

Case Study

Building a community of best practice at Balby Carr with IRIS Connect

“If you want to develop and become a better teacher, then IRIS Connect is dynamite”

Matt McDonald, History Teacher



discover. develop. share.

Balby Carr Community Sports and Science College is one of the most successful schools in the IRIS Connect community and in two years have uploaded over 530 hours of lesson observation videos.



Balby Carr Community Sports and Science College is a 1,200-pupil comprehensive school in Doncaster. The school's goal is "To improve standards to a level recognised as excellent by students, staff, families and the community". This goal grew out of the senior leadership team's belief that "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (McKinsey 2010), which led to their adoption of IRIS Connect in 2010. In two years of using IRIS Connect Balby Carr has fully embedded the system as a central part of their professional development programme.

The initial focus was to use IRIS Connect to support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Each year NQTs are placed in triads to observe and support one-another using IRIS Connect. One NQT, Adam Kelly, recorded 30 hours of his lessons in one year for his own CPD.

Chelsea Branson, an NQT in the Physical Education and Sport department at Balby Carr, explains that "With IRIS Connect, you just click on a specific comment and can instantly view that precise moment on the video, which makes it much easier to reproduce your good behaviour and improve your weaknesses."

IRIS Connect has also played a key role in supporting more experienced teachers. "IRIS is a powerful tool that overcomes the biggest problem with traditional observations: namely, that the observer and the teacher often have different views of the same lesson" explains Pat Littlewood, Head of the History Department. "This in turn, can lead to a defensiveness that diminishes the quality of the reflection. By contrast, IRIS allows you to view your own lesson through the eyes of the observer, making you more receptive to feedback."

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Pat Littlewood, Subject Leader for History

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“ I have been able to build a bank of lessons which I can the share, as and when I see fit, with the rest of my department and even across the school. ”

Lisa Nicholls, Operation Leader for English

Vicky Woodrow, the Director for Learning & Teaching, believes that IRIS Connect has had a positive impact on staff and students, largely because the staff have embraced the technology without any managerial pressure.

One of the core, school wide uses for IRIS Connect has been in triangle learning teams, which is fantastic for encouraging all teachers to use the system. This programme is designed to encourage support and collaboration between colleagues; the use of IRIS Connect has helped to overcome timetable constraints and enabled teachers to take part in contextualised learning conversations more easily.

All departmental meetings begin with an IRIS Connect video. At first colleagues were sharing short outstanding snippets of lessons, however as History Teacher Matt McDonald explained “Now we’ve got this culture in which people are sharing satisfactory lessons and asking their colleagues why is it satisfactory and how they can make improvements”. This openness and trust has been hugely powerful in terms of improving teaching and learning.

Teachers at Balby Carr have also used IRIS Connect to collaborate and share with their Primary Pyramid to overcome the literacy dip that Ofsted had previously identified. This has been hugely insightful for both the primary and secondary teachers to see the difference in teaching and learning styles, and has helped to support the transition between year 6 and 7 with great results.

As well as sharing with local Primaries, teachers at Balby Carr have begun to share practice with other Secondary schools using IRIS Connect. Matt McDonald, for example, has been able to observe an outstanding History lesson at Cramlington Learning Village to provide him with an insight into practice elsewhere and what outstanding looks like in other schools.

Amongst all of these fantastic uses for IRIS Connect, Balby Carr have worked with Ofsted and behaviour expert, John Bayley. John Bayley has been able to remotely coach teachers at Balby Carr by providing time stamped, contextualised feedback in observations that teachers have shared with him. This has vastly reduced the cost of gaining expert insight into their teaching practice.

“ IRIS is the next best thing to a time machine and it gives teachers at Balby Carr the opportunity to rewind, review and reconstruct good teaching. It allows us to be in two places at once doing two different things. ”

Martin Craig, Headteacher

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