



SBS Internal Scrutiny case study

Light Hall School

Effective Internal Scrutiny from an external provider has a key part to play in the effective operations of any trust, providing a valuable independent check that governance, risk management and internal controls are working effectively.

That's certainly the case at Light Hall School, a single academy trust based in Solihull in the West Midlands with 1,200 students, a sixth form and 150 staff.

For the past four years School Business Services has helped the Trust maintain assurance, support effective governance and convert audit findings into practical improvements.

Operations Director Mark Firmstone believes the internal scrutiny provided by SBS's Internal Scrutiny service over the past four years has given the Trust a structured way to look across different areas of performance while complementing the work of external auditors.

Each year, Mark works with the headteacher and board of trustees to choose the Internal Scrutiny subjects for the year ahead.

Recommendations that emerge from the Internal Scrutiny audit reports have helped the Trust strengthen key areas of practice. A recent cyber security audit confirmed that although many controls were already in place, there were areas that could be tightened.

Absence management has also benefited from the scrutiny process, with SBS's audit producing a set of recommendations helping the Trust improve how absence is managed and monitored.

Seamless communications and working processes comes in for praise from Mark and his team.

Mark and his team find the SBS portal, a platform where the Trust and SBS upload information before an audit takes place, "very streamlined and very simple."

An efficient approach that is finely attuned to the Light Hall School's reporting needs really matters to Mark and his busy operations team. "We get the information that we need, but there is no unstructured disruption to the school," he says. "It's all kept properly planned."

SBS's three annual internal scrutiny audits are timed so that the resulting reports feed into every trustee meeting. It means that trustee's decision-making is always informed by concise, accessible and richly detailed audits of key operations areas.

"What I value most about the way the service supports me and the school is the timeliness of the reporting," says Mark.



The promptness of the reporting schedule also means that the Trust always has the information it needs to meet Department for Education reporting deadlines.

SBS has combined efficiency and professionalism with a willingness to understand the realities of school operations, says Mark.

"We find their service efficient and professional. If we have challenges and questions to ask SBS is open to understanding how we work in school."

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schoolbusinessservices.co.uk

hello@schoolbusinessservices.co.uk



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