# Best Practice Network school improvement library

## Closing the gap between FSM and non FSM pupils in Year 11 English

### Middle Leader, Secondary, North West

Tags: Grammar school, FSM, English

### The issue

* Significant progress gap between FSM and non FSM pupils
* Negative residual for FSM pupils in English
* Need to raise attainment of pupils whose attendance fell below 85%
* Whole school and departmental priority to improve outcomes for FSM pupils

In terms of strengths, my school and department consistently achieve high results at KS4 and KS5. Despite being a selective school, we are one of six grammar schools within a fairly small geographic area, meaning we have a broader range of ability than might be expected. In 2017, English Literature pupils achieved 68% 9-7 grades and in English Language, pupils achieved 87% 9-7 grades and 100% 9-4.

In the academic year 2016-2017, my school’s Progress 8 (P8) score on ASP was 0.48 however due to remarks, this later changed to 0.5, which is above national average. The English results for my school were all above national average however, despite this, we still received a negative residual for FSM pupils, suggesting that there is a fairly significant gap between FSM and non FSM pupils at our school.

On average each year, 7% of pupils are FSM Ever6, which means there is a relatively small confidence interval and these outcomes can be affected by one or two individuals. However, on further analysis, I found that this pattern was consistent with the 2017-2018 Year 11 cohort, with a projected P8 residual of -0.26 for FSM pupils in English, during the Autumn term. The gap between these pupils and non FSM pupils was greater in English than in Maths, suggesting to me that this needed to be a priority for the English department, as well as for whole-school. Other priorities identified were stretching pupils to achieve grade 9s and raising attainment of pupils whose attendance fell below 85%, however interestingly, I found that this sometimes overlapped with FSM pupils as well.

### The solution

* Intervention strategies targeting FSM GCSE pupils
* Allocation of Pupil Premium funding to the project
* Purchase of additional interactive resources
* Created an additional GCSE English class with improved staff/pupil ratio
* Increased CPD budget to allow specialist Dyslexia training
* Provided teacher development on the subject of differentiation
* Act on results of pupil experience survey
* Redesign schemes of work
* Encouraged and facilitated use of online tutoring
* Assigned small intervention groups to PGCE students
* Engage support staff and non-specialist teachers in a whole school literacy initiative
* Developed a growth mindset
* Reformed approach to marking and providing feedback
* Work collaboratively across the school

The focus of my project was therefore to decrease the gap between FSM and non FSM pupils in GCSE English. This would be achieved through introducing a series of intervention strategies and resources to support these pupils, as well as guiding teachers to differentiate their support in lessons more. As literacy and SPaG is increasingly significant in new linear GCSEs across the curriculum, implementing ways to increase literacy performance was also a priority; introducing whole-school literacy initiatives would conversely influence other pupils’ performance and have an impact on the KS3 curriculum as well. To achieve this, I would need to utilise the assistance of support staff and also support non-specialist teachers with the delivery of these literacy skills across the curriculum.

I found it useful to consider the variables influencing project management. This allowed me to consider the four key variables: people, time, resources and context, identifying potential risks and problems, particularly in relation to finances and how receptive my team would be to new ideas.

I decided to use Google sheets for project management, as this is very similar to excel but allows for a more collaborative input. Google sheets can be continually edited and updated, allowing me to make adaptations and for staff to leave their feedback and comments. For example, when planning intervention strategies, staff were able to comment on how effective they thought these would be for their students before, during and after implementation.

From exploring examples of international teaching, the most important insight was that real learning doesn’t happen without engagement and for students to be engaged, we need to take into account their wellbeing and happiness. In Finland, I was inspired by the fact that children learned through play; this allowed them to initiate their own learning and willingly share it with others. This prompted me to create more kinaesthetic revision resources for KS4 pupils, particularly in relation to stimulating memory with learning quotes, which I then directed other staff to use with classes as well; I also adapted some of my lessons to encourage creativity and create links to real-life scenarios.

