



SHARING THE JOURNEY

Carolyn Bailey, Principal, Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Girls



Thank you, Carolyn, for agreeing for me to interview you about your journey with SchooliP. Are you able to tell me about your present role and a brief resume of your career?

I'm currently the principal of a school out in Abu Dhabi and it's called the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for girls. It's a school that runs right from pre-kindergarten up to grade 12. It's an American curriculum school with about 1500 students. Before this school, I was the principal of another school out here in Abu Dhabi called Cambridge High School. That was the British curriculum. So that was Foundation Stage 2 to year 13. with about 1800 students. Before that, I was in the UK and was the head teacher of an inner-city boys' school in Birmingham. I spent 20 years working in the UK

Why did you choose SchooliP?

The boy's school had a new principal, and he had used another product at his previous school and was interested in doing something similar. He was tasked with reviewing all options on the market. He reviewed several, and it was his recommendation to choose SchooliP

We pride ourselves in working in partnership with schools, developing their use in SchooliP. Did you find guidance and support helpful to you?

Definitely and actually that is what sets SchooliP apart from other systems. Before I became a head teacher, I was an IT and computer science teacher. I've often led the development of IT products. I've been part of as part of the government think tank in the UK and we did a lot of work around online mentoring.

I've done a lot of driving new systems in schools and it is rare, genuinely rare, that the promised support from the IT company comes through and in your case it absolutely is true. You are always there whenever I jump onto the online chat.

If it's just a small thing, someone always comes up and they are knowledgeable and skilled and they help me to solve my problem. When I want something bigger, it's so easy to just jump onto your booking schedule.

I can book a time very easily with somebody on your team and you are very knowledgeable and very helpful and always just willing and eager. That's true even now when we are three years into our journey, I think often companies will promise you lots of training at the beginning.

In my experience, such training can be quite painful and take three times as long as they need to do it. At the end of it, you are frustrated and you're already switched off.



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After-sales service is a challenge, to be honest. And that just is not true with SchooliP. With SchooliP you are always there, even years in, and pretty almost instant response. So it is definitely for me what sets SchooliP apart from almost any other online company that we use.

Managing change needs careful consideration. How did you go about introducing SchooliP?

When we launched SchooliP we were in the pandemic, and out here in Abu Dhabi that was quite challenging because we had a lot of online work, and a lot of our children weren't allowed into school. That did eventually change and they could come to school, but they chose not to as they didn't have to.

We were trying to launch it online digitally. I've always believed that if you want to get people on board, then it has to be a slow journey. You can't go from zero to everything you want in a system overnight. I've introduced an awful lot of IT systems, so if you're trying to go and get everything perfect from day one, you'll never be going to, there are always going to be drawbacks and pitfalls and things you have to work your way through when you introduce a system with anybody.

So we started quite small and we did a lot of tweaking. So initially what we did was we worked with you and your team to align school IP to our existing processes and school. So rather than trying to change our processes and the way we recorded it, so to speak, we did a lot of alignment and you worked with me. I asked to change titles, so SchooliP aligned with the titles that we were used to using in school and I asked if could functions be removed because we don't need that at the moment.

We were able to create in SchooliP a digital version of the processes that were already established and working in our school. After a year of doing that, we were then ready to be able to start to actually change our processes, to make better use of really the power of SchooliP.

At that point, we could then look again at how we do things in our school, and change our processes to better match the functionality of your system. That was year two and now as we move into year three, we just keep stretching out the different things that we can use it. It's now very familiar with our staff. All of our staff use it quite confidently and competently and are very happy to use it.

Did you come across any challenges when introducing SchooliP?

No, not I can think of because it is quite an easy system to use. Whenever I do come across a challenge, I usually jump into the chat or book a meeting and just say What do I do here? and someone just tells me and then it's solved and that's why it's so easy.. I'll just reach out to you and then you've often given me two or three ways.

You said, 'You could do it this way or you could do it this way' I think through the suggestions and decide which I think would be the best. SchooliP is very adaptable. You and I have quite a lot of ability to control it. So it's quite easy to shape your system to match whatever is going on in my head.



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What's the reaction and feedback of the leaders and staff towards using schooliP?

It's a bit mixed because you know, people would always want to stick with something they know. Before SchooliP, essentially we used a word template and there are still some people who, to be honest, would rather just stick with our little word template and be able to go in and do that. But quality assurance and monitoring that is virtually impossible.

The benefits that come from senior leaders and my ability to quality assure, track and monitor what's happening consistently, and quickly. See who's not doing what they're supposed to be doing. It's just so much better. That has to outweigh a small number of people who might prefer just to use a little word template.

What functions are you presently using in SchooliP?

The main purpose we use it for is the performance management process. Every single person in our school meets with their line manager at least once every three weeks, so other than normal meetings, obviously, we have partner meetings and year meetings.

Every single person from admin to security, meets their line manager once every three weeks and goes through essentially their performance management objectives.

We don't really think of them or we don't used to think about performance. We used to think of objectives as school priorities.

Conversations are designed to be an opportunity for the member of staff to 'show off' to their line manager about what they're doing, what they've achieved, how it's going, and the good things that are going on. It's meant to be a celebration. It gives the line manager a really easy way to track what is happening with that member of staff, and it means they've always got 1 to 1 dedicated conversation about you.

We needed a place to record this in SchooliP. We now track and obviously, we then do our interim reviews for performance management in there and we also do our end-of-year performance management there and that works super easy and everyone really likes that.

We use the standards, we call them professional characteristics out here. That's really clear. So every role – teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders but also admin, learning assistants, inclusion teachers, and librarians, all have their own set of professional characteristics or standards. We use that to track how people perform against those standards.

