# Best Practice Network school improvement library

### To reduce the attainment gap between pupil premium and non-pupil premium for upper ability students across Humanities and Technology Faculties by 50% and in line with FFT20

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Tags: Pupil Premium, Secondary, Humanities

### The issue

* Achievement gap for disadvantaged higher ability pupils
* Ofsted inspection identified need to increase achievement for disadvantaged pupils
* Teachers providing insufficient challenge for higher ability pupils

The next steps from Sept 2017 Ofsted inspection include increasing achievement for disadvantaged pupils and while the differences have diminished for some subjects with higher ability students, this is not the case for all and remains a high school priority.

From the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Families of Schools Database, I compared my school’s performance with three others; most similar, pupil premium award winner and strongest performance. I learned that we are more efficient in terms of higher pupil to teacher ratio and lower average salaries, with a better P8 score for the most similar school and conversely, our P8 score of 0.28 was 0.65 below the pupil premium award winning school, who have the same ratio of staff to pupils, but interestingly a lower average teaching salary, which would suggest a less experienced staff, however, they are supported by a higher proportion of teaching assistants despite having considerably fewer Special Educational Needs students.

I looked at the Key Stage 4 (KS4) Performance for disadvantaged pupils in 2017, comparing Attainment and Progress for % 5+ GCSEs (Grade 7+) against non-pupil premium. For attainment, although we performed within 2% for non-pupil premium and pupil premium, this was below the National Average by at best 17%, confirming High Attainers as a priority for whole school action. Where my school excels is in progress for our students and here although our disadvantaged pupils performed below the national average by 4%, this was 6% better than our non-disadvantaged pupils for Grade 7+. However, it was not possible to compare pupil premium High Attainers’ against other schools, and so I completed an internal analysis to create a benchmark for the project. I collected data for Higher Ability pupils comparing non-pupil premium and pupil premium, within year groups and subjects including Maths, Humanities and Technology. I decided to separate Year 11 out of KS4, so that more formal results could be analysed when the GCSE results were received. From my analysis, there was greater disparity in year 11 than compared with year 10 and KS3 in expected attainment, with an increase of 14% more, 1% less and 0% respectively.

### The solution

* Analysis of pupil data
* Conducted a review of teaching, learning walks and book scrutinies with a focus on higher ability pupils
* Redeployed TAs and teachers for greater impact
* Organised a programme of CPD sessions and coaching
* Compared level of challenge across the school
* Cascaded findings across the school
* Worked with subject teams to develop new materials and reform the curriculum to provide greater challenge
* Developed assessment criteria
* Engaged parents in learning through the use of personalised postcards to parents

Working across faculties, I considered how my leadership skills needed to be developed in order to effect change, and that the ‘problem’ is a ‘Wicked’ one as described by Keith Grint. At the time I had no direct influence over either the Humanities or Technology faculties and it would be necessary to adopt a collaborative leadership style, and I expected resistance due to being a non-specialist in either faculty. Working alongside colleagues, I hoped to build their capabilities, and support the development of others in building more challenge into their lessons for upper ability students. Using a growth-mindset rationale, “they [students] take on challenges and learn from them, therefore increasing their abilities and achievement”. (Dweck). Through this process, I would bring a different view and ask questions as an ‘outsider’ to develop a new perspective and improve the outcomes for students.

Initially, I conducted a SWOT analysis in Humanities, to examine variations in attainment (History and RE producing better results than Geography and French). To evaluate teaching across school accurately, I participated in learning walks focussed on stretch and challenge for upper ability pupils, examining progress for higher prior attainers, as well as lesson observations and work scrutinies. Strengths were seen in both faculties, with extension tasks available to stretch those making rapid progress. An area identified for development was in group work, where more direction was needed from teachers to define more challenging roles and assign these to higher prior attainers that linked to learning objectives. This observation was cascaded across school.

During school’s quality assurance process, I was involved with a faculty review with an advisor from the Local Authority. We examined a group of “setted” exercise books and identified work in some of the middle and lower ability classes as more challenging than higher sets. This led to further detail and exemplars being added to schemes of work for a more consistent approach.

With regards to classroom behaviour, there were small groups of students, who were having a negative impact on the teaching and learning in some classes. While my school had recently revamped our behaviour policy to encourage consistency with a “chance warning action” approach I felt that this area was not part of my remit until I read Tom Bennett’s Independent review of behaviour in schools, and realised that I could encourage good behaviour through my project. In his review, he looked at encouraging good behaviour which I have paraphrased as “good behaviour includes aiming towards students’ flourishing as scholars and human beings, helping them learn good habits of study, coping with adversity, or intellectual challenges”. By stimulating a can do attitude, providing upper comprehensive assessment criteria, staff could encourage students to push themselves for higher goals and reduce low-level off task behaviours which I had observed in lessons.

