

National Challenge Core Plus English programme

Element 6: Tackling variation in pupils' performance in English and mathematics

Rationale

Because of the joint English and mathematics PSA targets, schools are increasingly aware of the need to consider the two subjects in relation to each other, particularly where there has been a history of the subject departments operating in isolation from each other.

Reducing in-school subject variation requires very thorough and robust pupil progress-tracking coupled with effective communication between colleagues and with pupils and their parents. While not all pupils have comparable potential in mathematics and English, many do, and the school needs to know which pupils could benefit from targeted support, encouragement and mentoring in one or both subjects.

Quality standards

The improvement process will increase levels of consistency across English and mathematics so that:

- there is a clear school plan for reducing in-school variation in attainment in Year 11 and a follow-up plan to impact on Year 10 and in Key Stage 3 to sustain this improvement
- monitoring across subjects identifies emergent strengths or problems in pupils' patterns of working and progress in both English and mathematics, which is reported regularly to form tutors and parents
- pupils' ability to develop and transfer skills, especially thinking skills, talk for learning, Assessment for Learning (AfL), revision techniques and interpreting examination questions is recognised and strengthened in the context of both subjects, but particularly in the areas of underachievement in English
- regular conversations with heads of year, form tutors and parents ensure that pupils are supported to identify and discuss what they see as general and subject-specific barriers to their learning, and ways they might be overcome
- academic mentoring in either or both subjects is available on a personalised basis and contributes to pupil progress
- coherent, sustainable intervention programmes are employed to support targeted pupils; for example, Study Plus has been or is being introduced and appropriate staffing has been provided.

And in the longer term...

- support for pupils begins in Year 7 through the use of Key Stage 2 NC data and APP
- English and mathematics subject leaders and their line managers work together to support the progress of pupils
- the school establishes consistency in teaching approaches for mainstream teaching and in preparing pupils for examinations.

Exemplification

Several approaches to tackling in-school variation within the context of an overarching school Raising Attainment Plan (RAP) are outlined below. They are framed as a default two-week identification and setting up of the programme, followed by a notional three-week development phase and a one-week progress review. These are intended to reduce in-school variation between departments where English is underperforming, followed by links to guidance and relevant support materials. They should be used flexibly. For example, rather than being used consecutively as shown, the approaches could be addressed selectively in relation to a school's view of its priorities and its existing practice. Also, the school may need to focus on one or more aspects, depending on the areas of weakness identified.

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

Leadership and management of English needs to develop stronger departmental self-evaluation.

The range of actions and interventions to raise standards in mathematics and/or science is effective and produces higher attainment, whereas English actions are less consistent and produce little improvement for the effort made.

Teachers and/or pupils do not have sufficient grasp of the specific skills related to each GCSE grade, resulting in Wave 1 teaching and Wave 2 and 3 intervention not being matched to pupil needs or providing high expectations and challenge.

