

National Challenge Core Plus English programme

Element 1a: Leading improvement and raising standards in the English department

Rationale

Effective leadership at school and departmental level is essential for sustainable improvement. The National Challenge offers a fresh opportunity to break through the obstacles to progress by linking the actions of senior and subject leaders, through the Raising Attainment Plan (RAP), to the priorities required to help English teachers improve the rates of progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, to increase levels of engagement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 and to sustain improvement.

Element 1 outlines processes for:

- leading and managing systematic improvements over time in the English department
- addressing priorities for ensuring improvements in Key Stage 4 attainment in the shorter term by drawing on Core Plus elements
- using consultancy support as appropriate.

The processes described need to be tailored to meet a department's specific context and the priorities identified in the school's RAP.

This element provides:

- an improvement process and time line
- quality standards which underpin a review structure to track progress and improvement
- advice on narrowing the attainment gaps for black minority ethnic (BME) pupils and others in vulnerable groups
- a case study illustrating how some of the approaches can be used.

Quality standards

This improvement process contributes to sustainable improvement in English by strengthening effective department leadership to ensure that:

- the whole English team works on a clear set of priorities to improve pupils' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening, supported by focused use of national materials and local consultants
- time and coaching is provided for English teachers as they try out and evaluate the impact of changes and developments in their teaching
- all English teachers work collaboratively, through peer observation and coaching; Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities mean that no-one is 'left behind' and everyone has a role/responsibility in the improvement action plan
- improvement activity involves senior managers in supporting and tracking progress in relation to all of the above.

And in the longer term...

The leadership of the department will be:

- more confident in planning for future improvements
- more secure in evaluating progress with the action plan
- more skilled in ensuring improvements are embedded across the whole department.

Exemplification

This exemplification will address some frequently identified problems with planning as cited by English departments, such as:

The need for a regular and manageable cycle of department self-evaluation and review involving all members of the department.

The need to strengthen the role of subject leader (SL), build a collaborative department team and use department development time effectively.

Table 1 exemplifies a six-week improvement process. It should be adapted to help the department take action to address its specific issues on leadership and management in order to make measurable progress towards the quality standards outlined above. The table is followed by a review process that will help provide feedback to the RAP management group on progress and outcomes.

The element also includes a more detailed case study showing an approach to **supported department self-evaluation to establish English department priorities for improvement.**

Table 1

Actions for the English subject leader (SL) and senior leadership team (SLT) line manager	Related support
<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAP management team meeting with English SL and SLT line manager to review RAP; Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 data and priorities for improvement action. • Fast-track supported self-evaluation in relation to priority areas for improvement with reference to the Core Plus quality standards summary (Appendix 1.1), paying particular attention to BME pupils and other pupils in vulnerable groups (Appendix 1.2). • Agreement on action plan, which Core Plus elements to draw on, levels of consultancy support and monitoring and evaluation processes. 	<p>Meeting time.</p> <p>Review of current data and English department self-evaluation information. Consultant support for analysis, action planning and tailoring of Core Plus elements.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLT line manager, SL and consultant review and tailor Core Plus elements to address action plan. • Preparation of department meeting to outline actions and time lines and brief on elements. 	
<p>Week 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department meeting to outline approaches, time lines and expectations. • Individual coaching for those leading or contributing to specific actions. • Start of first six-week improvement process(es). 	<p>SLT, SL and consultant time for initial coaching.</p>
<p>First term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly review of actions and milestones in relation to improvement process(es). • End-of-element review and feedback to RAP management team. • End-of-term self-evaluation process, focusing on impact on teaching and learning in English lessons and pupil attainment and progress. 	<p>SLT/National Challenge Adviser (NCA) regular review of progress, end-of-element reviews and provision of feedback to English SL and consultant. SLT/NCA sign-off for end-of-term self-evaluation process and agreement of next steps.</p>
<p>Second and third terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLT line manager, SL and consultant review adjust and extend action plan. • SLT line manager, SL and consultant agree on and tailor next elements to address action plan. • Weekly review of actions and milestones in relation to improvement process(es). • End-of-element review and feedback to RAP management team. • End-of-term self-evaluation process, focusing on impact on teaching and learning in English lessons and pupil attainment and progress. 	<p>Recommended joint discussion where possible: SLT/NCA regular review of progress and end-of-element reviews, informed by SL and local authority (LA) consultant. SLT/NCA provision of feedback to English SL and consultant. SLT/NCA sign-off for end-of-term self-evaluation process and agreement of next steps.</p>