Singapore schools really highlighted how teaching needs to be adaptive and progressive, using tools such as social media as an effective platform for learning, rather than merely a distraction. Again this is something I adopted in my own planning, creating resources which allowed students to use language and emoticons from social media, to interpret complex ideas within Literature and have embedded these ideas into the departmental curriculum, which other staff and classes have responded to positively. Finally these examples made me reflect on performance management and how my team and I often viewed observations and work scrutiny as an opportunity for criticism, rather than an opportunity for ‘new ways of teaching’ and the ability to ‘push boundaries’ we hadn’t before.

Before conducting this project, it was important to consider potential barriers to collaboration. I initially needed to ensure that my team was on board, by making them aware of the benefits of the project, listening to their ideas and viewpoints and discussing ways to implement new strategies without adding to their workload. I intended to collaborate with other subjects within my school, as improving the progress of FSM pupils is a shared goal. However, I was aware that individual support for pupils needed to be tailored towards specific subjects and the skills didn’t always correlate. For example, in humanity subjects such as History and RS, we were able to address common issues such as SPaG and extended writing however this was more difficult in subjects such as Maths. There was also the issue of when to deliver intervention, how to share this time between all subject areas and fairly prioritise.

One of the main initial problems with my project was who would be able to deliver additional intervention; teachers within the department already had full timetables and there were no support staff available. I was conscious that I didn’t want to extend the working hours of the team or add to their lunchtime workloads. I therefore had to consider financially viable ways of utilising other support staff and bringing in external staff to support our team. I also intended to buy and print revision resources for pupils. As my project was focused on FSM pupils, I met with the Headteacher and Finance Director, to discuss the Pupil Premium budget and negotiate using some of this funding to finance my project. Fortunately this was approved. However I was concerned about the sustainability of this funding, particularly with the smaller proportion of FSM pupils in the following year. I used the Sutton Trust toolkit to evaluate which strategies would be the most cost effective and have the best outcomes for my project and this helped me to plan how I would spend the budget and to justify why this spending was necessary.

Before starting my project, I produced an Action Plan and introduced the idea to my team, during a departmental meeting. Staff were supportive of my objectives but were apprehensive of the practicalities and potential workload. We discussed this together, considering strategies to cope with this, such as the additional support of extra staff and how to utilise shared resources more in lessons.

I met with the Head Teacher and Finance Director to discuss budget options and then inquired about hiring a qualified teacher for intervention. As a department, we selected the most relevant revision materials to purchase for students and also started creating our own.

The main risks to my project were strategic as I was aware that other departments would be targeting the same pupils as me and I needed to ensure collaboration, to avoid clashes and maintain the welfare of pupils. I was also aware of timing and the additional demands placed on staff workload, which I approached by utilising directed time for planning and discussion.

Another risk was changes to the local demographic and needs of the community. Each individual child who receives FSM lives in entirely different circumstances and I would need to collaborate with pastoral teams to understand these needs and tailor the support provided.

In terms of staffing, the risk was ensuring that strategies were implemented effectively, especially if bringing in external staff, whose capability would be monitored through observation and pupil voice.

There was a financial risk in the potential for high-cost with only moderate outcomes as well as the sustainability of this funding in future years. However I evaluated these risks using the Sutton Trust toolkit and would constantly review this throughout the project.

During the academic year, Year 11 pupils have 4 key assessment periods. The autumn examinations provided us with a baseline of where students were in relation to their targets and from there we were able to apply improvement strategies. The winter assessment period highlighted that some FSM pupils had made progress in English Literature however no pupils had made progress in English Language, partially due to the fact that pupils had been working on Literature skills in class leading up to assessment, however this raised concerns with the Language papers.

In light of this, I conducted a pupil voice survey, to find out what teaching styles and activities pupils found most useful during lessons and which areas they felt needed more development. I found that students appreciated more interactive resources for revision and we therefore continued to develop and share these across the department, as well as encouraging students to engage more with the whole-school revision resource: GCSE Pod.

