How Woodland Academy Trust responded to two inspections, two weeks apart, with the evidence in front of them

How a multi-academy trust's central team used a live evidence base to respond in real time when two of its schools were inspected within a fortnight.

Two of Woodland Academy Trust's five schools were inspected within a fortnight of each other under the new framework – each HMI took a different approach on the day.

In both cases, Julie Carson didn't have to rely on memory or paper: the trust's live evidence base meant she could see exactly what each school could evidence, and react to the inspector in real time.

About the trust

Woodland Academy Trust is a forward-thinking multi-academy trust of five schools, supported centrally by Julie Carson, Director of Education and Deputy CEO.

The trust has built its own suite of custom AI tools – including staff-facing chatbots covering operations, policies and inclusion guidance – and Julie has won several influential AI-in-education awards and speaks regularly at sector events on the trust's AI work, despite, by her own admission, "hating public speaking."

The challenge

Before Intelligent Evidence, self-evaluation across the trust's five schools ran on the traditional model: heads wrote a SEF, capped at two pages, up to three times a year, and kept their supporting evidence in paper or online files at school level. From the centre, that made genuine oversight hard work.

> "I wouldn't necessarily know where the gaps were. I wouldn't necessarily know where trends were across the trust because I'd have to kind of do that manually which obviously I didn't have the time to do as well as I wanted."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

That created two separate problems. Quality-assuring five schools' self-evaluation meant relying on what heads chose, or knew, to share – not always straightforward with a newly-appointed head still finding their feet.

And the SEF itself was a moving target: written three times a year, out of date within a week, and an extra piece of workload heads had to fit around everything else.

"Sometimes the senior leaders can not always be aware of what their particular gaps are, depending on where they are in their own leadership journey.

If I'm relying on other people and then trying to cross-reference what they're saying with the evidence I'm seeing, that can be quite tricky at times."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

The solution

Rolled out across all five schools together

Julie introduced the idea of Intelligent Evidence through her existing fortnightly heads' meeting; Intelligent Evidence then presented virtually to the group, and the heads opted in as a collective decision.

Support afterwards was tailored school by school – some heads got to grips with it quickly, others needed more input, and Julie's trust dashboard made it obvious from the centre which was which.

"By just having a quick look at my dashboard I could actually see who those people were. So then when I'm doing my visits to schools, I could spend some time with that head and support them"



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

Spotting strengths across the trust, not just gaps

Once Julie could see the MAT overview, oversight stopped being about deficits alone. She could see where one school was self-evaluating strong in an area another school was struggling with – and start actively matching leaders up to learn from each other, something that proved especially valuable for newly-appointed heads.

"I can really look at those gaps, but I can also look at the strengths. So actually, where are our schools maybe self-evaluating as strong, and I've got another school that isn't, then I can start doing some matching and get the heads to work together."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

A trust improvement framework, backed by fact rather than opinion

Julie realigned the trust's own improvement framework to include information from Intelligent Evidence.

"I can have important development conversations with the heads when I go in and share that with trustees really easily, and it's factual. There isn't any kind of subjectiveness in it.



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

The shift, for her, was moving from a subjective document to something she could stand behind at the Education Committee.

The results

Evidence that worked live, in the inspection call itself

Two of the trust's schools went through the new inspection framework within a fortnight of each other – and each HMI approached it differently. The first wanted to discuss judgements on the phone before visiting; the second wanted judgements summarised on the call, then to see the live system once on site. Both times, the trust's evidence base held up.

"The head would say what the judgments were, but I had the evidence up in front of me and could justify exactly why we thought those judgments were correct. Having five schools, I don't keep all of that in my head in that fine amount of detail. So having that there was great."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

From a day per school to half an hour

Julie's termly school-improvement meetings used to mean roughly a day of preparation per school. With a live evidence base to open ahead of each visit, that dropped to about half an hour – freeing her to spend the visit itself on the conversation, not the paperwork.

"Just being able to open up the platform and then have a look before my meetings - it's a half-hour job rather than maybe a day's job. I'd say it probably saves me about four days' work per term just to get up to speed with the evidence and then think about my questions."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust

A living tool for school improvement, not a once-a-term exercise

For Julie, the value was never really about Ofsted alone – it's the continuous self-evaluation cycle that a once-termly paper SEF could never support.

"It's much more useful than having a paper SEF where it is literally done once a term and then put away on the shelf and no one looks at it again. It's not about that cycle, it's about what we know and how we are going to improve on that."



Julie Carson
Director of Education & Deputy CEO, Woodland Academy Trust



Find out where your evidence stands

Book a demo

Book a demo and see how Intelligent Evidence maps your existing documentation against the framework - so you can see exactly where you're strong and where the gaps are.