

The Cherwell School

One of Oxford's leading state schools, The Cherwell School has a specialist status in science. It has a great reputation in the local community for its excellent results, with 78% of its students receiving five or more A* to C grades in GCSE exams in 2011, and 64% of A-level candidates achieving A* to B results.



Project background

The Cherwell School is a thriving school with excellent results, and with many parents working for Oxford University and having their own expertise in academia and education, the school has high expectations to live up to.

It was within this context of academic excellence that the school's Governing Body was faced with the recruitment of a new head teacher. As Kaye Johnson, one of the parent governors, explains, finding a leader who can balance being an inspirational figurehead with the need to listen to the staff who helped make the school great is quite a task.

"In an outstanding school like this one, the challenge is to take

achievements that are already excellent to an even higher level!", Kaye says. "In recruiting a new head teacher the Governors are influencing the next generation of students in the school, and its relationship with, and standing in, the local community – the head is a strategic leader who gives overall direction."

Traditional methods of recruitment, such as work-based tests, school visits and an interview were not enough, and the school felt the need for further information to support their decision making.

The brief was not simple, and having struggled to find someone to fit the bill for several months, the Board turned to OPP for advice.

EDUCATION SECTOR

Business needs

- Selection of new head teacher
- Maintenance of the school's academic excellence
- Increased momentum
- More than just 'traditional' methods of recruitment

Psychometric tools used

- ABLE
- 16PF

Benefits

- Objective evidence that supported the recruitment decision
- Help in ruling out unsuitable candidates
- An expert perspective that clarified what the school needed
- Higher staff morale
- Increased desire of people to remain with the firm



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Kaye Johnson
Parent Governor



The solution

The selection panel had a good idea of the type of person they wanted, but needed tools that would uncover the candidates' genuine qualities and abilities, so that they could be really confident that the person filling this crucial role would be up to the job. "The person needed to be able to set a clear vision for the future, make difficult political decisions, monitor and understand budgets, deal with periods of great change and embrace new technology – all within a very, very public role... in short, they needed to grasp many different things and hold them all together."

OPP advised the Governors that a combination of two tools would give them the insight and objectivity they needed: the 16PF instrument, which measures personality traits and can be mapped onto a job description; and the ABLE Series® of tests, measuring a person's aptitude and potential to learn and succeed quickly in different types of work.

OPP's first task was to identify exactly what type of profile was needed – or in 16PF terms, what type of profile was undesirable for this particular post (known as a 'danger-zone profile'). A job analysis was completed that identified not only which of the personality traits measured by the 16PF were the most relevant, but also where potential problem areas would lie within each trait. By highlighting danger zones rather than creating an 'ideal' profile, the risk of excluding potentially excellent candidates who would be able to flex their style to excel in all areas was eliminated.

Additionally, as candidates' aptitude was a key factor, the Critical Information Analysis and Business Decision Analysis tests from the ABLE Series were administered. These gave information about the candidates' ability to analyse numerical data and use it to form conceptual frameworks and make sound decisions in practical contexts.

The selection panel had started out with six candidates, and had already shortlisted three of them as part of a first day of tasks and panel interviews. A second day was added to the selection process, which consisted of the administration and feedback of the 16PF and ABLE tools to the three remaining candidates, of which two were external and one internal. This included a series of debriefs between OPP's consultant and the selection panel, where the results of the tools and their implications for the recruitment were explained. The 16PF Management Potential Report was used to present the candidates' results.

Results

The panel found the psychometric results invaluable in making their final selection. "Because we had one internal candidate, we wanted to make sure that the process was fair and objective for all the candidates," Kay comments.

"The results from the ABLE and 16PF assessments allowed us to back up impressions we already had about the candidates from the interviews with empirical evidence – but the process also revealed some surprising information that we would never have picked up on using our conventional methods."

The psychometric results gave the panel the confidence to recruit their internal candidate, even though he was less experienced than the others. The tests provided evidence that he had the potential to learn and excel in the job – and indeed had already been acting up into the post on a temporary basis.

Kaye adds: "Via the assessments, OPP's consultant was able to make the salient points much more clearly than we ever could, and clarify for us what we wanted and how we could achieve it."

The new head teacher has now been in place for a year, and the Governing Body is already delighted with the results he has been able to achieve. The school continues to excel academically, and the person appointed has proved to be a popular choice amongst students and staff alike.

With more changes and challenges within the school system on the horizon, The Cherwell School is grateful of the steady and affirmative hand their new leader is able bring to the role. Kaye concludes: "It was a very valuable and very useful thing to do, and was a good process for the candidates to go through as well. So I can't say thank you enough really!"

Established in Oxford in 1989, OPP is one of Europe's largest providers of business psychology solutions. Its products and services are used by SMEs and multi-national organisations in more than 25 countries. OPP develops the 16PF personality assessment and also distributes many of the world's leading psychometric instruments, including the MBTI, FIRO and TKI tools.

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