NEXUS MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST
HOW A SPECIALIST MAT CAPITALISED ON A FLEXIBLE MIS

OVERVIEW

The Nexus Multi-Academy Trust is a unique group of eleven special schools based in Yorkshire. Founded in 2016, they are a forward-thinking organisation, seeking out partners who share the same ethos and core values.

We spoke to Ian Burns, the Information Governance and Strategic ICT Lead at the Trust, about their desire for innovation and opportunities to share best practice.

"We are now seeing a cohort of individuals that desire change, not for the sake of it, but for efficiency and to drive innovation."

IAN BURNS
INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC ICT LEAD

UNIQUE REQUIREMENTS

Specialist provisions often find themselves having to adapt software designed for mainstream schools and often don't get exactly what they need. Ian reiterated what we regularly hear from such establishments, that 'out of the box' solutions don't always meet their needs. Special schools have a unique set of requirements that aren't necessarily transferrable from one provision to another. There is no one-size fits all solution and each school works with a diverse set of requirements that is constantly developing.

The Trust wanted more from their MIS, and found that SIMS was uninspiring and no longer fit for purpose; a platform that had hardly changed in 15 years. With a new Academy opening in Doncaster, they saw an opportunity to begin afresh with a new system. They worked through a DFE proposal and initially looked at ten MIS suppliers before creating a short list of five that would be explored in more detail. After an in-depth review, Bromcom was chosen and launched at the new Academy.

Rather than impose a new system on all schools within the Trust, Ian presented the information to the group and suggested that for those that want to go beyond SIMS, Bromcom was the way forward. Half of the schools decided to move forward on this recommendation and have now successfully migrated to their new system. The remaining five are due to enter discussions about transitioning later in the year as they previously opted to hold fire for a variety of reasons.

"Bromcom came out best in pretty much all areas, excelling in the majority."

IAN BURNS
INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC ICT LEAD

Bromcom

COST SAVINGS

Whilst making cost savings wasn't the primary driver for change, it was always part of the conversation. The Trust's approved solution would need to demonstrate good value and provide efficiency savings across the board. Ian cited some clear savings that have been made in terms of the overall footprint for the MIS solution. With Bromcom being able to handle a range of tasks on their behalf, giving parents the ability to self-serve and providing staff with an easy way of accessing data from anywhere, the time savings quickly mount up.

Thanks to Bromcom's integrated functionality, cost savings are already being realised by the Trust and a significant number of third-party contracts have already been cancelled. As the schools begin to adopt more of the modules within their new system, there are further opportunities for cost and time savings. As always, this is a phased approach which can take time to come to fruition. Ian sees year one as exploratory as he guides each school through their transition and begins to introduce new ways of working.

"It will absolutely pay for itself in terms of the class savings for administration…. It will probably pay for itself three times over when you are using it to full capacity. We expect to see the reality of those savings from year two onwards."

IAN BURNS
INFORMATION GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC ICT LEAD

Bromcom

THE RIGHT SOLUTION

Implementing a solution that is flexible enough to meet the needs of each school has been essential to the success of the project. Bromcom is hugely adaptable, and the team are willing to work with schools to broaden functionality if required.

Since moving to Bromcom, the uptake in use within classrooms has been excellent. Previously, getting SIMS into the classroom was a constant struggle, with additional effort required to keep hardware and software to be up to date and compatible. Add to that the usability factor and SIMS just tended to languish rather than be used with vigour. As Bromcom MIS is cloud-based and is accessible on any device with a web browser, all previous barriers are removed. Ian gladly reports that teachers have been open to the change and that they have adapted to it well.