Secondary National Strategies to provide Regional Adviser (RA) support to LA as needed to:

- support identification of priorities for improvement
- review improvement plans
- provide advice and feedback to senior leadership and RAP management teams, local authority and related support teams
- coach consultants and help to monitor their improvement work with departments
- quality assure support strategies and improvement work as it progresses
- support the development of interim progress checks
- review outcomes to agreed quality standards
- support identification of next steps development and use of Core Plus elements for follow-up improvement work.

Review

In reviewing the impact of the improvement activity, the RAP management group and senior leadership team should aim to make a judgement about **how far, and in what ways**:

	The English department's action plan for raising attainment and accelerating pupils' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening is having a positive impact on all pupils' engagement in lessons and their progress.
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	The English department's action plan for raising attainment and accelerating pupils' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening is having a positive impact on BME pupils and those in vulnerable groups.
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	The impact of guidance and coaching related to the identified priorities for improvement have been effective and all English teachers are clear and confident about how to improve and refine their practice.
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	Senior leaders are contributing to English departmental improvement through regular monitoring and feedback to the subject leader and RAP management group.
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In reviewing the impact of the improvement activity, the subject leader and English line manager should aim to make a judgement about **how far, and in what ways**:

	The weekly and termly success criteria are being met and impact on the priority areas for improvement and have resulted in increased pupil engagement, progress and attainment.
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	Guidance and coaching for individual teachers in the English department is resulting in sustainable improvements to their teaching, with positive impact on pupil engagement, progress and attainment.
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	Any English teachers are in need of further support to make improvements in the priority areas of the plan.
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Case study

Case study of a time-efficient approach to supported department self-evaluation to establish English department priorities for improvement.

Structure and range of activity:

Before

Planning meeting (1 hour)

- objectives shared and agreement reached on who is to be involved and timetable for the day
- intended outcomes identified
- range of self-evaluation activities planned.

Briefing and development session for those involved (1 hour)

Consultant delivered a brief CPD session on:

- the SLT line manager's, SL's and consultant's role in department self-evaluation
- the rationale and process of supported self-evaluation
- aims and protocols for this joint work.

Agenda-setting

Headteacher, NCA, English SL and English consultant reviewed current self-evaluation evidence and data for quality of teaching and current rates of pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 English, and made initial estimates in relation to Core Plus quality standards summary.

The review highlighted need for further information in some key areas which appeared to be variable or weak:

- teachers' effective use of the department's scheme of work
- Assessment for Learning and planned additional support for struggling and underperforming pupils
- pupil engagement in English lessons
- strong/weak performance of different pupils with GCSE coursework and Key Stage 3 homework
- writing much stronger than reading at Key Stage 3.

On the day

Whole school and department lesson sampling (90 minutes)

Ten-minute visits to six English lessons in a team of four (headteacher/subject leader/NCA/LA English consultant).

Each member of the subject team had a different focus and concentrated only on this when in lessons (e.g. expectations and differentiation; quality and use of learning objectives; range of teaching and learning; assessment and feedback).

Pupil discussions (90 minutes; 45 minutes per group)

The discussion groups took place at the same time as the lesson sampling; focus on Year 9 and Year 11 – six to eight pupils in each discussion group. Conducted by four members of extended leadership team to agreed questionnaire/recording schedule (Appendix 1.3).

Subject team discussions (2 hours)

The team shared the evidence of what was seen/not seen in lesson sampling and arose from pupil discussion (see below).

Factual observations (rather than discussion of opinions or judgements) led to teachers in the department considering and agreeing priorities for improvement, which were 'owned' by all and included:

- teaching of reading
- objectives-focused marking of books and feedback in lessons
- need to improve planning for progression in (boys') writing
- tailored lesson planning and more reliable use of the scheme of work across all classes
- less teacher talk and greater pupil participation in lessons on reading
- encouraging thoughtful and extended response to questions in lessons on reading and peer review of writing during drafting process
- getting Key Stage 3 homework and GCSE coursework in on time and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress as they produce it.

