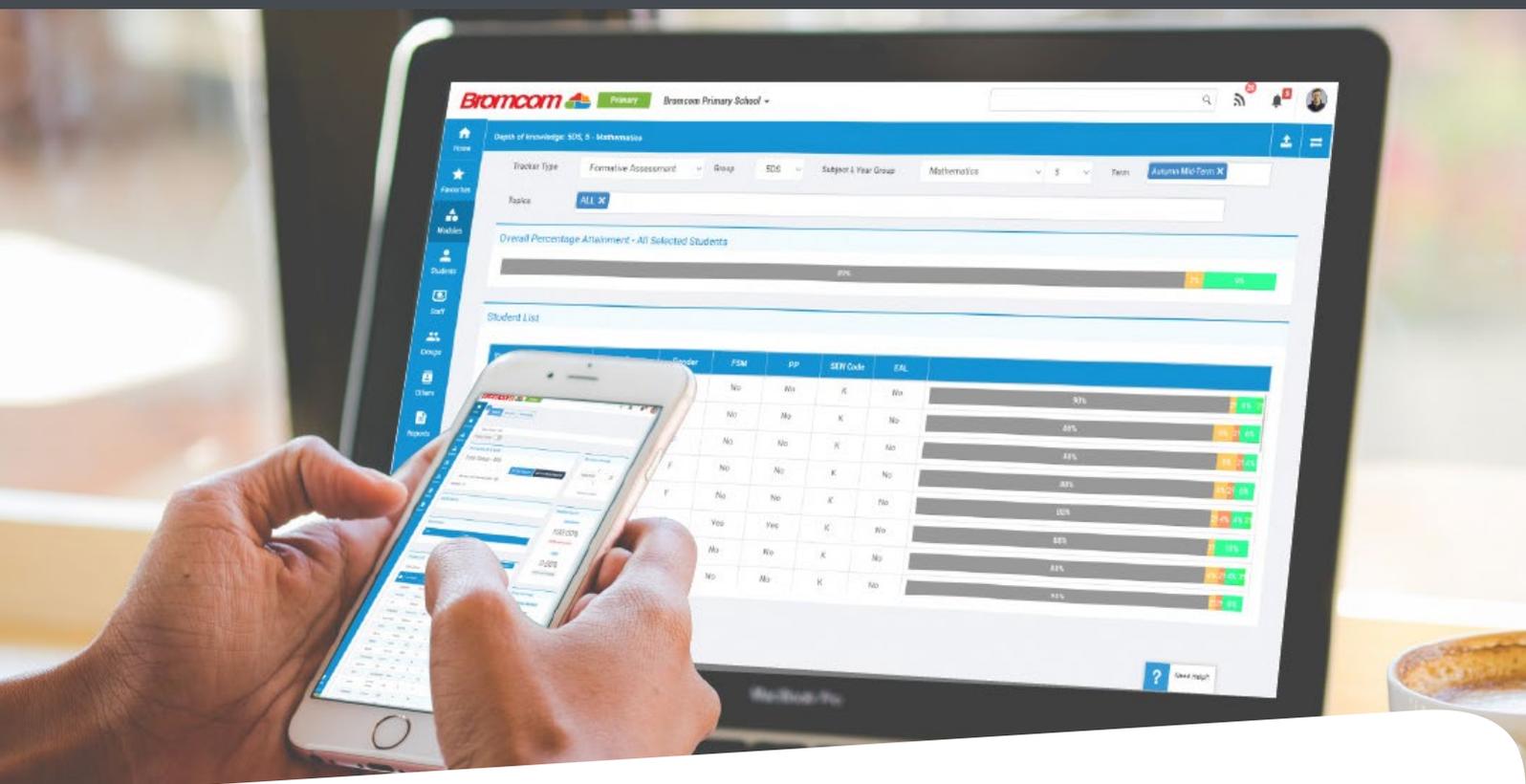
improve educational outcomes.

Everything about what we do should revert back to helping and aiding teaching and learning, and the experience and safety of our students. All the data I compile has a student's name under it, as a result our data is multi-levelled, instead of just a table of numbers. I think that's really important and the driving force of my job.