More prevalent use of Bromcom in the classroom opens doors to new ways of working. Staff can utilise communication tools to engage with parents, write reports, assign homework and monitor behaviour events, all from their dashboard. Ian engages with each school on a regular basis, discussing requirements and opportunities to enhance working practices so they can move towards greater utilisation of the software over time.
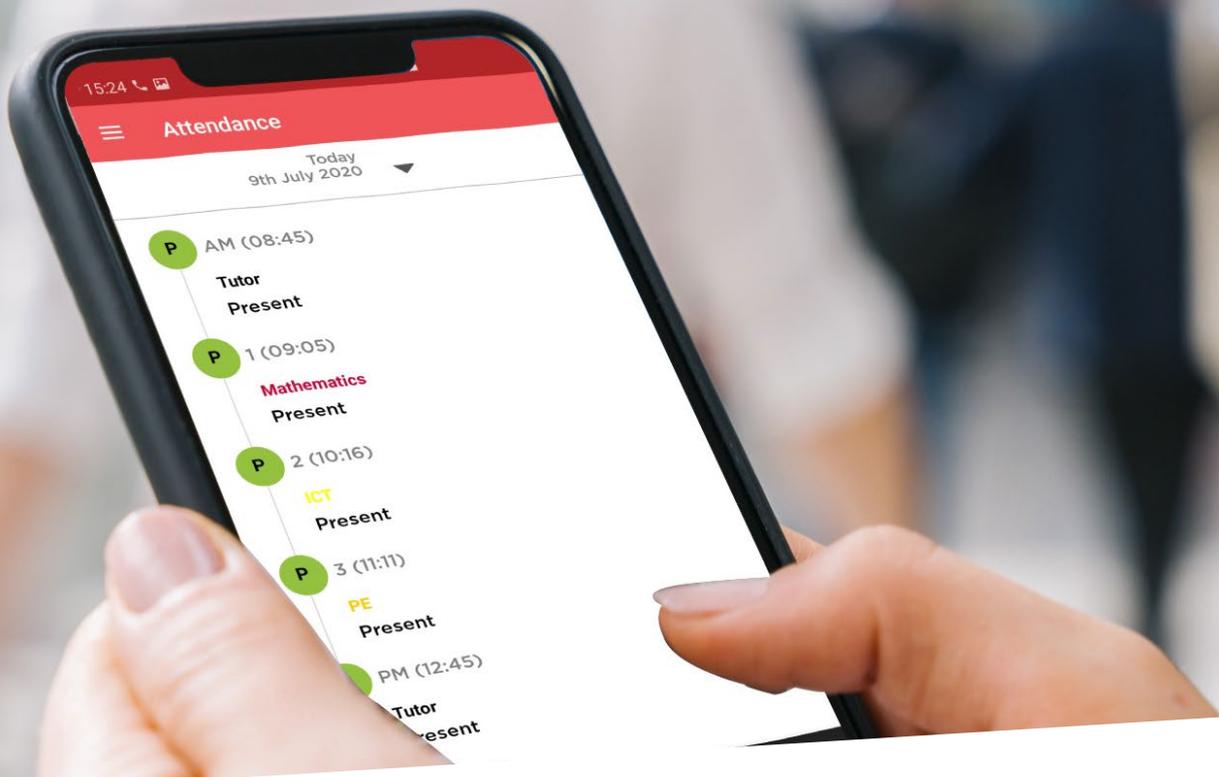
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

One of the more strategic elements that Ian values is their MAT relationship manager. He can see what's in the roadmap and can discuss what functionality could be phased in next to meet specific goals. Ian works with all the schools in the Trust and treats them as individuals to a great extent. Each school can decide what functionality they want to introduce when and the Trust then supports them to develop this area, usually in phases. He shares good practice from beacon schools within the Trust and bounces ideas off the Bromcom team to ensure their approach is well judged.

The Trust are enjoying the ability to add functionality as they see fit, with no additional expenditure as it's all built in. Ian highlighted how adding anything to their previous system would mean additional expense or systems, but in Bromcom all schools can explore a wide range of features and use as little or as much as they need. The added expense with the previous system would often stifle innovation and mean that ideas were canned. Now they can see something working at another school then simply configure it in their own system.

The parent app was a great example of sharing best practice across the Trust. This has helped some schools who were a bit wary about moving down this route gain confidence. Removing the price barrier has also created a lot more opportunities for schools to develop and streamline their administrative practices. Ian explains to his schools that administration time will be significantly reduces, with hours saved on paperwork. This helping hand of the Trust is supporting schools to transform at their own pace. As Ian mentions, their ethos is to empower schools to enable education.