Another area of study which confirmed my decision to encourage parental recognition for our non-pupil premium students, was the cultural difference seen in both Shanghai and Germany. Even pupils in deprived areas of these countries are more greatly supported by their families, as they will migrate to be near a school with a better educational provision. In Germany written contracts were signed with parents and children, not to mention the high quality teaching. Our culture in not such, but by sending “post cards home” of small successes often to our pupil premium students, parents may begin to aspire for their own children. I would be able to compare the success of this through an online questionnaire to assess students’ perspectives.

Initially, I considered how I would close the gap for all upper ability students, including those disadvantaged. Year 11 benchmark data indicates Geography as a priority. Following interactions with a Geography SLE, in a local school, and my own observations during a learning walk, I realised that a consistent approach to assessment could be the key. I would be able to share my own expertise and amalgamate what I had learned from observation and collaboration with the other school. I had observed outstanding practice with the use of detailed student friendly project assessment grids aligned to tiered quality final pieces of work in a practical subject, and also discussed the importance of meaningful assessment, clear guidance and outcomes and how that developed the higher thinking skills needed to be successful at the top. As History and RE had lower variation in pupil ability, it allowed students to be exposed to higher levels of questioning and they were more exposed to higher quality written pieces of work when peer assessing.

‘Better outcomes arise from persuasion rather than coercion which is forced upon others to influence or change their opinion’. In my communication plan I identified different methods of sharing information so that intervention could take place swiftly. This utilised existing systems in place so that risks are minimised regarding additional workload. Agenda led open forum meetings allowed discussion of successful interventions which could be taken up, if felt appropriate for a pupil in a particular subject. The use of the large newsletter posters was appropriate for the pastoral team, as they were best placed to speak to mixed ability pupils about life style, revision skills and future life options. While this was distributed to tutors, it also allowed Key Stage Managers to discuss their message in Life Studies lessons. Postcards were personalised and sent to celebrate success at home and engage parents in their awareness of the children’s efforts and successes.

I also engaged with an SLE via email and face to face. Our meeting was highly effective due to our earlier emails, making them concise and effective.

I used the secondary school efficiency metric tool which showed my school is 3rd in the first decile for value for money for student outcomes. Budgets were devolved to faculty leads and as Gifted and Talented Coordinator, I had no direct access to funding. However, for worthy extra-curricular activities, I needed to source these from either non-chargeable companies, or approach parents to pay for the event, which were usually overreaching several skill sets or subjects. For pupil premium students, I would approach the AHT who had responsibility for pupil premium, and submit an application for funding, seeking any additional contribution needed from that pupil’s family. My Business Case examined risk mainly in terms of time, impact on marking homework, and cover lessons. To opt to do nothing would lead to a rise in the gap and was not a consideration. Great care was taken to deploy staff and specialist TA’s, using computer rooms and in-class exam time so specialists could be withdrawn to work intensely with a small group of students from another class. Another benefit to this was that the permanent class teacher had a smaller remaining group, to focus on another area.

As part of my research on professional development I looked at Joint Practices Development (JPD) and Gerrard Egan’s skilled helper coaching model, which received positive reviews relating to focus for the coaching sessions. I also attended in school CPD using the T-Grow approach to coaching. JPD is proven to improve teaching and learning outcomes, when colleagues share and co-construct ways of developing their practice then their students are likely to have a ‘can do’ attitude.

This would suit our existing joint planning twilight sessions, which would build on a prolonged series of continuing development supported by the Teacher Development Trust (TDT) report. It would provide a non-threatening method of demonstrating good practice and give staff time during inset to create their own resource, addressing the needs of upper ability students and enabling them to implement it.

Using my own experience of writing extended assessment criteria and my studies of the Hay’s Group Research, I shared my vision of renewing existing materials with Technology colleagues, who initially were reluctant to change current practices. However, after explaining the need to add a further level of achievement and to use student friendly language, both equivalent and more senior colleagues embraced the change. By my own example and writing a draft alternative version to show how the revised materials would look, I was able to effect change through leading. “Power from: altruistic gain for others – Focuses on moral purpose and collective outcomes. Empowers others to take on an active role as part of the commitment to long-term, sustainable outcomes”.