ASSESSMENT - PRIMARY

We rolled out Primary Tracker last September, and it has been truly straightforward. Little training was required and staff were able to 'just get on with it'. The associated analytics didn't require any training due to its intuitive layout – it does what it says on the tin.

The driving factor for me was to ensure we had a way of harvesting assessment data in such a way that it could easily be collated centrally. The power to centralise and then deconstruct it from a single database is immensely powerful.



The Primary Tracker has allowed us to collate that data and information, and even in these difficult times, the first year has gone well. It is allowing me to move on to phase two, which I'm working with Richard and Steve on (Bromcom Product Owners). This is about how we best bring in the other important information, the scaled scores, standardised test scores, attendance, behaviour, etc. That will then allow us to have a complete dashboard for attainment and progress – the last piece in the primary jigsaw for Key Stages One and Two. For EYFS, we are waiting on the DfE to a degree, so there is only so much any of us can say.

Importantly, it is really good to have those conversations with product leads regularly, something I feel very privileged to be able to do. I tend to touch base with someone like Richard once a term, which is great as it keeps that roadmap ticking along. It keeps our aspirations on track, and it helps me prioritise mine and my team's workload. That, in turn, gets rolled out to all 34 schools.

It is one guy talking to product leads, which doesn't seem like much of a conversation, but actually that ends up filtering down to an organisation with over 2,000 employees and 14,000 students. If you don't have a roadmap, all of your planning is 'pie in the sky'.

"I want to spend as much of my time as possible on improving outcomes, supporting schools, supporting them with their SIPs and their SEFs, and their Ofsted readiness. That's the top-level strategic intervention for someone like me to perform in. I can only be afforded that opportunity to engage with that, if the systems are doing everything they should be, automatically. Everything must work as it should."

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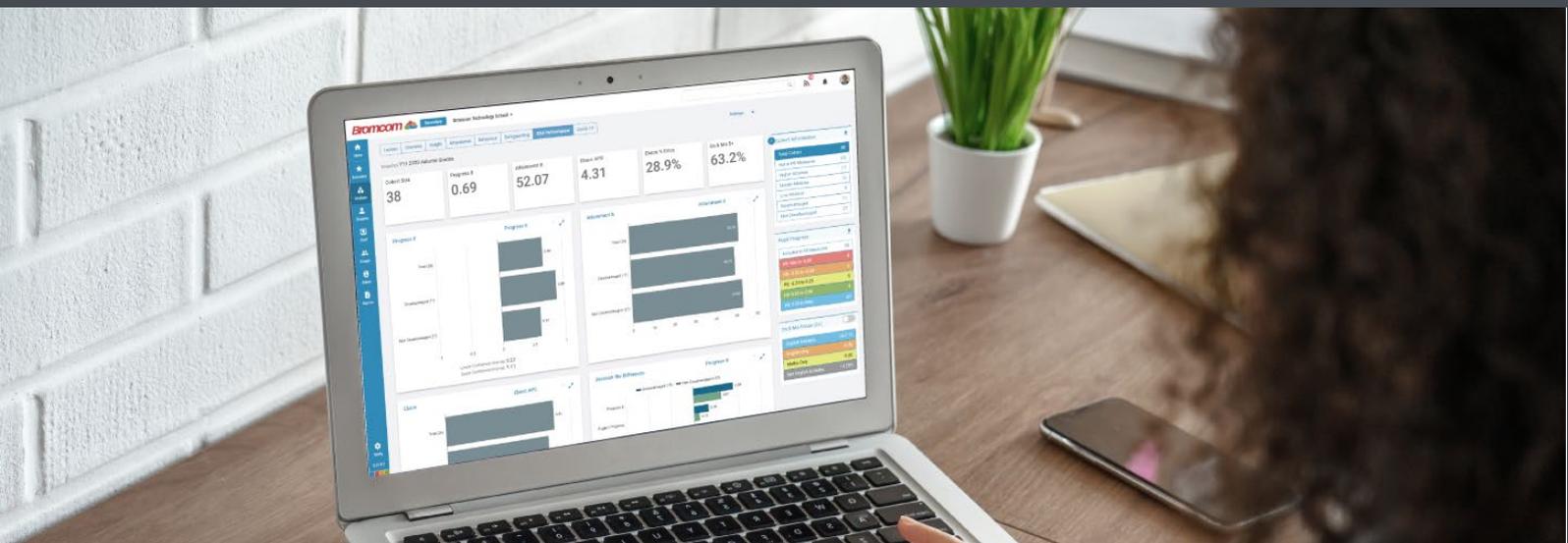


ASSESSMENT - SECONDARY

In Secondary we have done something similar, all schools use the same assessment entry methodology. That's where the Key Stage Four dashboard has been a great success. It has allowed us to get rid of SISRA, thus making important financial savings.

