A whole school approach

Over the last few years schools have implemented and further developed many of the strategies highlighted in this document. The mantra for last year was ‘work smarter not harder’ and for this year we have indicated that the ‘song remains much the same’. Earlier this term we asked your core subject leaders to evaluate the high impact strategies they made use of last year to indicate what worked well, what could be tweaked and what extra ideas they would like to implement. The outcomes of this enquiry have been sent to you with this guidance. The next step would be to continue in-school evaluation to forge a coherent and well understood whole school KS4 strategy to raise the bar and narrow the gaps.

Learning from 2015; the post mortem
Developing confident, independent learners

Our evaluation of the 2015 series of examinations raised questions about highly intensive intervention programmes leading to a state of ‘learning helplessness’ in pupils and the extent to which we prepare pupils to be resilient, independently confident learners when away from school support. We need to consider if:

- Pupils are confusing learning with being taught
- If our interventions include a strong element of support (overt teaching) to prepare pupils to be effective learners when they are away from school
- There is too much re-teaching of subject material during revision sessions, with the perverse outcome being that all present are deluded into believing that learning has been taken forward as a result.

We should ask learners and teachers to consider these questions and start a debate in school about how our interventions should include a significant input based on preparing pupils to be confident, independent learners when away from the classroom.

Wouldn’t it be preferable for teachers to prepare personalised work for pupils to tackle independently outside school and then use their contact time to trouble shoot the learning issues identified by the pupils rather than herd learners into teacher led weekend/Easter revision sessions?

Is a form of ‘prep’ approach a way forward?

Much of the success of public schooling is based around a feature of school life known as ‘prep’. This approach requires pupils to prepare for a lesson by involving themselves in some prior learning related to the content and context of this lesson. In public schools ‘prep’ is basically supervised homework that is carried out independently. In the lesson that requires the ‘prep’ teachers often use a tutorial approach; questioning the pupils on their knowledge and understanding gleaned from ‘prep’, there is no hiding place for those that have not completed this work.

School based interventions could learn from this approach and instead of being dominated by re-teaching syllabus content the teacher could set up some personalised learning at home, based around good diagnostics, that would be
revisited in the next session. At this session pupils would be able to gauge what they had learned and where their learning was still not secure. This is more of a ‘clinic’ approach based on sound diagnostics, personalisation of learning and swift focused feedback.

**Some good news**

In RCT secondary schools 2015 we achieved our best ever collective results, in nearly all schools the gap between the final summer prediction and actual outcomes showed less variation than in 2014. Since 2012 we have added over 10% to our L2+ figures and we now have no schools with less than 45% for this measure. However, we can still refine our assessment processes to be even more accurate in this crucial professional work. The gaps between what we believe we will achieve at the end of the teaching programmes, and what actually happens on results day, must narrow further.

Fewer pupils achieved one of English and mathematics but not the other. The missing core subject was most often mathematics. Too often, the pupils missing out had been targeted with support which did not make the difference needed, in other examples some of these pupils were not identified as needing to be part of an extra support programme. In both cases there is still a need to improve accuracy, precision and intervention effectiveness.

So the song remains much the same and the following elements must still be our focus, we need to be even more:

- **accurate** in our assessments, particularly for secure ‘C’ and C/D borderlines in the core;
- **confident and convinced** in what is recorded over time in our tracking systems;
- **precise** in the targeting of individuals and groups in need of extra support;
- **effective and efficient** in personalising catch up and revision opportunities to the particular needs of groups and individuals;
- **more proactive** in developing confident, independent learners; and
- **relentless** in chasing and driving all the pupils to higher attainment.

**Learning about the effectiveness of our strategy from the analysis of 2014 results, important questions:**

Are SLT in receipt of lists of those pupils who missed a L2 qualification in one of English or mathematics? Does SLT know if these pupils were targeted or left as ‘invisible’ learners? If individuals were targeted why did they fail? If they were not targeted what does this say about the accuracy of assessment and tracking? What do we do differently this year? What evidence do we have that assessment in the core is accurate?
Have core subject teams produced an analysis, by class, of their final predictions against the actual results? This will allow the SLT to see if issues related to accuracy are confined to one or two classrooms or are more general. Scrutiny of these analyses should lead to support being provided to improve accuracy in the future and increase confidence in the content of the tracking system.

Has the quality of revision and intervention from last academic year been evaluated? To what extent were the right pupils doing the right, personalised revision to address their particular learning deficits, as opposed to 'sheep dip' sessions where all pupils wade through endless past papers? Did diagnostic assessment, such as exam board itemised marks, feature prominently in personalising revision sessions and interventions? What are we doing to improve?

