

Case Study

Duke's Aldridge Academy



From in-house to optimised cleaning: How we took Duke's Aldridge Academy on a journey to efficiency

About Duke's Aldridge Academy

Duke's Aldridge Academy is an educational academy based in North London, part of the Aldridge Education family of schools. The academy welcomes 210 new students each academic year and specialises in the arts, partnering with a local theatre, hosting artists in residence, subsidising instrument tuition, and offering masterclasses from industry professionals.

The school's ethos is founded on relationships, characterised by mutual respect – an ethos which included how they treated their cleaning staff, many of whom had been a valuable part of the school for a decade or longer. In 2022 though, the school had reached a crossroads. The leadership and governors knew they needed to outsource for efficiency's sake, but they cared too much about their cleaning team to TUPE transfer them to the lowest bidder.

The cleaning situation before Nviro

- In-house cleaning operation
- Low productivity
- High absence rates

Duke's had been running their cleaning operations in-house for 20 years. Like many schools, they had chosen to do this to maintain tighter control of costs and standards. If schools want cleaning done properly, shouldn't they do it themselves?

However, while there were some strengths to the school's cleaning operations, the system had become very inefficient. Costs of running the cleaning teams had ballooned, and there were HR difficulties that were difficult for the school to rein in, such as high absence rates and the potential misuse of enhanced benefits.

What Dukes needed:

- Cost-savings to make the most of a stretched budget
- A TUPE transfer that would result in greater efficiency
- A service that made no compromise on people, safeguarding or standard

It became clear that Duke's needed a more efficient system, but there were reasons for the school to be nervous about bringing in an external cleaning provider.

After 20 years of handling everything in-house, the idea of TUPE transferring their cleaners across to another employer naturally raised concerns. Would that employer be able to look after their people properly while delivering efficiency and cost-savings? Would people feel less valued, causing standards to slip? Safeguarding also needed to be a high priority.

They needed a cleaning specialist that could bring everyone together on a journey, ensuring people were listened to and heard, all while de-risking the service and ensuring there was no drop in service standards.

What are your aims?

Duke's Aldridge Academy needed to see cost savings while maintaining standards, but another option when switching to Nviro is to spend the same amount while delivering on a more ambitious specification.

To learn more about how the Nviro team can deliver on this level of efficiency while taking care of your team, see our article on [Nviro and the mobilisation process](#).



Why Nviro was chosen

We would draw on our specialist expertise – developed over the last 30 years – to propose a new way of working and an optimum model that would be both an evolution and revolution of Duke's current system.

This would be supported by fresh KPIs that reflected what was important to the school, its students and its teachers, as well as an initial risk register, which the Nviro team would report against as they worked towards an annual saving of £50,000 on the core contract charge, which the school could choose to reinvest into teaching or facilities to meet the needs of students.

Nviro stood out as an experienced employer that would be a safe and reassuring team to TUPE transfer the team across to. As a real living wage employer that prioritises career growth and mental health, Nviro proposed a series of measures that would make this endeavour a way for Duke's to invest in their people.

Nviro would also drive the cultural change while respecting Duke's cleaners' ways of working, experience, and site knowledge.

Nviro's solution would be a dedicated HR business partner on site on a fortnightly basis to meet with staff face to face, building relationships, answering questions, and working with key stakeholders, such as the cleaners' union.

That HR business partner would remain focused on the school over an 18 month transition period, by which point their Nviro's on-site service manager would be able to effectively handle the delivery of the service and the operational management of the team.



The timings of the contract, and why they mattered

As part of the mobilisation we agreed with Duke's that, although the contract was awarded on 1 September, the TUPE transfer would not take place until 21 October. This gave the Nviro team vital time in which to consult with staff on site, get to know the cleaning team, as well as provide training and understanding of terms and conditions.

The schedule gave us further opportunity to understand:

- What challenges the school was facing
- What concerns they had about embedding our processes and policies
- What should actually happen on site, as tenders often don't accurately reflect what occurs or what the client needs.

This all fed into our conversations with stakeholders, the logistics of mobilisation, ordering equipment, risk assessments training and ensuring the cleaning team understood the changes and how it would impact them.

This transition time is an important part of Nviro's approach to delivering the best outcome for schools who are moving from an in-house operation. It's one of the reasons we'd suggest not starting delivery of a contract on 1 September, right after a summer period when many stakeholders will be absent or even leave their employment. See our dedicated article for [what to consider when retendering or switching from in-house cleaning services](#).

The changes Nviro proposed

Nviro was able to identify strategic areas for redesign and fresh approaches. We then introduced a managed process and managers that would help deliver on an optimum operating model. Rather than have cleaners tackle tasks with no supervision, for instance, we would put good, targeted supervision and planning in place, and we'd introduce practices that would allow the team to get more done in less time.

The result of the planning, communication, dedicated resources and commitment to improving standards meant we took everyone on the same journey, establishing a good relationship with the union, the service manager, the cleaners and others at the school.

To reduce absences, we worked with a private healthcare company to help bring long absent employees back to work. We also started monitoring people closely when they took extended sick leave, to protect against the misuse of their benefits.

All this was done with great sensitivity, and with clear and transparent communications about what was and wasn't acceptable. In a number of cases we were able to negotiate phased returns or reduced hours to accommodate people who wanted or needed fewer hours.

Equipment, uniforms and safeguarding

On a more logistical level, we modernised Duke's equipment and chemical strategy so it was fit for the site. We also



provided cleaners with safety shoes, winter clothing, and five sets of T-shirts and trousers, so they wouldn't need to wash their uniforms more than once per week.

We also upheld strict standards around safeguarding, drawing on our specialist experience of working with many schools and other government departments such as the police force. This capability meant that whenever new hires were needed we could complete DBS checks with great efficiency to ensure there were no lags in service levels.

Whatever change is needed

In the case of Duke's, Nviro didn't make fundamental changes to the cleaners' working systems, such as cleaning schedules or allocating areas to teams rather than individuals. However there are instances where this can be helpful. At Crawley College, we went on a similar journey of delivering cost savings, but in this scenario, a key part of achieving efficiency involved switching from a morning to an evening shift.



The outcomes:

Nviro have built a very good relationship with the Duke's community, as well as with the Headteacher and teaching staff in the school. Now they know that so much more is possible, they often come to us and say, "This is what we'd like to get done – can we do it? Can you support us?"

We've made ourselves an extension of the team at Duke's, with a high level of integration between our managers and theirs – and strong support from our head office.

After just 12 months, we've seen a great improvement in absence rates as well as a greater uptake of learning and development opportunities, improved engagement, fall in health and safety incidents, and better productivity rates.

For more examples of how we've created a different cleaning experience for schools, take a look at our BACA & PACA case study, on our website, www.nviro.co.uk/case-study/. And if you'd like to learn more about how Nviro can partner with you to create financial and operational efficiencies in your school, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Find out more

To find out more about how Nviro supports clients through a successful cleaning transition, please contact our expert, Antony Duggan:

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