The biggest complement I can give is that we have staff who absolutely loved SISRA, I asked them "have a look at your KS4 dashboard [In Bromcom]. Now I want you to really look through it and tell me anything that it doesn't do, that you can get from elsewhere." They went, "No. Great. Does everything."

All of our Secondary schools now use the student portal for homework, which has allowed us to end our Show My Homework contracts. We have managed to get the schools to engage in it, and the take up in this difficult year has been good. Again, through all those little product meetings that we have, which at the time seem innocuous, make real labour and physical savings as well. They are really important and that's why those relationships are absolutely critical, and far more important than anything else.



ATTENDANCE & BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour, for me, is the party piece of Bromcom. Pathways is a very powerful bit of software that sits in the background, and the schools that are using it, love it. Those that aren't using it, are only not using it because they either aren't sure how or simply don't know about it. This is a long term project for

us to tackle, which realistically, will take some time. The schools where Bromcom behaviour workflows have been set up, they absolutely love it. It allows them to spend more time on what they should be doing, because the system is doing that tedious work for them, as it should.



WHAT IS PATHWAYS?

Pathways is a behaviour automation tool within Bromcom. Schools can define their behaviour policy to ensure that follow ups to behavioural events are automatically processed. It can carry out a wide range of tasks based on various triggers.

For example, it could automatically notify the head of year that a pupil has reached 10 achievement points this week, or assign a pupil a detention and notify staff if they have had a specific behaviour type logged against them.

The biggest project over the last 12 months, and it will continue to be so for some time, is that of Attendance. Whilst there are no performance measures (this year), it is absolutely critical for safeguarding the children, so using the single system has allowed us to manage that centrally.

The majority of employees within education

are teachers. They use Bromcom for Attendance, Behaviour and Assessment – the big three. They have all of that at their fingertips through the dashboard approach. We don't really need to do anything with them. We can leave 80% of the organisation alone quite frankly.

MAT-LEVEL ANALYSIS

A big issue in schools is to try and join the link between pastoral and academic factors. If you have poorly behaved and poorly attended students, we obviously know that they don't usually attain that well. It's about trying to capture that earlier. A big piece that I do is to

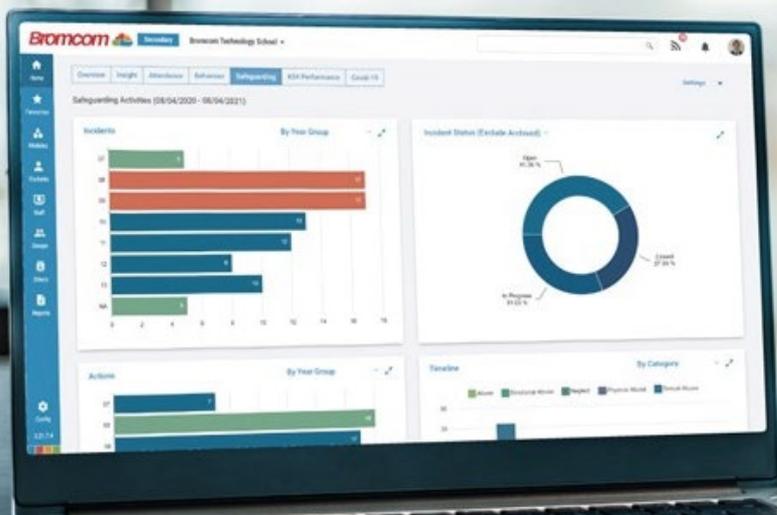
pull all that information out and create additional, bespoke documents, such as a 'School on a Page', which then gives colleagues access to trends, snapshots, attendance, behaviour, exclusions, all in one place.