During the implementation stage of my project I reviewed the lesson observations carried out by line managers for other faculties, with the Assistant Head teacher who has overall responsibility for teaching and learning, so that we could identify and discuss areas where I could support staff.

The lesson observations were only a snapshot, but did indicate a need for more emphasis on extension tasks and higher thinking questioning in French and Geography.

I carried out observations on pupil’s behaviour in Geography and French lessons to assess their engagement and effort at various stages of the implementation of my project. This was also important as I was exposed to the different mixes of abilities and characters in each class.

Of the two Geography groups, one was significantly smaller with a higher proportion of upper ability students. However, both teachers were developing probing questions to access higher thinking skills and a fuller written argument/explanation.

The two French groups were evenly split in terms of ability and numbers. At the outset, there was enough disruptive behaviour from a few minority students, to impact the flow of the lessons and the concentration of others. As a two tier examination and to prevent the loss in learning time, the lessons were structure from the middle, differentiating outwards rather than top down.

Assessment criteria are now being refined to incorporate the changes for the new GCSE, however these were only released by the examining body very late in the two year course and could not be shared with the pupils until the second Term in year 11, effectively creating a barrier to success.

I attended training.

I co-developed assessment criteria for coursework of the new GCSE’s in Craft (renamed) and Food and Nutrition with the Head of Technology and latterly with the second in department.

I influenced the types of materials being used in resistant materials as this was limiting upper ability students, and potentially the calibre and gender of pupils who were opting for GCSE courses. With the introduction of new equipment, this expanded the opportunities for students.

I persuaded senior members of staff to improve the Key Stage 3 (KS3) project workbooks in their subject specialism so that it was more accessible in terms of language and images as well as providing additional differentiation, encouraging them to display finished works that students could aspire to an excellent piece of work and compare different finishes.

I led a cross-curricular team of teachers in delivering inset, including the deputy head, who judged my resources for “challenge, engagement and resilience” as excellent.

I attended curriculum and progress meetings to monitor and support staff and pupils.

Having observed pupil’s behaviour in lessons, I completed research into teaching and learning for upper ability students. I discussed three pieces of research with the Humanities and Technology teachers, so these could be implemented in lessons; The ‘4 Rs’ by Guy Claxton which helps students build coping skills when they meet unfamiliar territory, Abraham Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of learning needs model’ which helps students understand barriers that hinder their progress and the ‘TASC wheel for problem-solving and thinking skills’ by Belle Wallace.

After sharing these strategies, I re-observed students and discussed how they felt about attempting more challenging work now. In the main, students were more inclined to try, said they were less likely to avoid it as too hard for them. I verified my observations by accessing our behaviour logging system. While there was very little disruption recorded earlier, there were fewer incidents logged later in the year. This may also have been as a result of approaching examinations. However, the students should feel more empowered and less concerned about failure or being seen as unsuccessful.

With each stakeholder, I have had to address my position and role and adjust my behaviour and methods of communication appropriately. The three faculties all had a similar development need, but one that needed to be delivered and engaged with in different formats. The forum of various types of meetings enabled me to maintain a staff focus on upper ability students. Liaison with the year teams and faculties during short 5-minute morning briefings also maintained this impetus. Sharing the work carried out with the SLE, and developing the ideas we discussed at length, brought insight in to how I could further support colleagues in Technology. Not always, but a high proportion of students who received ‘postcards’ would express how proud or grateful they were to have received them and commented that they had been ‘noticed’. In order to better evaluate the impact of the postcards, I would include this on the pupil questionnaire. Another form of communication which I omitted from my plan was delivering staff training regarding differentiated resources.

As well as looking at my own school’s circumstances and discussions with colleagues; I also carried out further research and examined information from sources, such as the Institute of School Business Leadership who have worked with the Education Funding and Skills Agency for the benefit of producing resources for Academies. The NASBM register is more useful, because Levels of Impact and Probability are defined and so provide more understanding regarding the “severity” or “security” within which a school is operating. Therefore, I prefer the NASBM model compared to others I have researched, and have used it to create my own risk management plan. I am aware as a growing school with the largest proportion of costs being staffing and our biggest income that of funding per student on a previous year’s basis, we will struggle to work within the budget, incoming numbers being 40% greater than outgoing, which will continue for a couple of years. While this will provide us with a risk score of 2, we currently have an experienced staff on high salaries, whether overtime, natural “wastage – retirement/promotion elsewhere” in the next two years will alleviate this, the number of teaching hours needed will increase and place a burden on staff if new appointments are not made. However, in contrast to teaching hours, there will also be a greater need in terms of pastoral, teaching assistants and site staff to support additional students in the interim before income is received. The next highest risk is lessons not being appropriately differentiated to stretch upper ability so that they gain the experience and resilience to be successful with more difficult questions and attain higher grades. Continued monitoring of books and lessons with a focus on challenge together with modelled solutions against appropriately tiered criteria will help improve the risks faced.