Was follow up appropriately relentless? Were registers kept to ensure targeted pupils attended sessions? Were parents contacted if their offspring missed sessions? If pupils still failed to attend, were parents asked to come in to explain why? Were arrangements made to support eFSM pupils, such as arranging transport? Were incentives used, such as biscuits and a drink for a ‘lesson six’?

Are we forward planning to avoid the mad Y11 rush? Should we be starting to identify ‘secure’ pupils around January for Y10 and starting intervention programmes from that point?

**A menu of high impact strategies for 2015-2016**

**Data Analysis and Pupil Tracking approaches include:**

- Ensuring that middle leaders have undertaken a rigorous analysis of their 2015 results, particularly the Hedger data, (available late November) to develop a clear view of the main priority areas for raising achievement for cohorts, classes or groups of pupils; particularly closing the gaps for those vulnerable to underachievement (FSM, LAC, ME). Good use should be made of FFT estimates and the all-Wales core data sets to ensure that everyone sets high expectations for current cohorts based on estimates from prior attainment (FFT D) and determine appropriate rates of progress.

- SLT ensure that all pupils, particularly in Y11, have challenging subject targets based around high expectations, for example near the top of the range indicated by FFT D pupil estimates. All teachers must know these individual targets and work towards their achievement. Departments should regularly discuss progress of individual pupils at their meetings and not be able to reduce any target without consultation with the SLT link.

- Ensure that assessment, particularly at the C/D borderline is accurate. A number of schools focus on accuracy within these crucial zones by sub-dividing C and D grades into C1, C2, C3, D1 etc. Without accurate assessment we cannot be confident in our tracking systems and will not be precise in targeting individuals and groups in need of extra support. Some may fall through the gaps.

- Reviewing procedures for interrogating ongoing performance (tracking data) so that the school is able to quickly identify patterns in the underperformance of subjects, by teachers or by individual pupils or defined groups of pupils. This needs to be combined with effective guidance and
highly effective interventions such as mentoring and study support programmes. We would recommend half-termly entry of accurate assessment data into tracking systems, close scrutiny of the data by heads of department and year heads followed by the identification and targeting of under-achieving individuals, groups and teachers/departments.

- Many schools have used 'colour coded' Venn diagrams to target pupils who are at risk from not achieving L2 including E/W and mathematics. All teachers of E, M and science should know the current grade estimate for all the core subjects. Most schools publish lists of pupils on the C/D borderline or at risk of leaving without a qualification along with details of the interventions being used with these learners.

- High achieving schools have scheduled meetings where heads of core meet to discuss pupils at risk and share successful approaches. They rigorously follow up, seeking out these underperforming pupils to check if they are being effectively supported by the improved interventions.

- Some schools expect teachers to produce a raising attainment plan (RAP) for classes where progress is not up to expectations; these plans are overseen by the head of department and progress reported regularly to the linked member of SLT.

- Many schools track pupil progress in terms of trajectories, a path of progress from a clear KS2 starting point to final GCSE success. This trajectory involves following the progress of all pupils at the expected rate of 2 levels of progress in KS3 followed by at least a further level of progress at KS4. An expected ‘milestone’ is set for progress at the end of each year and action is taken with those pupils whose progress is behind the expected trajectory for 2 levels of progress by the end of KS3.

- Some schools are able to provide parents with the outcomes of each 6 week assessment cycle and report much better attendance at parent’s evenings as a result of this work. SIMS Learning Gateway, SIMS App)There are significant benefits from regular testing and quick feedback to pupils within the assessment regime.

- The recently published Sutton Trust research indicated that involving pupils with the outcomes of assessment, providing regular feedback about progress and offering practical guidance about ways of improving work provides a very high impact on learning, particularly for vulnerable learners. This should be associated with effective AfL practice in terms of providing rapid feedback and clarifying ‘next steps’ in learning, preferably using paired/peer review techniques.

  (Sutton Trust; Toolkit of Strategies to Improve Learning)

**Mentoring and Learning Support tactics include:**

- Reviewing the range of support from SLT, TA, subject staff and other mentors for underachieving students. To be most effective this support needs to be effectively targeted, personalised and linked to advice from key departments about the current academic needs of the pupils. Many schools target this support at particular groups of learners such as underperforming FSM learners, C/D borderline, those at risk of failing to achieve the L2
threshold including E/W and mathematics or those at risk of leaving without qualifications. An effective form of mentoring is described as ‘assertive mentoring’ and many schools have benefited from this approach which involves the setting of clear targets, for example for revision tasks, after each session and relentless follow up for missed deadlines. A few schools have started mentoring well before Y11 and some have started the work in Y7.

