# Best Practice Network school improvement library

## Improving Progress 8 scores for high prior attaining students

### Headteacher, Secondary School, South East

Tags: Secondary, Progress 8, high achievers

### The issue

* Lower than expected P8 score in 2017
* Need to close gap in attainment for pupil premium pupils
* Need to improve progress for high prior attaining students
* Requirement to publish progress online for parents

The key driver for change was our Progress 8 figure in September 2017 being lower than expected, for all students (+0.04) for high prior attaining students (-0.05) and for disadvantaged students (-0.42) whilst the attainment 8 figure was well above National figures for both groups.

Changes to performance measures and school accountability measures and a greater emphasis on all students making progress rather proportions of students reaching a given threshold mean that a school is held to account more rigorously than under the old system. The new exam grades have also added to the challenges the school faces as there is greater emphasis on differentiating between the higher grades available and more challenging specifications. Due to the large amounts of funding the pupil premium in schools has received schools are expected to show the impact of this through closing gaps in attainment and in particular progress for students who are identified in this group. This has led to a new focus in the performance tables and published information online for parents to access.

My analysis of student attainment and progress data using Analysing School Performance tools and the schools’ data analysis software showed the lower and middle prior attaining groups of students had made better progress than the higher prior attaining students

In 2017 our intake had a greater proportion of high ability students (approximately 55%) compared to 41% the previous year and for 2018 the proportion is 51%, which indicated we needed to focus on improving progress for high prior attaining students. From looking specifically at pupil premium students this pattern was repeated. By looking at subject results and considering the impact of English and Maths outcomes on students’ progress this was also an area identified for improvement.

### The solution

* Collaborated with the Outcomes Governor to draft an evidence informed improvement plan
* Exploited distributed leadership to share responsibility for improving pupil outcomes
* Raised status of Maths and English subject leaders through attendance at Governor meetings and extended SLT
* Developed team responsible for Progress 8 improvement
* Updated job descriptions for key staff
* Established a programme of professional development for staff
* Progress 8 training for governors
* Survey of Pupil Premium pupils
* Provided coaching for subject leaders
* Targeted interventions for previously high attaining pupils and Pupil Premium pupils

The full governing body were informed of the results once issued in August and then updated In September with the progress information. Initially they were very pleased as the attainment was higher than in previous years, however the progress score caused concern.

I worked with subject leaders during our results meetings, specifically English and Maths, to look at areas for development. I also gathered feedback from SLT and met with the Outcomes governor to draft the action plan. I presented the action plan to full governors and they were particularly interested in the outcomes for disadvantaged students and asked that this be included as a specific strand with targeted actions. They also asked questions regarding teacher workload and wanted to ensure I would be using existing systems to monitor the plan. We discussed the current data collection pattern in school and agreed it would enable me to monitor the effectiveness of the plan so it was unnecessary to increase workload for staff. Governors also requested that the action plan and its impact be included on the half-termly link governor meeting and Headteachers report. It was also to be reviewed with the school improvement partner at each visit so they could be kept informed of their evaluation.

Through this discussion of the school priorities for improvement and vision for the school with the governors the plan was expanded to specifically target disadvantaged students alongside high prior attainers. The benefits of this were agreed to have wider whole school implications and will ensure the impact can be embedded into teaching practise. By ensuring the governors fully understand how they can measure the impact of the school’s actions on outcomes for students they are able to challenge the school about its plans and maintain the focus on every student achieving their potential.

Having researched the Leadership of change I wanted to be clear when communicating the action plan about why we need to change and sharing that. By being specific about improving outcomes for the students rather than for the performance tables so that students meet their potential and make the progress we want them to and this is clear in our school ethos.

A key theme from my research was asking the right questions of staff to ensure a collaborative approach to designing the action plan. I have in the past always tried to do as much as possible myself and reduce the burden on other staff. If this project was to be a success I needed to involve and empower other staff to deliver improvements.

I identified the key staff; in particular the Subject leaders for English and Maths and will develop their roles to give them greater status and credibility with wider staff. I also needed to consider my leadership style with the English and Maths teams and ensure they feel involved rather than attacked. Different people in these teams will require different approaches.

Looking at research into good practise the need to support thoughtful professional development was something I wanted to include in the action plan to ensure staff had time to develop the skills we were looking for with students. By using professional development time, it was also an opportunity for all of the senior team to be involved and reinforce how important this was for improving student outcomes.