Other departments had shared the success of peer mentoring, however we were wary of the accuracy and assessment knowledge of sixth form prefects and conscious of the increasing demands on their curriculum. We therefore assigned small intervention groups to PGCE students and I asked their subject mentors to oversee the planning and delivery of these sessions.

I began by creating a sense of urgency, trying to avoid the disengagement of colleagues. I chose an area for development which focuses on some of our most vulnerable students and as a department, one of our greatest weaknesses. This motivated staff in terms of their own development but also in supporting pupils who are most in need. I then established that all staff were on board by clearly sharing objectives and providing opportunities for colleagues to make suggestions and ask questions, which then created a ‘strategic vision and initiatives.’ This approach allowed me to address potential barriers to success such as opposition from other curriculum areas and lack of funding and encouraged me to celebrate small successes with my team along the way, such as positive pupil voice feedback. I realised that ‘sustaining acceleration’ would be the most challenging part of my plan and in order to maintain motivation, I would need to constantly review and feedback the progress of the project, for staff to see the benefits of what we had implemented .

Due to new linear GCSE courses, a lot of work had gone in to adapting the curriculum at KS4. My aim therefore was to embed this into KS3 schemes of work so that students were supported from an earlier stage. We held a departmental meeting where we analysed previous exam data and discussed what areas of development were required. I then designed a new Scheme of Work for a Year 9 unit, which I modelled to the department as an accumulation of their suggestions. I assigned each member of staff a unit of work do adapt, based on this model, utilising their strengths and areas of interest, which also fed in with our next appraisal meeting and setting targets. I also identified that one of our Year 11 FSM students was dyslexic and that we needed to adapt our teaching to support this additional learning need more securely. Through our CPD budget, I was then able to attend a course of Practical Solutions for Dyslexia and fed back the information initially to my department and later to the whole school. One of the main ideas taken from this was to introduce more visual and kinaesthetic memory-based resources to lessons, which we did. As this can be quite a time-consuming process, members of the department and trainee teachers created these resources and they were shared, particularly in the weeks leading up to exams.

Feedback from surveys produced by pupils, PGCE students and colleagues all suggested that the most effective way to support Pupil Premium pupils in lessons was to differentiate resources, sit pupils at the front of the room and use targeted questioning. From September to December staff implemented this into their lessons, which I observed through learning walks and found to be effective in engaging students and clarifying their understanding. Simultaneously one to one intervention sessions were taking place during Games lessons, which were focused specifically on their end of Year 10 mocks and areas targeted for improvement. Although pupil voice suggested this was effective for most, some pupils were overwhelmed by this environment and therefore we later introduced intervention for small groups of pupils as well, with a less exam-focused and more nurturing environment. The type of intervention pupils attended was based on their feedback and their teacher’s knowledge of them as individuals.

From January, intervention continued in and out of lessons, whilst monitoring pupils’ progress closely through regular progress assessments. Pupils were also encouraged to access online tutoring made available to them and GCSE Pod. Class teachers were given a twilight session to set assignments for pupils on GCSE Pod and were able to then monitor their usage.

According to the Education Endowment Foundation, reducing class sizes would increase the ‘range of approaches a teacher can employ’ and ‘the amount of attention’ pupils would receive, resulting in ‘improving outcomes for pupils.’ Taking this on board, we decided to create an additional smaller GCSE group in February, which targeted underperforming pupils and partly consisted of FSM pupils. We were fortunately able to do this without any additional cost implications and as a result, were also able to minimise the number of pupils in all GCSE English classes.

According to Carol Dweck and others, one of the most successful ways of increasing pupil progress is ‘making effective feedback and developing a ‘growth mind set’ in pupils. Consequently we reviewed the way that we delivered feedback, revising our mark scheme and providing students with more time for guided self-reflection. Growth mind-set is something we have been developing as a school during form-time and we later linked this to our English lessons.

When considering the best leadership style to adopt for my project, I felt that I already used the authoritative style, as I am trusted and respected and generally able to instruct others without being challenged or viewed as too imposing. However on occasion I have had to adopt an affiliative style, mostly when having to mediate between members of staff within the department.