- Effective schools regularly evaluate the quality of their learning interventions, using pupil and parental views, and react accordingly such as giving more pupils to the most effective mentors and relieving the weakest of these duties.

- Provide motivational sessions for those with low confidence, many eFSM pupils underachieve due to low self esteem. eFSM pupils need special attention if they are off track. Make sure they have the resources to attend any and all opportunities the school provides to support success in exams. Make sure they are more confident and make sure they are there. FSM learners need more time in school to mitigate their vulnerability, are they getting the extra time and attention?

**Departmental and Curriculum arrangements:**

- Anticipate the curriculum support needs as an integral part of timetable development for 2015-2016. For example, allocate a maths or English teacher to be available when PSE is being taught to Y10 or Y11 or place an extra member of staff with a half year/year group being taught maths or English. This individual can work with pupils who need ‘catch up’ or are on the C-D borderline prior to examinations.

- Ensure pupils have the opportunity to ‘walk through’ an exam situation, going through the whole procedure, with their subject staff leading them through an exam with the use of a ‘visualiser’.

- If English and mathematics are your priorities then make sure they are by throwing the kitchen sink at performance in these subjects. Never forget that English, mathematics and science will provide the L2+ measure. Go for a strong core provision in terms of deploying available resources.

- Raising expectations at KS3 in order to increase the proportion achieving level 6 and above. Preach the importance of conversion rates from KS3 to GCSE success at every opportunity. Conversion rates are particularly important in mathematics where only around a quarter of those achieving level 5 go on to a C grade or better at KS4. All pupils achieving a level 6 in English should achieve the L2+ threshold.

- All schools should have challenging targets for L6+ in the core subjects at KS3 and for increasing the proportion of pupils making two levels of progress.

- Consider reducing the options available in Y10. Do pupils need to follow 12 or more GCSE courses if they would be better off with more time to achieve good grades in the core subjects and a few others?
• Collapse the timetable for Y11 to arrange for English, maths and science learning days near to modular and mock exams.

• Have as many mock exams as you need, starting in December. Ensure enough time is given for a whole exam to be attempted. If results are poor then give the same exam again in the spring term following the remedial teaching. Hold a mock ‘exam certificate’ assembly to point out to pupils what it feels like to be successful or unsuccessful.

• SLT ensure that the teaching groups, particularly in core subjects, reflect the ability of the pupils and classes headed for a particular tier of exam or level(s) are homogenously grouped. Getting the groupings right is a key to success. Poor behaviour is not a reason for being in a lower attaining group. Re-group if necessary.

• Can the curriculum be tweaked to arrange for one lesson of mathematics each day in KS3? This is how it works in KS2. Some schools have changed their day to include six 50 minute periods, creating more time and timetabling a lesson of mathematics each day for KS3.

• In many schools attendance in Y11 is lower than in other years, sometimes significantly so. The obvious approach is to improve these attendance figures. However, as attendance can take time to pick up early entry could be considered, so that pupils, who may not be around in Y11, can achieve a qualification by the end of Y10.

• Making ‘late in the day’ short-term adjustments to the curriculum provided to individual students, e.g. students concentrating on mathematics and English and successful subjects and dropping others. Some schools regularly rewrite their timetable for Y11 to make these adjustments. A focus on English and mathematics is an appropriate choice whilst dropping non core subjects where there is no chance of success. Short courses turned into full courses can boost average point scores (RE full course for all more able pupils, statistics GCSE for those who have already achieved a C grade in maths?).

• Where there is the resource, make arrangements for smaller classes in Y11 for English and mathematics if sufficient high quality of teaching is available; split larger groups according to their learning needs.

• Provide motivational sessions for those with low confidence, many eFSM pupils underachieve due to low self esteem. eFSM pupils need special attention if they are off track. Ensure they have all the necessary support, ensuring they have the resources to attend any and all opportunities the school provides to support success in exams. Make sure they become more confident and make sure they are there.

• Consider having the maths or English team as the Y11 tutor team. These core teams can support better outcomes in tutor time, working closely with their groups. Do the same in Y7 to support literacy and numeracy?

• Use the most effective subject areas to improve examination outcomes for more pupils, use the timetable to ‘grow’ these subjects and to reduce the
influence of very ineffective subjects. Stop teaching subjects that do not provide pupils with acceptable outcomes.

- Does revision cover how to revise independently, mastering exam technique, where the marks come from; activities such as; which of these three answers is the best and why? How would you improve the weakest to be as good as the best? Groups working on laminated A3 past questions to get great group answers. How does the school encourage parents to support revision at home?