Actions for the English department	Related school leadership and support
<p>Week 1 – setting up focuses, plans and systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular, frequent teacher meetings are scheduled to provide frequent updates on pupil progress. • There is detailed review of those pupils who are seen as having C+ potential in one subject but not in the other. (Any pupil who gained a level 5+ in English should be deemed capable of a C+ grade at GCSE. But also, any pupil who gained level 4 to 6 in mathematics and is making more progress in mathematics should be reviewed.) • Lessons learnt from the previous year need to be acted upon to change practice in monitoring and teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan for core subject coordination is confirmed with the progress leaders for English and mathematics and the head of Year 11 (and Year 10 for sustaining the improvements). • Analysis of data and the issue is undertaken and clearly presented, showing which pupils achieved a C+ grade in one subject but not in the other; for example, a Venn diagram based on the previous year's results is created. The reasons why (including attendance and behaviour) are explored openly and robustly with an eye to doing some things differently. Also discussed should be what has contributed to pupils achieving higher grades in mathematics.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The names of target pupils are shared with tutors and teachers. • Departments prepare in advance ways of maintaining progress for pupils during teacher absence or after pupils' temporary absence. • Parents are informed and involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All current Year 11 pupils with C+ potential in both subjects are identified as target pupils (and Year 10 for follow-up). • Key areas for improvement are identified. They are usually but not exclusively from the following: leadership, management, systems and processes (e.g. monitoring consistency), teaching, learning, pupil engagement (e.g. AfL). • Teaching arrangements for targeted pupils are reviewed to ensure that they maximise pupil potential. • Particular attention is given to ways of supporting pupils on their return from absence, and on minimising the adverse impact of any teacher absence. • Parent information evenings are arranged where tutors or academic mentors can discuss progress with curricular targets. • The action plan will have identified the key areas for improvement.
<p>Week 2 – Pupil-focused monitoring across subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed monitoring at the level of assessment objectives is in place for English and for mathematics, incorporating a Red/Amber/Green rating in relation to expected grades. • The pressures of any remaining English coursework are kept manageable for pupils, and do not impinge on their mathematics time. • Teachers try to ensure that completed coursework units match grade expectations, and that examination skills are developed through coursework. • Teachers begin to encourage and expect pupils to voice any difficulties they encounter in learning in either subject. • Teachers begin to ensure through AfL that pupils know what progress they are making and what they need to do to reach their target grades, to match the subject and school monitoring progress systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A RAG rating method of monitoring of pupil progress in mathematics and English is introduced and involves form tutors as well as subject teachers, overseen by senior leadership team (SLT) and subject leader (SL). • Monitoring is updated at least monthly via meetings of the core subject coordination group. • Attendance, attitudes and behaviour for learning are reported on in addition to academic progress in each subject. • Pupils (all or a sample) are interviewed to ascertain their perspective on underachievement in English. • Personalised intervention and support are made available as soon as problems emerge.
<p>Weeks 3 to 5</p> <p>The department needs to pursue the areas for quick development precisely in line with priorities in the action plan drawn up by SLT and SL. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic mentoring • rigorous use of AfL strategies during 	<p>School leadership to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure priority action(s) is being pursued through weekly meeting with SL in these early stages • provide support for time and resources that the action(s) may need • ensure local authority (LA) consultancy is

<p>Waves 1, 2 and 3 teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration between other subjects (e.g. mathematics, science) and English on systems to track progress and apply consistency and challenge in classrooms; for example, leadership in teamwork and decision making • review of GCSE course plans to ensure current Year 11 underperformance areas are addressed; for example, skills in previous Year 11 papers and Year 10 exams which reveal poorer performance • targeting specific features of teaching to model skills or engage pupils in greater understanding of those skills • develop an efficient range of intervention programmes, taking into account what other subjects within the school and what other schools have successfully used, for example, mathematics/science programmes that have produced the better results, Study Plus. <p>Some of the above are developed more below.</p>	<p>being used effectively and strategically to target, support and challenge the department and SL in pursuing the priority action(s) quickly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure alignment of tracking, monitoring and evaluation processes with whole-school systems • inform RAP management team of short-term progress leading to longer term improvements. <p>LA consultant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support SL in establishing quick response and action to secure priority programme for improvement • support and coach teachers in the programme as necessary • help SL to develop monitoring strategies to gain views of progress being made by all teachers in all classes, and especially in intervention programmes • liaise with SLT to inform RAP management group of short-term progress in establishing a secure programme for improvement.
<p>Academic mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department engages with mentoring identified pupils on English skills they need to secure to attain potential grades. • Teachers make links with any general mentoring, tutor support and learning conversations. • Teachers deliver a schedule of mentoring, followed by records kept by teachers and pupils. • Teachers adjust Waves 1, 2 and 3 teaching to accommodate outcomes of mentoring where appropriate. • SL tracks progress of programme through records, and conversations with teachers and pupils. • SL informs SLT of progress in line with reviews of RAP progress. 	<p>Academic mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school sets up where appropriate general and academic mentoring. The value of each is clearly identified and matched to pupils' needs. The value of academic mentoring, where pupils receive personalised tuition from a subject expert, is to target specific skills related to grades. • Skills identified are 'published' to all teachers, particularly in those subjects where there are similar requirements for GCSE (this helps to sustain improvements). • SLT and SLs set up review schedules and systems that keep track of the quality and outcomes of mentoring.
<p>Tutor support/learning conversations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Year 11 (and Year 10) to secure tutor support schedule and coach all tutors to match the process to pupil needs and high expectations. • Tutors deliver a programme of conversations. • Tutors make use of information supplied from academic mentoring to support and 	<p>School leadership to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secure sustainable system of tutor mentoring informed by and linked to academic mentoring • develop clear links between Head of Years 10 and 11 and core SLs through regular meetings and progress reviews. • review programme progress through milestones and records.

