

## **Academy invests in technology to transform teaching and learning**

How a top-performing comprehensive school is getting better value for money by taking advantage of its freedom as an academy.

Harrogate Grammar School became the first academy in North Yorkshire in March 2011. As a school it was rated outstanding by Ofsted, and in 2012 91% of pupils achieved 5+ A\* to C GCSEs.

Headteacher Richard Sheriff talks about the difference being an academy has made to his students and staff:

My aim right from when I arrived at the school was to put in place the systems and structures to allow Harrogate Grammar to become more autonomous and less dependent on our local authority.

### **Investing our funding**

Taking responsibility for our own money did feel like a big step at first, but we have found that it means we can use the funding we get much more effectively to help our pupils learn and develop.

For example, since becoming an academy, we have invested in the latest technology. Instead of taking pupils out of classrooms to sit in a computer room, as many schools still do, each student has a tablet computer. This has transformed the way they learn, as well as making it quicker and easier for staff to monitor performance and progress.

### **Focusing services**

When we converted, we brought services such as occupational health and human resources under our own control. Feedback from staff has been really positive because they feel much more looked after by a HR department that is closer to them at the school, and that knows their own needs and issues.

We've also taken catering in-house and the quality of our school meals has improved markedly. The number of pupils enjoying our school lunches is up 17% this year alone, which is great news.

We do continue to have a very good relationship with our local authority, and have retained a number of services that they provide, including admissions and SEN support.

### **Recruiting high-quality staff**

As an academy, we are finding it easier to recruit and reward the best quality staff. We are now seen as a forward-looking, innovative, independent school - the kind of place that high-quality, ambitious teachers want to work in. This means we can pick and choose the best staff to work here.

For the future, we're looking to take forward our work with other schools, potentially as an academy sponsor. I have worked in inner-city schools where aspirations are low and the kids don't think that they can achieve. I think we can help schools to turn

themselves around and raise pupils' aspirations. At the same time, partnering with a school in different circumstances could be a really good learning opportunity for our pupils and staff.