Work on department self-evaluation form (SEF) and improvement plan (2.5 hours)

Consultant, SL and SLT member worked together on: reviewing and adding to draft of department SEF, in the light of the day's activities; a SMART improvement plan, including consultant support and monitoring/evaluation processes to address most of the issues agreed by the department during the morning.

Follow-up

Feedback and further discussion with department

SL outlined to the English team: the work undertaken; the value of the experience for her/the team; the action plan and initial next steps identified.

Getting the plan under way

Consultant and SL provided coaching for the key 'change agents' in the department who were to lead the focus on different elements.

Resources

Extensive guidance for raising the attainment of BME pupils is given in:

Access and engagement in mathematics – EAL

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DfES+0251%2f2002&>

Ensuring the attainment of Black pupils: Management guide (DCSF ref: 00750-2007 BKT-EN)

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/sec_blackattain

Raising the attainment of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage pupils: Guidance booklet (DCSF ref: 00043-2008BKT-EN)

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/ws_attain_0006907

Raising the attainment of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage pupils: A management guide (DCSF ref: 00069-2007BKT-EN)

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/ws_attain_0006907

Ensuring the attainment of pupils learning English as an additional language: A management guide (DCSF ref: 00011-2007BKT-EN)

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/ws_eal_0001107

Appendix 1.1

Summary of quality standards taken from Core Plus English elements 2a to 5a.

(To aid department self-evaluation and improvement planning)

Element 2a

As a result of this six-week improvement process, there will be greater **departmental consistency** in:

- use of progression data in order to improve current approaches to planning – in particular three-year trends in two levels of progress in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4
- use of learning objectives and strands of progression in the Framework for English to plan for progression from Key Stage 3 into Key Stage 4
- the quality of long-, medium- and short-term planning
- the quality of the teaching of medium and short plans – curriculum provision.

Element 3a

As a result of these six-week improvement processes, there will be greater **departmental consistency** in:

- the way that teaching sequences for reading and writing engage pupils to contribute actively to lessons and make swift, tangible progress
- the development of a climate for learning to help pupils become increasingly functional and independent
- the development of behaviours for learning and promotion of social and emotional skills
- the promotion of consistent attendance to reduce barriers to learning.

Element 4a

As a result of this six-week improvement process, the following key aspects of Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) assessment will be in place:

- the SL and SLT have a clear time line for periodic assessment in English and how they fit in with whole-school tracking and reporting of progress
- the department has been trained on APP procedures and each member of staff is clear about what they need to do throughout the term to make and record assessments
- a term's scheme of work has been reviewed to ensure sufficient coverage and progress for all pupils in reading and writing
- pupils regularly receive feedback on the specific aspects of reading and writing they are working on and this engages them in their learning
- English teachers have undertaken initial standardisation of their assessments using the standards files and understand the principles and processes for using APP.

Element 5a

This six-week improvement programme will enable the English department to review and renew aspects of its intervention provision within the whole-school context, so that:

- all pupils in Years 7 to 11 who are working below expectations and have the potential to achieve more are identified; the barriers to their learning are appropriately addressed, and their progress is tracked
- identified pupils make good progress in the key areas of literacy and mathematics, close learning gaps and meet or exceed expectations. There is a significant increase in the percentage of pupils making two levels of progress, particularly those moving from level 3 to level 5 in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3, and in those moving from level 5 and level 6 to English and mathematics GCSE grade C and above at Key Stage 4
- well-focused and targeted additional support for pupils is linked to their main learning and teachers direct the work of additional adults to support the identified needs of learners. These adults address pupils' particular weaknesses and equip them to work more effectively in lessons.

Appendix 1.2

National Challenge schools with high proportions of BME pupils are likely to need to narrow these attainment gaps. It is particularly important to tackle attainment gaps for BME pupils early and identify potential grade C attainers from Key Stage 2 data. By Year 11, many Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils have made such poor progress in mathematics that they are on track to attain a grade E GCSE and so are unlikely to be identified as potential grade C candidates.