Looking specifically at raising the level of challenge in lessons a focus for the profession development sessions was questioning and developing high order thinking. Instructional support has a strong impact on student outcomes and it was an area I felt our teaching staff would be able to develop as they already have a deep knowledge of the subjects they teach (also a strong impact on student outcomes from the same research).

The action plan was designed to raise the performance of higher ability students and disadvantaged students, as there is a large number of higher ability disadvantaged students in my school these students will have a big impact on the overall outcomes. I planned to address teaching strategies across departments and also needed to raise awareness of disadvantaged students so strategies could be linked to these students specifically. I monitored the plan thoroughly, involving staff at senior and middle levels to do this. I also planned to survey disadvantaged students about their attitudes towards school and include specific provision for improving these.

I believe it is important to look at other indicators for disadvantaged students including the school attendance and behaviour data. Research into the effectiveness of distributed leadership allowed me to persuade the Headteacher and governing body to appoint pupil premium achievement leaders to work on the barriers to learning that disadvantaged students face.

Given the national shift to a school led improvement system I think schools will need to think carefully about how they distribute leadership to be effective. There needed to be a network of people in school who can lead on teaching and learning due to the size of many schools and the formation of MATs. These people needed to be leaders rather than simply following instructions and be open and transparent about what they were trying to achieve, as this is an effective way to work with others.

I am planned a series of meetings to share the actions that we as a school would be working on. Once the initial rationale and questions were concluded I planned for regular updates to all staff at normal meetings, after school briefings and using email. I also built this into the line management meetings that other senior staff held with departments with feedback gathered at SLT meetings and planned for regular feedback to governors to keep them updated on the progress of the action plan.

My school works in partnership with other schools in the MAT, which comprises two primaries and two all through schools. There are regular opportunities for senior leaders to work together and meetings and email contact to share ideas and expertise. A new opportunity this academic year was for middle leaders to be involved on MAT working groups focusing on Teaching and Learning and Assessment. Both of these groups could link to my project and provide a way for me to develop parts of the action plan and gain feedback from others.

I met termly with the outcomes governor and also reported to full governors through the Headteachers report. At each monitoring point using the latest tracking information I reported on the outcomes for all students, disadvantaged students and then further broke this down by subject area. The governors received training on the progress 8 calculations and the attainment 8 figures and so were clear that we were monitoring these in the same way that school data is reported in the performance tables. The governors took a great interest in the impact of the project and held the school leaders and me accountable for implementing this in the most appropriate way. I also arranged for the Subject Leaders for English and Maths to attend a governors’ meeting so they could gain a better understanding of how my project was being prioritised.

I discussed with the Head having the Subject Leaders for English and Maths included on the extended SLT. This also enabled some succession planning to take place in these key departments and has increased the leadership capacity in each department.

I worked with our human resources department to develop the job descriptions and then discussed with both members of staff to look at their role in developing teaching and learning. I then took on a coaching role with the Subject Leader for English to develop her confidence in implementing change in the department. This is a member of staff with lots of experience but she has been reluctant to deal more difficult members of her department. I helped her by using some of the work I undertook on powerful conversations to frame her approach and focusing on the vision she has for the department which needed to be shared more explicitly. By having an additional member of specialist staff, the changes within department can be embedded and monitored. The departments have also taken the lead on evaluating the quality of teaching and learning within their own teams. Investing in these staff showed them the importance of the issue to SLT and the governors.

I systematically implemented the action plan, working with staff and governors to do so. The monitoring of the change programme took place using the school data collection points which specifically look at rates of progress and attainment using the DFE methods of evaluating school performance. All sub groups are monitored and I developed the data analysis further to include a specific group of disadvantaged students. Over the course of the project the gap was closing quicker in Maths than it was in English. I held additional meetings with the English department to discuss the data and distributed leadership of a peer observation schedule to the Subject leader to implement and monitor. Throughout the project I have monitored the impact with SLT to keep them informed and involved.

I have focused my meetings with the intervention manager on the data for high prior attainers and disadvantaged students and evaluated the impact of the strategies at subsequent meetings. The meetings I have led with the teaching and learning team in school have also focused on the data for these students so the teaching strategies used for interventions could be monitored.

I also used the data analysis for SEN students in line management meetings with the SENCO to look at the effectiveness of strategies used by the learning advisors and ensure these were monitored. This is not something that has previously taken place and enabled some evaluation of which strategies to pursue with individuals and a clear time to move on with other individuals.