We now use the PD function that tracks all our PD. For us, this is very powerful because you know we have 240 staff in different schools. Obviously, the PD we offer for KG is quite different from the PD we're running for secondary school. It's quite hard to keep an overview of the amount of PD that goes on, especially when there's weekly PD going on all the time.

Now when I put it in SchooliP because it all just sits in school and that's really easy to allocate out.



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I get a tracker so I can see at the end of the year we have offered 248 or whatever PD sessions over the year and staff get an individual record at the end of the year and that shows on their performance management of all the training they've had. That really keeps PD in their mind of what they've enjoyed in terms of training opportunities, but it just keeps them on a much better track of PD.

Inspections, audits, or boards need updates on what you've been doing and you can say, Well, since our last meeting, we've run an additional this many PD sessions. It keeps the management and the organisation of PD really easy.

We started using the school development plan, and part of it doesn't really work for us at the moment, but that's more about our school processes. We use the evidence section a lot and expect to upload evidence about how they are doing in their performance management.

We use monitoring a lot. All of our lesson observations and learning walks are done in SchooliP and recorded straight into the system. We were able to completely design what we wanted monitoring to look like for our purposes and how we do lesson observations.

It's very easy to track. You can imagine across a school like ours that's a lot. There are hundreds and hundreds of those, but because they all just go into one system, I can see any teachers at any time I can make sure that everyone has the right number.

We can check the quality and see that, you know, we haven't accidentally done 17 learning walks on you and two learning walks for the person next door to you. When you've got a really complex school it could be quite hard to manage.

I just wander the entire school and just wander into lessons and so do my VPs, head of school, and heads of departments. This gives us the ability to see who's done anybody very quickly and very simply.

So before I walk in, I can just pull it up and say I'm about to go into Fiona's class. Ohh. See, Fiona's had four. I'm going to move on. Who's the next room? Sarah. She's only had two. Great. I'm going to Sarah's. So it helps us to keep equity and just consistency I guess, across the school.

What impact has SchooliP had on your school?

I think the main impact is I have to strategically think about how I want to enhance or develop SchooliP and maximise its functionality. It has helped me to rethink how I want to do performance management in my school and performance management now, I would say, is a real strength of our school and our teachers kind of agree too. That's a bit odd because no nobody really wants performance management.

They see it as a positive thing in our school and a genuine way to try and improve what we do. People are on this journey where we do want to get together every few weeks and talk about our school priorities and how's it going what are my next steps and what have I forgotten and have that constant dialogue about teaching and learning – how it's going and what I need to do next, or I need to think about. It's rare, and actually, because SchooliP makes it so easy to track. That means those conversations keep going all the time because it's quite easy to see.



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I can see that the middle leader actually hasn't got around to meeting, so it's very easy just to say don't forget because it is fundamental to how our school runs.

So what that means is that we've got a consistent conversation going across our school about teaching, and learning that come back to the same priorities because the way we set SchooliP and the way it works, we can cascade those priorities.

Very simple, very simple to similar groups of staff. So all staff are talking about the same priorities on a regular basis and for me and my senior team, the ability to track that and make sure it's happening on a regular basis and very easily and quickly just have a quiet word when it's not happening.

They get themselves back on track and make sure that those conversations are happening. Whenever you're talking about teaching, and learning consistently and constantly, you can't help but make it better. Teaching and learning have improved quite, quite drastically across our school over the last three years.

During a recent inspection has anyone happened to mention SchooliP?

I always try to get into it, look at it, our performance management often comes up. So we've had it come up in our attic inspection which would be the equivalent of Ofsted in the UK that performance management is a strength of the school and it also came up in our CIS and NIA which is an American accreditation body for American curriculum schools and CIS is a Netherlands International School accreditation process and it came up.

Performance management came up as a strength in all of those, and that wasn't per se about school IP because they don't particularly want to look at it. But what happens is the way our staff talks about performance management. So when we get inspected pretty consistently across the board, staff will talk about how it works in the school and how that helps to drive teaching, and learning and how that is a core part of how we work. Obviously underpinning that is school IP.

What are your thoughts or ideas on how you're next going to develop your use of school?

I don't know. I haven't got a lot of thoughts this year. So we've just totally redesigned our approach to how we observe lessons and do our learning walks because traditionally we've had we were very near SIS focused, which is the American and Netherlands accreditation boards.

But they came and went last year. We've just redesigned our whole lesson observation process based much more on the addit framework. So try and drive our school to be outstanding. We're currently very good with some outstanding and we want to get that now to be outstanding.

So we internally are making a big shift because of how we evaluate teaching-learning. The framework is changing radically in our school. But how we use SchooliP essentially hasn't changed because you know we can put new templates in it, new systems in it. So I think for this year our development is about changing the content in SchooliP. So I guess rather than actually additional functionality.



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What advice would you give to anyone considering subscribing to SchooliP?

Just do it. Just do it. Just get on and just make a start. If you can do nothing else but get all your stuff in there and get staff adding evidence and talking about teaching, and learning, and using it as a vehicle to drive conversations about teaching, and learning in your school and get on and do it.

How can we, at Derventio Education, improve you and your colleague's experience using SchooliP?

I guess the only thing that comes to mind and you have solved it, you solved it a lot last year. Is the speed of your system. At one point it did get quite slow. You did a big upgrade and that has definitely improved it, but that remains very key. I assume your servers are based in the UK, but SchooliP has to be instant. People want instant access, they don't want to click on a button and have to wait. Sometimes your system even now can be quite slow and that frustrates people.

Thank you very much for your time and your comments.

You're most welcome.