I have 34 schools all running the same system that I can sit there at home and actually do full MAT analysis on anything for Attendance, Exclusions, Key Stage One, Two, Four, even Five assessments. It means ironically that I don't spend that much time in Bromcom systems because much of the work that I'm doing uses the single flat database in Excel or equivalent software, but it's still all Bromcom under it.

It doesn't mean it is going to stay that way. But I like to always do things myself because it is that internal check and balance within the

organisation. That isn't a criticism of Bromcom, it is quite the opposite actually. It's about me having the tools to have that check and balance to do something bespoke.

As a large organisation our data protection officer gets lots of Freedom of Information requests, be it from the press, parents, etc. They can be about anything to do with anything, and so far, we've been able to meet those needs, comfortably. Ultimately, we've got access and resource to the information to compile it however we want.



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We have our central MIS, test sites and a virtual school as well. That's a longer-term project for us, which went really smoothly to begin with, but unfortunately the pandemic has put a halt to some of that progress. All of those facilities are now knitted together nice and neatly, no complex data warehousing required.

If you have accuracy and consistency then you can have faith in the information that you are sharing with the community, whether it is

school leaders, governors, trustees, parents, students, etc.

It's about using technology to be innovative, and education for too long has been a bit slow with it. People like me coming in are hopefully able to keep banging that drum and driving forwards, improving efficiencies and allowing teachers and support staff to spend more time on student level issues not complex reporting and printing.

THE ONE-STOP-SHOP APPROACH

It is not until people sit down and actually go through all of the systems an educational institution uses, that they see financially how much can be saved. I think they'd be staggered. But it's a lot more than that. It's the labour savings and the ease of use, not just for teachers but for parents. Parents are accessing a single app that they can update their own or their student's details. They are able to pay for their school dinners, get their student's reports, see their Attendance – they can see it all.

I think with the developments of the dashboard approach, it has a knock-on effect to inform your full governing board, trustees, etc. Whether you are viewing it within the MIS or MAT Vision, or whether you are taking the data dynamically and creating these smart sheets, Bromcom's role is to provide the functionality to make it possible, and it is. It's the facility for efficiency both in human resources and in fiscal savings. It's that 365 approach of data going from one place to the next.

“The biggest thing for us, is it has allowed us to bring students back to the forefront of data rather than the other way around.”

DAVID SANDS
TRUST DATA MANAGER

That is the challenge as we head into this next decade, bringing data from multiple sources or ideally all from those same systems to allow that instant approach to information and data management. If we want to have a deep dive on attendance, we can. We know it will be accurate and to the point, thus allowing us to highlight what is required, where and when.

It is the opportunity for that One-Stop-Shop to

axe those third party systems. Maybe it's your data system, SISRA, 4Matrix, GO 4 Schools. Maybe it's your Show My Homework or Homework Club or any countless other opportunities there are out there. Maybe it is your ParentPay, your WisePay. They are simply not required.

COST & EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

No school wants to be spending all of their budget on information systems. Whilst I can't give you numbers at all, if I am able to turn round to you and say, "Well, we've got rid of SISRA. We've got rid of Show My Homework, etc." You start adding up all these pieces of software over 34 schools that's a lot of money.

We've managed to significantly cull our IT systems down. We had lots of schools using ClassDojo that was technically free financially, but used a lot of time in setup, in populating, transferring, in parents using it,

and so as we phased people away from things like ClassDojo over to using MCAS again people are happy. They certainly realised, "Yes, all our reports are electronic!" How many hours does that save their staff?

That's why I don't think you can put a financial figure on the saving because it is vast. Scheduling all your attendance reports rather than someone making them is too vast to be able to quantify. Yes, lots of MIS' have areas of this, but in my experience, it didn't tick all of them.



TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP

When calculating the cost of your MIS, it's important to consider a wide range of factors. You might be paying for IT equipment, servers, maintenance and support just to run your MIS. Then add to that the cost of additional bolt-ons just to provide the basic functionality you need. Lastly, there's the human impact of using software that could create inefficiencies and add to your workload.