Mindful of the need to reduce teacher workload I have taken the lead on producing agendas, PowerPoints and information handouts for staff to ensure that the administration side of the project did not impact on anyone else. I have also used existing directed time to manage the communication of the project with staff, this meant I could avoid staff being resentful of the project and avoid this having a negative impact on the outcomes.

As part of my project was going to involve staff training for developing planning for high prior attainment students I was able to give time to staff by reducing the written feedback element of marking as well as the frequency of marking as outlined in the school policy.

Another area I have minimised workload associated with the project was by using existing data collection points rather than incorporating new ones and these have also reviewed to ensure they are at the most useful times and staff are not completing assessments just for the data collection points but using the ones that fit best with their teaching schemes.

During the presentation to governors I outlined the analysis that I had conducted of the summer 2017 results based on prior attainment groups and disadvantaged students to explain the rationale behind the improvement project being based on high prior attaining students. I also provided a breakdown of the year groups currently in school based on these criteria alongside their current progress in school. By providing the context and them projecting this forward to look at Summer 2018 results I was able to show that the project was necessary to avoid a repeat of the Progress 8 figure being lower than we want. The use of data and having all this prepared in advance meant I could answer questions confidently and reassure the governors that I was clear in the aims and expected improvements. I was able to convince them to allocate the budget requirements of my project and agree to the changes to job descriptions. I was pleased with the additions they suggested by including disadvantaged students as a separate area of focus and that the monitoring of the project would include these. We discussed how the governors could best monitor the plan and set up the lines of communication to enable this.

As our school has been a teaching school for a number of years we have strategic partners in place already. I worked with the Director of the Teaching school to use these links to develop research into best practices for stretch and challenge in lessons. By identifying some key resources and practises we planned for these to be used in the professional development program and built in training time for middle management staff to then in turn develop the use of these techniques and resources within their departments.

I arranged for a review of our teaching to be carried out in school using a reciprocal arrangement with a school within our trust. This gave some external validation to our judgements in school on teaching and learning and also enabled further expertise to review our impact so far. The review I carried out with our partner provided them with a review of their use of data to identify students for intervention and led to an action plan being drawn up to assist them in moving this area on. This has been implemented and initial feedback from their SLT is that they have seen an increase in outcomes for students identified.

### Impact

I have analysed the internal data for KS3 and KS4 to look at the progress of high prior attaining students and also in particular disadvantaged students who are high prior attainers. The KS3 data was presented to all staff at the end of the summer term and shared with governors and the trust. The KS4 external results were presented to all staff on the INSET day in September and have been sent out to governors in advance of the first meeting of the academic year.

Throughout the project I have led staff to focus on the progress of higher ability students in school and remained committed to delivering better outcomes for this group. I have focused on improving standards of teaching and learning across the school and provided training to support this goal. Staff have become better informed of the ability profile of their students as a result and better equipped to respond to their needs. The English and Maths subject leaders have developed their understanding of standards in their departments and been supported to lead changes with individual staff. I have also focused on provision for disadvantaged students and how we remove barriers to learning. There are now additional staff in roles to work with disadvantaged students and I have moved from instructional leadership with this group of staff to a more distributed leadership style. It is pleasing to note that these staff are enjoying the responsibility and have started on plans for the next steps in their roles. I can see this role developing further and becoming more central to the school’s work. I plan to work with this group to provide staff training on wider issues in school for disadvantaged students. Given the successes we have had at KS3&4 I am also planning to work on KS5 to look at progress and interventions.

In Key stage three the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students has closed from last year. Last year at the end of Key stage there was a gap of 0.5 tiers progress (schools own tracking system) and this year this has reduced to 0.13 tiers progress. High prior attaining students have made better progress this year with 83% meeting end of year targets which has increased from 72% last year.

High prior attaining disadvantaged students have also increased their rates of progress from 68% last year to 81% this year meeting target.

For Key stage four students the tracking over the year showed the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students to be closing for overall Progress 8 and in the key subjects of English and Maths. High prior attaining students took longer to show an impact and I think this was due to the teaching and learning strategies for this group taking longer to implement and have an impact, at Christmas they looked as though no improvement had been made but by the final tracking their progress score had increased from 0.03 to 0.24.

The final results in August showed that high prior attaining students had a progress 8 score of 0.29. All students had a score of 0.18, disadvantaged students had a score of -0.16.

This shows the very positive impact of my project and a real improvement for students.