<p>challenge pupils to address key skills in English that will raise their grades.</p>	<p>LA consultant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support SL and teachers in developing strong links between academic mentoring and tutor support/learning conversations • help department develop effective questioning and AfL process that inform tutor and academic mentoring • support SL and teachers in reviewing short-term progress.
<p>Assessment for learning to improve specific grades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SL identifies key resources to use with teachers and pupils in identifying and improving grade-specific skills. See National Challenge English Element 4B for resources available to inform these actions. • Teachers improve their understanding of skills and grade boundaries. • Teachers use Wave 1 and 2 strategies to improve pupil understanding of their specific strengths and areas to improve, what to do about them and what the coursework and exam assessment grade criteria are in detail. • Teachers engage pupils in ensuring their improved understanding influences their work and shows improvement in those skills. 	<p>School leadership to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure alignment of AfL in English to whole-school AfL development • provide and support links between good AfL practice in other subjects and English • review progress with the SL, department and LA consultant frequently in the initial stages to ensure quick progress. <p>LA consultant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support teachers in quickly developing key AfL strategies and practices in classrooms through coaching or lesson observation and feedback • contribute to SL and SLT review of classroom practice to inform RAP of progress.
<p>Week 6 – Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department to meet as a team and review whole process in terms of their own progress but also as to how far pupils have been improved in their understanding and their work. 	<p>School leadership to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet SL and LA consultant to review progress against key success criteria for teachers and pupils (see below) • lead action planning to move the process forward for the next six weeks • inform RAP management group of progress • secure and sustain cross-subject links and whole-school practices in AfL. <p>LA consultant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform SLT and SL of review outcomes to contribute to RAP review • support SL and teachers in monitoring and evaluation strategies.

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 to match other subjects and accelerating pupils' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening is having positive impact on teaching and on pupils' engagement in lessons and their progress.
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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 SL and RAP management group.
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	The English department is more open to seeing what other departments are doing well or even better and taking advantage of their expertise and good practice by emulating or adapting these.
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	The English department clearly understands and agrees with the need to, and the possibility of, raising the grades to match other subjects.
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In reviewing the impact of the improvement activity, the SL and English line manager should aim to make a judgement about **how far, and in what ways**:

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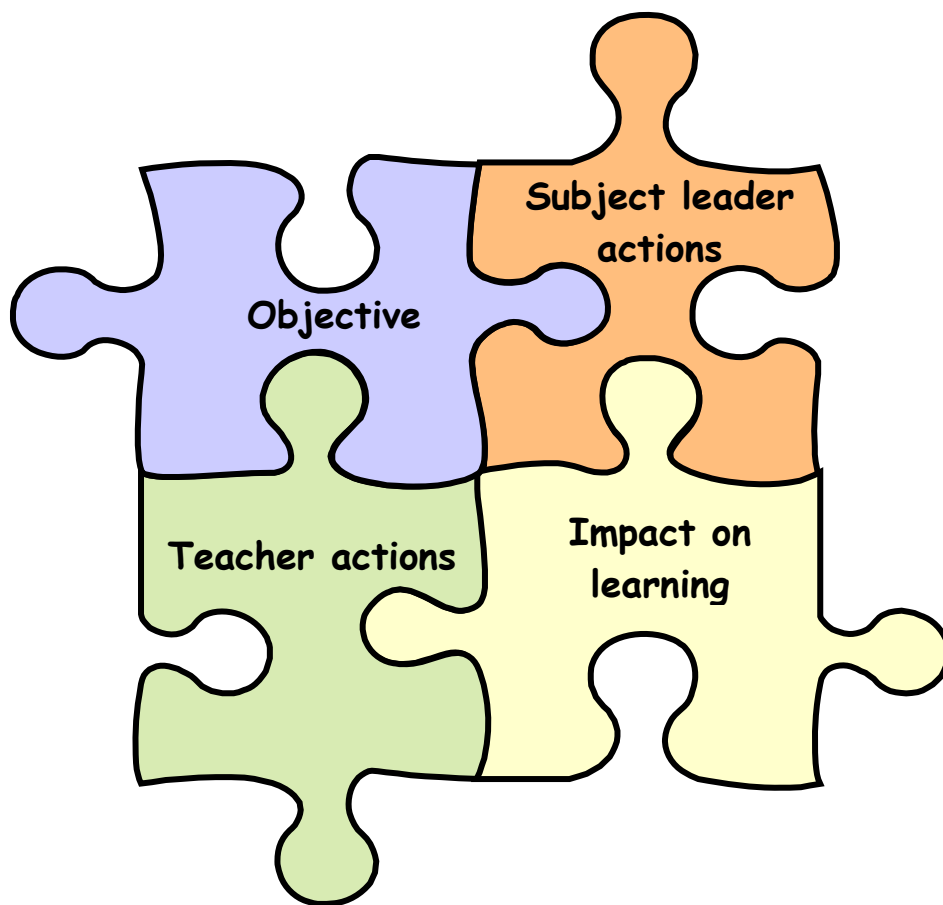
	Any English teachers are in need of further support to make improvements in the priority areas of the plan.
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Case study