Common features of schools that have raised the attainment of BME are:

- setting the challenge of high expectations
- having systems for effective tracking of pupil progress
- having close oversight of academic and personal progress
- showing commitment to valuing and including pupils
- engaging effectively with parents and carers.

The steps described below could be used to strengthen Core Plus elements

- senior and subject leaders review key aspects of BME pupil performance within English
- review findings inform key aspects of the development to focus on increased progress of BME pupils
- teachers become more aware of the progress of particular BME pupils
- teachers begin to implement specific strategies to increase the engagement of particular groups.

Review of BME attainment

Senior and subject leaders undertake a focused review and then discuss this with the department. The following processes will help to ensure effective review and analysis of data and to identify specific strategies to raise attainment of particular groups.

- Analyse current attainment and progress data by ethnicity and gender and decide how well BME pupils are doing in Year 10 and Year 11.
- Identify those pupils who are 'stuck' or have regressed in Key Stage 3 and identify appropriate intervention. Check that they are in a teaching group offering the right challenge for their potential.
- Review the rationale for setting pupils and for tier entry and non-entry of BME pupils at Key Stage 3 and GCSE.
- Review the level of expectation and challenge reflected in schemes of work and unit plans for BME pupils.
- Compare performance of BME pupils with that of their peers in the same teaching groups and identify any significant differences.
- Review teacher expectation and the level of challenge and support in lessons.
- Undertake lesson observations and work sampling, to evaluate the progress of targeted pupils.
- Review the appropriateness of curriculum resources and schemes of work.
- Engage in a regular dialogue with BME pupils and their parents about their engagement, progress and attainment.

Responding to the findings

The review might identify particular groups of BME pupils who are underperforming in particular years, with particular teachers, within particular aspects of English. Although whole-school intervention strategies will support many of these pupils to make faster progress, it is important to identify specific strategies to support specific groups of pupils.

All pupils respond positively to a curriculum that reflects their cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. Schools that have developed an inclusive curriculum have noticed improvements in pupil motivation and engagement, which has impacted on pupils' attainment. Suggestions of approaches and resources are provided in:

Ensuring the attainment of Black pupils Unit 4: An inclusive curriculum

Raising the attainment of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and Turkish heritage pupils Section 2 Curriculum, learning and teaching.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, whether they are newly arrived or advanced bilingual learners, will require particular support to engage with the academic language of critical analysis. It is important that teachers work closely with EAL teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning for bilingual learners.

Academic tutoring can be particularly effective in raising the attainment of Black pupils. Guidance and some resources are provided in:
Ensuring the attainment of Black pupils Unit 6: Working with pupils – academic tutoring.

The strategies should be discussed and agreed with the whole department. CPD may need to be provided for staff (mathematics and EAL or Ethnic Minority Achievement staff) so that developments are consistent across the department.

Appendix 1.3 Suggested questions for pupil discussions

Prompts
<p>Do all/most English lessons have clear objectives that help you understand what you are going to learn? Tell me about a typical lesson...what happens/in what order...what are common ingredients....</p>
<p>What do teachers do in English lessons that most helps you learn and make progress? What aspects of lessons are less helpful? Discuss some teaching approaches/strategies to see if pupils recognise them and are responding well to them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demonstration – shared/guided teaching – questioning – pair and group work – sharing examples of good outcomes.
<p>Are you aware of the level/grade you are working at in English? What level or grade are you aiming to get in English?</p>
<p>Do you know what you need to do to improve? Give examples...how do you know? What helps you know when you are making progress? What type of feedback do you find most useful?</p>
<p>What activities and support in English lessons help you most to improve your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reading? – writing? – speaking and listening? <p>How often do you have a chance to work on something with others and discuss in pairs or groups?</p>
<p>When you are finding something difficult, what support is available?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – teaching assistant? – extra classes? – mentor? – intervention programmes (be specific so pupils recognise the ones being used in school)? – booster lessons, and so on?
<p>Final question – if you were to change one thing in English lessons to help you make more progress what might it be?</p>