What I'm not even beginning to include is if you are still operating a client-based system, such as SIMS, all of the onsite servers and the support for it, and then the support for the servers in the IT infrastructure as well. The drain on the infrastructure, your access points throughout the schools just to make that work, the categories defined, the need to have Windows PCs, whereas now we really only buy Chromebooks.

Every one of our machines is half the price it would have been. The teachers and nearly all the student machines are now Chromebooks. Over the last 12 months, all the device rollouts have been Chromebook, every single one of them.

OPERATING DURING A PANDEMIC

From a central perspective for myself it's allowed me to really concentrate, prepare, and actually start to highlight certain issues within the organisation. Listen and say, "How can we use the system or offshoots of the system to benefit our students?" It has been critical for us to accurately monitor attendance throughout the period, actual v statutory, accurately monitoring 'bums on seats' during both lockdowns and now we are back out of it.

I think one thing that DRET should be phenomenally proud of, is that within two weeks we had a full home engagement learning provision going for every student from every school. I don't think many organisations in the country had that. It then allowed me to immediately make sure I was able to monitor engagement in other ways.

We could bring in the data dumps from, say, Google Classrooms or Microsoft through the DRET logins, but also then combine that with the data coming out of Bromcom, such as

key worker data, social worker data, etc. We were able to bring actual attendance data, marry that up with the other services and within a month we had a full dashboard approach to remote and home engagement. That saw us really well through everything because it allowed us to monitor everything, down to individual students.

We also then used Bromcom to capture student welfare and phone calls home, so rather than using communication logs we used assessment sheets because they were easier to pull out centrally. We had that as a fairly formulaic approach. It was a massive effort from all staff within the organisation to make those calls. But again, it allowed us to pull together that dashboard, with student welfare and safety right at the heart.

The driving factor behind that is, "Well, this is what the system can do, so we are going to make sure the process works in that way for this example."

"In that random time of unforeseen crisis, we were able to actually manipulate the system still to our benefit to get all the information we wanted"

DAVID SANDS
TRUST DATA MANAGER

You don't always want that. You want processes to drive systems and vice versa, it has to work both ways. But we definitely had that approach. Again, if we were in an organisation with lots of different MIS, that would have been impossible. I think you'll find that from any MATs if they are operating multiple systems, they weren't able to warehouse that data accurately and cross it over. I think that was a really, really big one for us.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Bromcom have a very helpful team, who are extremely patient and answer emails directly. I'm not sure that the equivalent of the product leads would be providing those answers at other companies.

It's nice to see that Bromcom are looking forward. You have Scott Biggs (Bromcom Education Consultant), looking at his CEO angle if you will, that higher strategic element which I understand is a longer-term job. This is really securing the future and driving our information and data management forward. I was lucky enough to have a conversation with him a while ago and be part of that early doors as well.

You have Dan Sears (Bromcom Education Consultant) driving online communities as

As mentioned, attendance is a massive one for everyone, all educational organisations, but a big one for us especially. DRET is known for their schools, often located in more deprived areas. As such, attendance can be a battle. It's about us now talking with people like Ben (Bromcom Product Owner) from a MAT Vision angle and seeing, "How can we use the system to benefit students?" Not produce tables of numbers.

well, which is really positive. Communication is king of everything, be it communication to roadmaps about what can we do, how do we manage the MAT, what is going to be possible? What are our data priorities? DRET's priorities are going to be different to that of Harris, Ark, Oasis, take your pick. But it's important that we have the tools to really drive on that going forwards.

Nick was invited to a one-to-one session with one of the Product managers to discuss what he would like to see in terms of CPD tracking, an area that Bromcom were rapidly developing to avoid the need for additional bolt-on software.

FOOTNOTE - Thank you to David Sands and the DRET team for providing their valuable time to being part of this discussion. We value all of our partnerships and the successes at DRET are a great example of where MIS Supplier and Education provider can work together to improve outcomes. If you would like to know more about how we can help your school or MAT, please get in touch.

GET IN TOUCH TO SEE HOW WE COULD HELP YOUR SCHOOL OR MAT



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Bromcom – In Discussion with DRET

Prepared: April 2021
Version 1

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