CPD in our school is structured so that staff are encouraged to pursue their own line of CPD, finances permitting. Being excited about learning is essential to create a positive training experience for teachers. If we are not excited about learning, how can we expect our students to be excited and enthused? Effective staff training should impact in classrooms and lessons need to be fresh and energetic which stimulates students and maintains engagement.

Leading the group of teachers to deliver CPD, enabled meto share my understanding of how upper ability pupils are reluctant to look for their own mistakes and correct them. This brought an additional element to my colleagues’ thinking about students’ confidence and ways in which they could facilitate deeper learning for them. The resources have been used by several members of staff, across at least 3 subjects and with lower and middle ability students too.

As part of a CPD program to keep staff up to date with the growing demands of technology, I think that school should also investment in training for staff to use them efficiently, rather than working things out for themselves. Given the limited financial flexibility my school is going through at present, I think that where possible free sources of training should be adopted, staff should complete a reflective exercise in their own professional needs so training is more personalised, this could then be discussed with line managers at the beginning of the year, perhaps as part of the appraisal process. An excellent resource, are our own teachers and partner schools where links continue to be fostered. Many teachers do not see their own expertise, and I think this should be celebrated. When outstanding practice is seen, is should be shared. At my school, we have run CPD sessions where staff can choose which one to attend and they have been very well received, but few staff want to run sessions, perhaps reluctant to be seen as a “show-off”. As a leader of CPD, I think these staff should be approached to deliver what has been seen to be outstanding. It would boost morale for that staff member, empower them and show them they are valued

### Impact

2018 results initially indicate that only 2 schools in the county have made better progress towards improving outcomes than ourselves, ranking us at 20th out of 73 based on KS2 data. Of the 53 schools ranked below us, 17 had cohorts with a stronger intake and all 19 schools above us had a higher intake, showing we out performed local schools for attainment. This is an unconfirmed P8 of +0.2 at present. As a school, our Pupil Premium cohort show an increase of 22% against 2017 National averages, which is equivalent to closing the gap by 28% for GCSE Grade 5 and above. As my particular interest remains with Upper ability pupils, the national indicators show level 7+ to be 20%, compared with our school results of 21%. The impact of the project on GCSE Geography results shows considerable improvement since the beginning of the year where only 40% were making ‘Expected or Better Progress’ compared to 93% seen in the Summer results. Other areas of impact include those from Technology; Art, and Photography showed a negligible difference between PP and non-PP students for upper ability with results above national averages by 58.6% and 18.5% respectively.

The impact of our rationale towards PP students is beginning to have an impact, as lower down school, more PP students have a higher proportion with strong ambitions than non-PP students for upper ability (81% vs 40%). An area for us to develop from this survey, is expectations beyond school at 16, as nearly double PP students, in Year 11, would prefer to get an apprenticeship over going to college at 16 than non-PP students, whose drive appears to be a short term goal of financial independence. This is not reflected in Year 7 to 10.

Working with Technology has impacted on the delivery of different materials in light of my work in supporting the regeneration of assessment criteria, empowering students to be more aware of what success looks like. Several members of staff have adopted ‘challenge’ activities from twilight sessions which enable reluctant high achievers to criticise other’s work in class due to the style of anonymity.

I found the collaboration between myself and the Geography SLE invaluable. Much of the success with our Geography results is an amalgamation of many strategies, staff and students. It has reinforced my conviction that the process of assessment aids learning and development. Teaching can be more informed and students are familiar with the pressures of study. Moving forward, I believe that this success can be mirrored in French and it would be worthwhile to work alongside a similar or better school so that parallels and differences can be examined for the benefit of students. There are many network meetings for Core subjects and they provide opportunities for specialist to share strategies and raise standards. Hopefully, with more MAT and Alliances being formed, non-core subjects will have the same level of access and support. The skill set of our governing body is also an asset to school and through their supervisory role they are able to guide the direction of school and acknowledge the efforts that teaching staff provide.