Below is an example, developed with the help of Bristol LA, of how schools attempted to address variation in achievement between English and mathematics. The timeline identifies the main priorities and the action plan illustrates how those priorities were converted into actions.

Time line for Year 11

Increasing A* to C grades in English and mathematics time line for the last few terms of Year 11



Summary of main actions

Autumn term

- Identify** target pupils for grade C.
- Share** expectations with target pupils and their parents.
- Plan** a support programme matched to pupils' needs.
- Check **coursework** is on track for expected grade.
- Ensure **study skills** are developed.
- Prepare **mock exam** that accurately reflects work covered and the final exam.
- Analyse** mock results to plan the spring term programme.

Spring and summer terms

- Check all **coursework** is of appropriate level.
- Provide detailed **feedback** to pupils and their parents.
- Maintain an effective **revision/study programme**; direct monitoring of progress.
- Integrate **active learning** and booster materials into the programme to maintain attendance and engagement.
- Provide academic **mentoring** for pupils.
- Evaluate** the effectiveness of the programme, including pupils' opinions.

Action Plan for autumn, spring and summer terms

Autumn term Objectives:	SL will : <i>Outline of activities</i>	Teachers will: <i>Outline of activities</i>	Outcome measures Checking the actions have an impact on learning, e.g. pupil voice, lesson observations, dept. records
Identify those pupils who have made too little progress and from them select a target group.	Have identified pupils based on departmental data, Year 9 end of key stage assessment data and tracking in Year 10. Have informed parents and have in place procedures for monitoring the progress of these pupils to achieve their target.	Know the target pupils in their groups. Update SL regularly with the progress of these pupils.	Target pupils are known by SLT, head of Year 11, Year 11 progress tutors, SL, teachers. Parents of target student are kept informed.
Match additional support programmes and staff to needs of target groups. (Oct/Nov)	Provide support plans for target group including course work expectations, exam technique and active revision strategies. ** Provide in-house training for new and inexperienced teachers regarding intervention strategies in Year 11. (LA consultants have a wealth of resources and techniques available for departmental training.)	Know how to implement support plans and check the progress of the pupils. Make student data the focus of a one-to-one so that pupils are clear where they are, where they should be and how they are going to get there. Map out coursework targets/time lines/deadlines with individuals.	Teachers of Year 11 are familiar with the support plan and are confident to implement strategies for effective intervention. Pupils and parents know coursework targets and expectations for final grade. Pupils know what they have to do to improve. Parents informed of coursework deadlines.
Provide appropriate support for coursework and ensure pupils are on track to meet their coursework grade. (Oct/Nov)	Provide timetable for effective moderation of coursework and feedback to individual teachers and pupils. Ensure that skills needed for the examination are being developed through coursework.	Have some internal moderation opportunities. Provide additional sessions for pupils who have a shortfall in number and/or quality of coursework.	Teachers are consistent with marking and feedback to pupils. All targeted pupils' coursework is on track to reach at least the grade equivalent of their target. Ideally target C pupils should have B standard coursework mark.

Prepare and implement mock examination effectively. (Nov/Dec)	Check that the mock examination tests covered work to date and reflect the nature of the final exam. Attach question analysis cover sheet to mock papers to enable diagnostic feedback.	Guide pupils in use of cover sheet as a self-assessment tool based around the assessment objectives.	All pupils attend mock examinations. Pupils know the purpose of the mock examinations and feel they have been sufficiently prepared.
Use the outcomes of the mock examinations as a diagnostic tool. (Dec)	Lead analysis of mock papers. Year 11 use traffic light system to identify strengths and weaknesses against each topic of study. Identify curricular targets for pupil groups. SL /key teachers draw up a revision programme for all pupils, which can be differentiated to address individual curricular targets for pivotal pupils.	Guide pupils to identify their weakest (RED/AMBER) areas and topics from their exam papers. Cover those in lessons and provide workshops that pupils can sign up for that match the diagnostic review.	Target pupils have signed up for the revision sessions that match their identified strengths and weaknesses, or know that they will be addressed in class. All pupils can identify strengths and weaknesses from the mock and what they are going to do about it. Pupil voice/learning conversations take place throughout support period and focus of support adjusted accordingly.