- Consider making the best use of available time; use an after school period 6, lunchtime, for providing support arrangements for revision guidance, the completion of controlled assessments. (More able pupils benefit from early morning revision sessions). Many schools have established a regime whereby the non-attendance at these support opportunities has a zero tolerance. We should also ensure that eFSM pupils are able to attend. You can use PDG money to provide transport for these events. We are not convinced that there are significant benefits arising from weekend, and holiday time residential, it is better to set pupils focused personalised work for these times and check how they got on by providing learning support during the next scheduled contact time.

- Producing well prepared departmental revision packages and reviewing approaches to active revision and study support. This needs rigorous SLT oversight for effective and efficient delivery. Effective schools have developed a coherent whole-school timetable of revision/study support opportunities and SLT quality assures what goes on.

- Many schools make very good use of ICT based revision resources (effective use probably needs guidance for pupils and parents) and classroom/corridor revision posters.

- Schools should not grant study leave prior to the start of the main exam period, during this time pupils should be provided with an intensive school based revision programme.

- Many schools provide a revision session on key aspects of the subject being examined either by collapsing the timetable for the day before or operating immediately prior to a morning/afternoon examination.

- For English and mathematics, ensure target groups are taught by the most effective teachers, match teachers to groups. In mathematics, avoid split classes and more than one GCSE lesson per day/many lessons in one week or at the end of Friday.

- The SLT must believe and ultimately ensure that all learners have the right to 5/6 good lessons a day.

**Some Further Secondary School High Impact Strategies**

- Set up a CSI group of the core subject leaders led by a member of the SLT. This group regularly considers progress data across the core and shares tips, tactics and intelligence. Middle leaders have great potential to become a powerful group to support school improvement.
• Use tried and tested literacy intervention strategies for improving reading ages and curriculum access. Make good use of the analysis of reading scores/ages and implement intervention strategies to target those in need of support with basic literacy.

• Early entry has its merits, yet each school needs to consider this approach as part of a wider strategy to raise outcomes.

• Exam boards now provide individual and group item level analysis on exam paper performance. This provides very useful feedback for departments to indicate areas of the syllabus that were not well understood (taught?). This exam feedback should also be used to personalise revision packages for groups and individuals.

• Involve everyone in target setting; use achievement data for supporting and challenging departments, teachers and individual children. Let all learners know that they are capable of examination outcomes within a range of grades (use FFT D estimate ranges), determined by their engagement with their teachers and their own learning efforts, the ‘compact’. Avoid the ‘self-fulfilling prophesy’ by indicating to learners that they are going to get a particular grade. Does everyone use this type of target setting approach consistently? Have conversations about targets been ‘quality assured’ by SLT?

• Develop regular, focused learning walks for senior leaders and middle leaders, ‘look for what is good, share and build on what is good’. Also to find those aspects where quality needs to improve.

• Pair up the more cynical with positive individuals for peer observation. Celebrate together what is going well.

• Lead a staff development drive (PLC) on a focussed and sustainable topic that will result in higher achievement; particularly related to the ‘outstanding lesson’.

• To improve parental links, set up an IT skills club where pupils teach mum to text, to shop on line.

• Be proactive in the community with -
  Partner schools
  Parents clubs
  Volunteer groups
  Faith communities

• Build relationships, have structured conversations with pupils/parents to recognise and celebrate the achievements of individual children and/or have a review day to engage learners and their parents with aspirations of high achievement. Make sure all at school are giving consistent messages about high expectations.

• Build relationships at every level, model positive relationships, talk to the pupils about good behaviour, find pupils and staff doing things well and tell them.
• Don’t forget to continue to build relationships with staff; a thank you or a personal well done costs nothing, praise ‘post its’ are worth considering for efforts beyond the basic call of duty. Organise a summer term ‘Olympics’ with staff competitions culminating in a fancy dress ball with the staff orchestra and high profile guest(s) to say thank you to the staff for all their hard work.

• Work collegiately to agree what excellence in learning and teaching looks like; the outstanding lesson. Share and spread the excellent practice; adequate is simply not good enough.

• Make best use of colleagues who have taken part in the outstanding teacher programme (OTP). Reduce their timetable and use them as learning and teaching coaches across the curriculum to support the implementation of the outstanding lesson.

• Use technology in one defined area in a successful way and build on this success across the school e.g. portable technology, video conferencing.

• Make sure that the role of those most associated with year groups are confident in analysing tracking data and are regularly expected to produce cohort progress reports to SLT. These individuals should also be tasked with evaluating the impact of current interventions and designing new, more effective interventions.

• Never forget to reward pupils who make better than expected progress with those things they value. Ask the pupils what these rewards might be. Some schools have found that the most valued rewards are dinner time queue busting cards, phone cards, High Street store vouchers or cinema tickets.