



Steve Orton – Discovery Schools Trust Chief Finance
& Operating Officer

[Uplift achieved - £331,000 in the first year](#)

Talk to Steve: SOrton@discoverytrust.org



What were Discovery looking for when you contacted us? What were the pains you were hoping to alleviate?

In the first instance, we were keen to grow our wraparound childcare, holiday provision and nurseries. We have an ambition to be able to offer our families 8am - 6pm childcare, 52 weeks of the year, and wanted to take ownership of the offer across all schools, to not only ensure high quality provision, but to free up the schools to focus on their day job - educating the children.

However, the administration was a stumbling block to us moving forwards: invoicing and reconciliation was hugely time-consuming, and we had limited confidence in the accuracy of our school-produced data (both financial and attendance). Were we deal with this element ourselves, we recognised that bringing this inhouse would require a huge amount of work, including the recruitment of a specific team.

Why did you choose Childcare Bookings?

We were drawn to working with you for two main reasons. Firstly, because you don't offer just a booking system, but an end to end service. The fact that you deal with all of the admin, the bookings, the credit control - and you maximise income & attendance - made it an easy choice. From an operational perspective, it was incredibly encouraging to see the efficiencies that we could achieve working with you.

Secondly, and more importantly, we want to work with partners, not suppliers. What you provided was tremendous added value. Your background and expertise in wraparound childcare, from both the commercial and operational perspective, gave us a lot of confidence in making decision decisions going forward. It had a significant impact on the high-quality and profitable provision we now run.

As CFO and COO you have a very busy job, and time is precious. What was it about our approach that made you confident to make a big decision like this with (relatively) limited time?

The business case was easy to articulate, and when sharing our plans with stakeholders, it was really important to be able to say that Childcare Bookings had high credibility, worked with other large Trusts, and, for me, it was really important that at no point had there been any hard sell. You were happy to go at our pace, and give free insight and support without pushing for a contract.

What has been the impact on your staff?

Prior to working with you, we had a centralised finance team that had to deal with all of the financial administration for the schools' childcare. This meant hundreds of transactions to reconcile, trace back to the invoice/payment, and crucially manage any bad debt. This is a thing of the past, and your administrators and support team feel very much like an extension of our own team.

What would you say to other Trust leaders who perhaps have yet to see the opportunity of wraparound (and nursery) childcare?

Wraparound care across a dozen schools generates the same amount of revenue as a small primary school. We have been able to use the uplift you have generated to pay for 1500 laptops across our school network. It's been a brilliant opportunity to utilise our assets and generate cash flow when budgets are so tight. Adding holiday care, and our new nurseries, will push the revenue up towards that of a 2 form-entry primary.

The landscape is tough, and growing revenue is an important alternative to cutting costs. It also helps us as it's a significant point of difference against competing schools. We asked ourselves the question "If we're not open 8am-6pm, are we truly supporting the parents?" We can now proudly answer this question at every parent's evening and school tour. We're proud to be the cornerstone of our communities.

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