With new members of intervention staff, support staff and trainee teachers I have adopted a more coaching style, taking responsibility for their wellbeing and development, as well as monitoring compliance.

However I feel the most appropriate leadership style for my department is democratic, as we have weekly departmental meetings and generally make decisions collaboratively. I have therefore avoided the coercive style, as this would make staff feel demotivated, particularly if they felt dictated to, without an understanding of why changes are being made. However I do value the benefit of pace-setting and have therefore used this to set standards for an already highly motivated and successful department.

Ultimately I am personally moving towards a more authoritative approach as with new examinations, there is an opportunity to develop a new vision for the department, which I have begun initiating this year. This has been developed through a clear vision and demonstrating a self-confidence that colleagues trust and feel motivated to support. Although democracy is still important, an authoritative leading style has ensured a clear and consistent achievement of my vision.

I don’t believe that staff are motivated by pay and threats and instead agree with Sahlberg’s argument (2011) that effective communication is built through trust. Bryk and Schneider (2002) further this argument and define relational trust as consisting of ‘respect, competence, personal regard and integrity.’ This was the foundation for the communicative style I adopted throughout this project.

When communicating with colleagues, it was important that I conveyed my vision clearly and concisely, avoiding any miscommunication and clarifying any potential misunderstandings. This mostly took place in face-to-face meetings and was sometimes followed up by email. However I also tried to respect my colleague’s opinions and value their knowledge and expertise by encouraging discussion and collaboration during meetings. In terms of integrity, it was very important for me to remain consistent in my vision and expectations, with colleagues having a clear understanding of the project’s objectives.

When communicating with students, clarity and respect was also essential. It was important that lessons and intervention sessions were clearly articulated, to support the students’ understanding of the curriculum and exam expectations.

There was less requirement to communicate with parents, however, this was initially addressed by letter, explaining that pupils were entitled to extra resources and intervention, due to their FSM status. This was communicated clearly and formally, without causing any unnecessary discomfort to parents or pupils, in order to ‘minimise barriers’. Later communication was conducted via telephone, where it was again essential to provide clarity, respect and show competency through my subject knowledge and expertise.

I have collaborated consistently with my team, discussing and providing updates in weekly departmental meetings, twilight sessions and emails. Colleagues within my department have delivered strategies within their lessons and have also supported the external intervention happening by liaising with intervention teachers and contributing ideas and resources. This has been essential for ensuring a consistent implementation of strategies, tailored towards individual students. In addition to this, I have collaborated with the Senior Management Team, updating them on the progress of the project and maintaining their approval and support.

I have also collaborated with other departments within my school, particularly Maths and Humanities. As Maths is the other core priority subject, it was important to manage intervention so that there were no clashes and to cause minimum disruption to the rest of the curriculum. Communicating with Humanities subjects allowed us to identify patterns in students’ learning needs, which then became a focus for intervention sessions. This helped to avoid a potential barrier to collaboration, which was conflicting priorities and ensured the support of other departments in our additional intervention work. I also observed intervention systems within the school such as the ‘Science Angels’ peer mentoring system, which I evaluated in terms of their effectiveness and adopted strategies from as a result.

As our school only consists of a small percentage of FSM pupils, I sought advice from teachers at schools for whom this is a greater proportion of their budget and pupils. I contacted another local secondary school and also surveyed a selection of PGCE English students from the University of Manchester. Their feedback provided me with effective strategies, ideas and resources for intervention.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, I collaborated with the pupils, maintaining contact through conversation and pupil voice, to embed their ideas, suggestions and feedback into the delivery of our lessons.

I considered how best to utilise Pupil premium funding, to manage resources effectively and get value for money. I considered the 1996 Nolan Committee Report, to ensure I conformed to the school’s financial procedures and also used the Sutton Trust toolkit to evaluate whether my spending was economic, efficient and effective. My primary spending consisted of buying revision resources for pupils and then an additional amount (see budget sheet) was spent on intervention. Although one to one tuition came out high-cost with only moderate impact, I felt that this would be the best value for money, as it is delivered by qualified teachers, who can tailor their teaching and learning for the needs of individual students, in a more concentrated environment. As a school, we purchased subscriptions for online tutoring and online resources, targeted at GCSE, which my department utilised as part of their intervention and is therefore an additional cost. As these are long term subscriptions, this will aid the sustainability of these resources beyond this initial year of intervention.