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ENGAGEMENT AT TRUST LEVEL

As each school migrates onto the Bromcom platform, the opportunities for innovation increase. To capitalise on this, the Trust has just appointed a new data expert in the central School Improvement team. One of their key responsibilities will be to propel Power BI usage across the Trust to identify trends and issues, allowing usage of the systems across the Trust to be driven by specific operational needs and development requirements. Ian is excited to see how this will progress as the school have identified a strong business case for developing their central reporting as it will feed into their existing School Improvement programme.
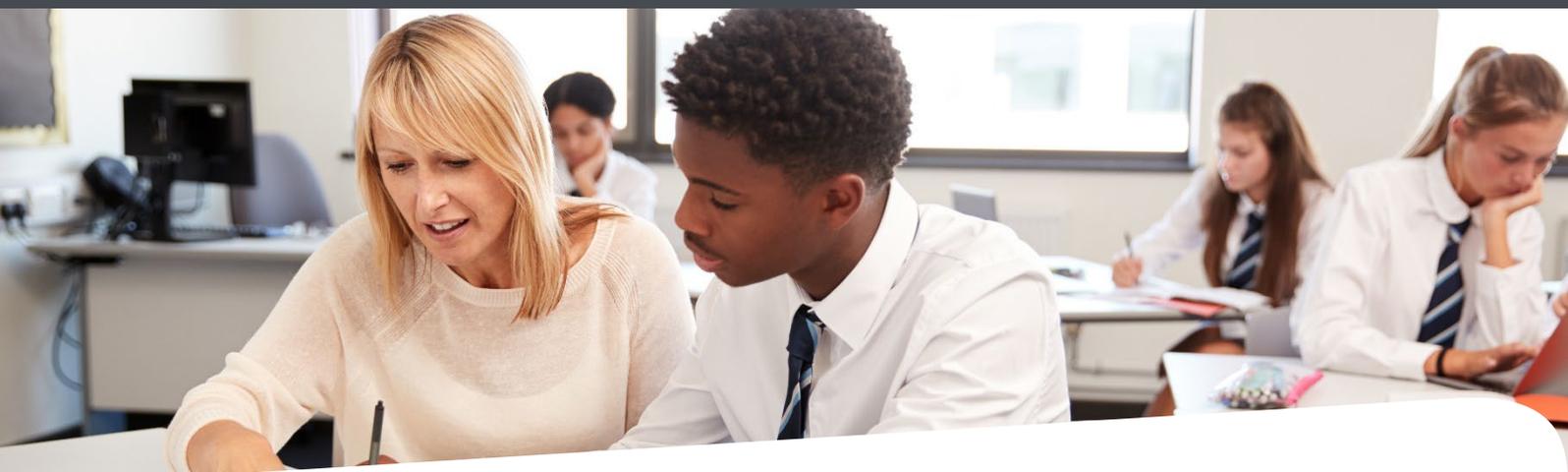
This team has been in place for some time, but has been bolstered more recently, becoming a more permanent fixture with increased support across the group. They work alongside school leaders, provide peer review and share good practice. Ian sees them as the perfect team to utilise this new technology.

Thanks to using Vision-X from Bromcom, the Trust can still import data from their remaining SIMS schools, so they aren't prevented from progressing with their plans in the interim.

During lockdown, Ian used Vision-X to see instantly who was in school without having to contact the individual sites. Likewise with staff, he has quick access to current staffing levels without needing to dive into payroll. It was a huge leap from where the schools were at previously and gave the central team a snapshot of the entire Trust, something that's essential for decision making.

With a great deal of change and development on the horizon, the Trust are doing an excellent job of managing the transition and retaining the support of their staff. Ian now has the tools he needs to move the group forward and exciting times are ahead as their hard work begins to pay dividends.

FOOTNOTE - Thank you to Ian Burns and the Nexus team for providing their valuable time to being part of this discussion. If you would like to know more about how we can help your school or MAT, please get in touch.

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

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Bromcom Cloud-MIS Case Study

Prepared: May 2021
Version 1

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