

Core Plus English

User guide for subject leaders

This user guide is for use by subject leaders to help decide which parts of Core Plus will be most useful.

A separate **Core Plus overview** sets out the wider picture and, in particular, explains how Core Plus links with other programmes in the National Challenge.

How the materials are presented

Support for English departments is a part of Core Plus provision. For each core subject the elements follow the same structure, offering quality standards, a self-assessment tool and exemplification.

Each element used should, however, be adapted to meet the needs of individual departments.

Elements

English Core Plus consists of six elements.

Element 1a Leading improvement and raising standards in the English department offers guidance about how to use the National Challenge as a fresh opportunity to break through potential obstacles to improvement. It closely links the actions of senior leaders, through the Raising Attainment Plan (RAP), to the priorities required to help subject leaders and English teachers improve the rates of progress and levels of engagement of pupils and to sustain that improvement.

Element 1b Leading improvement and raising standards in the English department: Pivotal pupils in Years 10 and 11 will require immediate action. This element addresses the immediate needs of Year 10 and Year 11 pupils who may otherwise be at risk of not getting five grade A* to C passes, including English and mathematics. Initially, the focus is on pupils who are close but not secure at the grade C borderline. The tactical process and practice of identifying and supporting 'pivotal pupils' through Core Plus can and should be extended over time to apply to all Year 10 and Year 11 pupils.

Element 2a Planning for progression in English: Using the Framework for English and reviewing the planning cycle focuses on improving the quality of long-, medium- and short-term planning for English to increase the pace, challenge and engagement of pupils. It outlines:

- planning sessions to help the department use the Framework for English to develop more coherent strands of progression
- processes for paired work and joint planning by teachers
- a review of progress and the planning of next steps to ensure that the department continues to improve rates of progress for all pupils.

Element 2b Planning for progression in English: Using the Framework for English to address GCSE assessment objectives effectively provides materials to improve the quality of planning for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils. It explores how to maximise coursework outcomes and make good use of the remaining time available in the lead up to examinations. The element encompasses:

- use of the Framework for Key Stage 4 English to promote progression
- identification of patterns of progress across group(s) of targeted pupils
- how to plan, track and monitor progress against GCSE assessment objectives
- effective use of support teachers.

Element 3a Improving subject pedagogy and the climate for learning outlines:

- a process for improving the teaching of pupils' reading skills
- a process for improving the teaching of pupils' writing skills
- ways to develop the climate for learning to help pupils become more functional, independent and overcome barriers to learning.

Element 3b Improving subject pedagogy and the climate for learning for Years 10 and 11 offers materials that can support any department in reviewing and developing the quality of teaching and learning in GCSE English. It incorporates a six-strand improvement programme and supporting material, which includes:

- guidance on addressing GCSE assessment objectives effectively
- advice on keeping a productive balance between coursework and the development of examination skills
- ways of improving the teaching of critical reading
- ways of improving the teaching of writing skills, including punctuation
- ways to develop the climate for learning and to help pupils become more effective independent learners.

Element 4a Tracking pupils' progress using Assessing Pupils' Progress and the underpinning principles of Assessment for Learning will help a department to develop its assessment of pupils' progress in a way that is rigorous, periodic and linked with national standards. It outlines:

- planning sessions to help the department to use the *Assessing Pupils' Progress* (APP) handbook and its assessment processes
- opportunities for members of the department to work in pairs for collaborative planning, peer support and joint standardisation
- a review of progress and planning of next steps.

Element 4b Improving pupils' attainment at GCSE through assessing and tracking progress focuses on effective department practice to enable pupils to build their skills and understanding rather than simply completing GCSE specification units. The element explores how pupils make better progress when each teacher's approach to planning and teaching the GCSE course is informed by a clear image of progression and when each pupil's learning is tracked and assessed systematically throughout the course, with timely use of the information generated to improve attainment.

The process of tracking pupils' progress at GCSE outlined in this element is based on, and similar to, Key Stage 3 APP.

Element 5a Intervention and personalisation involves a departmental contribution to whole-school systems and is essential to pupils' progress. All schools and all English departments will be taking action to improve intervention and will be expected to report on the impact of intervention actions as part of the six-weekly evaluation of the RAP. Element 5 will help English departments address curricular gaps and individual barriers to learning.

Element 5b: Implementing Study Plus in Key Stage 4 outlines the main features of Study Plus and the planning and development needed to introduce it. The Study Plus approach is designed for:

- pupils who end Key Stage 3 on level 4 or with a low level 5 in mathematics and/or English
- pupils who, when in Year 9, are predicted by teachers to attain D or E grades at GCSE but have the potential to do better (as indicated, for example, by predictive data such as Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data based on prior attainment).

Element 6 Tackling variation in pupils' performance in English and mathematics provides opportunities for the two departments to work together, particularly where there has been a history of subjects operating in isolation. This element addresses the need to reduce in-school subject variation through robust tracking of pupils' progress, consistent development of transferable skills, targeted support and mentoring in one or both subjects, coupled with effective communication between colleagues and with pupils and their parents.

Selecting elements

Choosing and aligning the English elements is not a one-off decision; it should be reconsidered as evidence of impact and potential obstacles to progress are identified as part of the six-weekly evaluation process built into the RAP.

Establishing the priorities from the elements on offer should be informed by existing departmental self-evaluation evidence. In addition, the senior line manager, the subject leader and the local authority (LA) consultant will hold collective intelligence about the

relative strengths and weaknesses of the team in the department, the current systems and routines and the real or perceived barriers to improvement. If, however, the development needs of the department are not sufficiently clear from existing self-evaluation you can use the self-assessment tools to guide both the initial selection of elements and the focus of work within a selected element.

In starting this work we recommend that most departments will find it useful to begin with aspects of Core Plus Elements 1a, 1b and 5.

You should then select from the other Core Plus elements in response to departmental priorities.

Overall, it is better to start some elements of improvement and maintain an ongoing review of the focus than to spend several days or weeks finding out what should be done. Often a group of teachers working together to improve teaching will gradually realise the nature of further improvements that are needed.

So the message is – get started on some collaborative work in the department. Make sure this impacts on target pupils as quickly as possible. Maintain a keen eye on the effect of the work and be prepared to refocus as barriers to improvement become apparent and productive developments begin to emerge.

Using the self-assessment tools

Self-assessment tools are available in each element and provide a summary of the relevant quality standards. You can also access the self-assessment tools for all the elements in a single document.

The tools can be used in two ways:

- 1 They can be used in their entirety to decide which Core Plus English elements should be used and which quality standards addressed.
- 2 Alternatively, the self-assessment tool for a particular element can be used to focus work and provide a baseline for development in that area.

Whichever approach is used, completing the self-assessment should be a rapid process. To ensure this, we suggest you familiarise yourself with the standards, ‘traffic light’ the current situation, relate development needs to priorities described in the school’s RAP and use this as a basis for planning action.

Where possible, try to use a wide range of perspectives in the self-assessment process to establish a rounded view, including senior staff, teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) holders and other members of the department, asking different groups to agree their judgements in groups. In bringing together responses, focus both on agreed areas for development and areas where there are significant differences in perception.