I also conducted an assessment of individuals within my team and strategies to promote their support of this project, identifying that newer members of staff were keen to get involved and therefore felt that delegating some responsibility to them would ease the overall workload and provide them with the opportunity to develop their own professional development. One example of this is the online tutoring, which was organised and overseen by one of these members of staff. After we had established clear objectives of what we wanted to achieve from this, they were able to lead it independently and I evaluated the outcomes of this through pupil voice.

More experienced members of staff were willing to support but wary of additional workloads. I therefore delegated tasks based on a colleague’s area of interest/expertise and ensured that resources were shared for those who felt they had less time to commit.

As a highly experienced and successful team, it wasn’t necessary to put in any particular measures for improvement however I conducted learning walks and book monitoring, to ensure that strategies were being applied within lessons and that progress was evident in work. One area of development I felt we required was supporting students with extra additional needs and this is why I attended and then led a Practical Solutions for Dyslexia session for staff and oversaw the creation of resources and activities as a result.

Support staff who provided intervention were less familiar with the curriculum and therefore training was provided to them by myself and examiners within our department. Intervention staff kept a journal of each session which I continuously monitored and discussed with them, as well as speaking to pupils. When I felt that staff needed additional support, I spent time planning sessions with them and providing additional ideas and resources.

Effective delegation was a huge step for me in developing professionally, which I was able to achieve by overseeing the implementation of strategies both in and out of lessons. As Second in Department I also found myself caught between ‘path making’ and ‘path following’, leading some areas but also supporting the Head of Department in others. I established myself as ‘path maker’ in this project by leading meetings, independently conducting learning walks and book reviews and managing support staff independently.

### Impact

At the beginning of the academic year, our P8 residual for FSM pupils was -0.259 and after their summer examination results, was an estimated 0.059. English overall achieved a residual of 0.54.

This I believe, is a testament to the success of this project and is a result of targeted and differentiated intervention provided outside of lessons, targeted support from staff within lessons and the motivation of pupils to improve. This pupil motivation was largely a result of staff’s commitment to their welfare and creating a growth-mind-set that some pupils were previously fixed upon. I decided to focus primary on the P8 score as Rebecca Allen states, this was introduced to ‘ensure the best possible outcome for every single student,’ which reflects the primary objective of my project.

Although not all pupils met their targets in both English Language and Literature, their marks increased and from pupil voice feedback, all pupils felt supported and developed confidence through the additional support they were given.

One FSM pupil who slightly underperformed in English, consistently underperformed across the curriculum, however made more progress in English than most other subjects. After evaluating this outcome, this was partly a result of the pupil’s disengagement and therefore moving forwards with the current Year 11 cohort, we will be spending much more time liaising with pastoral teams, to support these pupils. This is something we have already implemented with low-attending pupils and this also had a great impact on their results, as our commitment to supporting these pupils with missed work has led to greater progress.

The extra CPD and funding used to provide additional intervention to pupils was cost-effective, as pupils clearly valued this and made progress. Training support staff to deliver these sessions was also cost-effective as we were able to utilise the expertise within the department, as most of the team are GCSE examiners. This has also led to sustainability as support staff are now equipped to continue with this intervention and as a department, we have developed an extra medium of support, to decrease the pressure and workload of class teachers.

Through the training and discussions that I have led, staff are more aware of the needs of FSM pupils and a range of strategies to support them in and out of lessons. Staff are also more equipped to support pupils with Special Educational Needs such as dyslexia. The success of this project is something that I am now sharing with Heads of Department across the curriculum and therefore this is developing into an opportunity for whole-school development, which I hadn’t originally anticipated.