Spring and summer term Objectives:	SL will: <i>Outline of activities</i>	Teachers will: <i>Outline of activities</i>	Outcome measures Checking the actions have an impact on learning, e.g. pupil voice, lesson observations, dept records
Ensure that Coursework is completed or on track to achieve the appropriate level for target group. (Feb/March)	Provide detailed tracking to identify early interventions for pupils who fall short of their predicted coursework grades.	Mark coursework; marks entered on to a database. Moderate overall achievement, feedback to pupils areas for improvement and provide an opportunity for this to occur with individuals.	Coursework is completed to appropriate standard for each student. Pupils aware of what they have achieved and what is required to progress further.
Improve the confidence of parents to support their child in Year 11 – Parents' Information Evening 2. (Feb).	Liaise with SLT about the main aspects of the parents' evening. Disseminate information to teachers. Provide parents with information: particularly resources, intranet, websites, revision guides and deadlines.	Reinforce information provided at parents' evening to pupils. Use the parents' evening as a basis for raising pupils' expectations.	Parents understand ethos of targeting selected pupils and are informed well enough to support their child.

<p>Start revision programme in February with intensive programme starting in May.</p>	<p>Plan revision programme targeted on student weaknesses as agreed with department, based on mock analysis and student feedback.</p> <p>Ensure that pupils are taught to decode question wording.</p> <p>Monitor impact of revision intervention.</p>	<p>Implement programme and provide the necessary individual support where required.</p> <p>Include pupil partnerships, skill-based starters, plenaries and question-based coaching.</p>	<p>Revision programme understood by parents and pupils.</p> <p>Student attendance at sessions is good.</p> <p>Revision sessions are active and pupils' interest is maintained.</p> <p>Pupils have GCSE partners.</p>
<p>Monitor student progress and attendance.</p>	<p>Monitor progress of pupils through observation of lessons and work scrutiny.</p> <p>Liaise with tutors to monitor attendance and behaviour for learning.</p>	<p>Provide regular feedback to SL at departmental meetings.</p> <p>Inform tutors about individual student progress.</p>	<p>Teachers of the target group are implementing revision programme.</p> <p>Tutors and parents are well informed.</p>
<p>Engage pupils through active revision strategies during the period leading up to the examination.</p> <p>Specific activities related to learning styles may be put in place. (March to May).</p> <p>Build pupils' confidence in the pre-examination period.</p>	<p>Ensure revision programmes are active and engaging and integrated into normal teaching programme.</p> <p>Provide support to teachers to broaden repertoire where required.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to share good practice across the department.</p> <p>Use a range of materials including booster to support the development of learning strategies.</p>	<p>Rearrange groups if required to focus on teachers' strengths, for example, possible 'circus' of writing revision sessions or an algebra week.</p> <p>Question coaching. Encourage use of self- and pair-assessed exam question marking.</p> <p>Use a range of revision methods during lessons, including booster materials in conjunction with sample questions.</p>	<p>Pupils remain engaged in the time leading up to the exams.</p> <p>Pupils are well supported by subject teacher and tutors.</p> <p>Pupils are clear about the style of GCSE question and the responses required.</p> <p>Pupils seen to be using a range of active revision/learning strategies in their examination preparation.</p>

Resources

- Assessment for Learning
www.qca.org.uk/afl
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/five/afl/
- *Improving the planning and teaching of English at KS4*, Consultants' CD-ROM 2007
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-03870-2006&>
- Departmental self-evaluation grid for KS4 English (In *Improving the planning and teaching of English at KS4*, DCSF ref 03870-2006DOC-EN-01)
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-03870-2006&>
- Digest of GCSE Examiners' reports which identifies priority areas for attention. (Contained within *Improving the planning and teaching of English at KS4*, DCSF ref 03870-2006DOC-EN-01)
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-03870-2006&>