

# The Use of Alps in Brynteg School Sixth Form



*By Richard Martin, Assistant Headteacher*

At Brynteg, we have a sixth form of around 380 students. This figure has been consistently high for a number of years and we also attract approximately 15 students annually from other schools who join the sixth form in Year 12. We offer over 30 AS and A level courses with a small number of these being offered in collaboration with the local college. In addition, a small number of vocational courses are offered, most recently, BTEC Sport and Engineering. We had our first Alps reports for the summer examination series of 2014. Before we issued the first Alps report, training was given to the senior and middle leaders of the school as to the methods and processes involved and, more importantly, how the reports were to be interpreted and used as a basis for improvement.

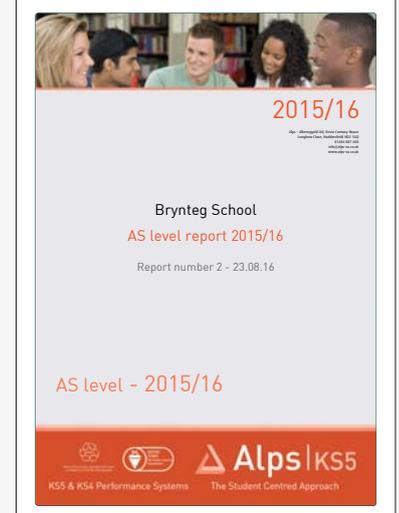
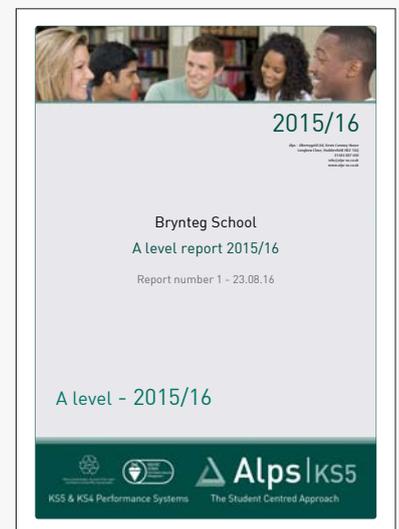
The Learning Pathways process in Year 11 provides both students and parents with all the information they need in order to make an informed choice about their AS options. There are talks by subject leaders on the Learning Pathways evening which outline the nature and expectations of the various courses. Knowing their GCSE target grade helps to inform the choices which are made.

At the start of Year 12 there is an induction period where every Year 12 pupil is interviewed by a member of the sixth form pastoral team or a member of the senior leadership team. The purpose of the interview is to review their option choices in the light of their results and decide whether or not the original choice is still appropriate for them. Support and advice are given where necessary to guide the student through this process.

Throughout Years 7 to 11, students have been used to working towards a target grade for the end of a year and the end of a key stage. Students are given their Alps target for AS in Year 12 and their A level target for Year 13 at the outset. This is a minimum expectation which may be revised upwards by subject areas as a personal subject specific target.

The school has a comprehensive tracking system with four data collection points, which we call 'Tracking Weeks', during the year. During these weeks, all staff enter a current working grade for all students in their subject area in SIMS. This is then RAG rated, (Red, Amber or Green), against their Alps target. We use a fine grading system i.e. C+, B- etc. to record attainment. Hence, there are 3 increments per grade e.g. C-, C, C+. A residual is calculated in SIMS of the target grade against working grade in each tracking week. For example, a working grade of C+ against a target grade of B would give a residual of -2. Positive residuals are green, residuals 0 to -3 are amber and residuals of -4 or less are red.

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After each tracking week there is a prescribed menu of interventions which must be followed both at a subject area level and at a pastoral level by the head of sixth form. When student progress is a cause for concern i.e. Red, then the class teacher records on SIMS the nature of concern. If this is a first referral then the class teacher has a conversation with the student to identify the areas of concern and then an action plan is agreed. In the case of further referrals, the head of department becomes involved in these conversations. If progress continues to be a cause for concern then conversations with parents will result. The head of sixth form has an overview across all subjects for each student. When there are 2 or more subject referrals for progress then a cause for concern letter is sent home. Further referrals are escalated in a similar way as in the subject areas. Having the Alps target grades has allowed us to take both horizontal and vertical approaches to tracking student progress and intervening where necessary.

Each student in the sixth form has a mentor meeting with their form tutor every fortnight. The main purpose of the meeting is to discuss progress and any issues or barriers to progress. The Alps targets provide the basis for these discussions, particularly following a tracking week when the discussions will be focused on the current position relative to the Alps targets. The tracking data and the Alps targets are used to generate interim reports to parents which list the current working grade for each subject along with the Alps target grade. Subject teachers will also use the Alps targets as a basis for discussions in parents' evenings and in the narrative of the annual report to parents.

One of the most impressive features of the Alps process is the speed with which the reports are generated after results' days, unlike other providers. This means that all staff have them from the first day back in school in September. As part of the school's self-evaluation process, all heads of department have an Autumn Review Meeting as early as possible in the Autumn Term with the headteacher and their line manager and Alps will feature in the post-16 discussions.

Throughout the year, after each tracking week, heads of department have a self-evaluation meeting with their line manager to discuss progress against targets. For post-16, based on the Alps targets, the head of department will be expected to provide information on how many students are working above, at or below target, including those who have been referred for progress and what measures have been put in place to support them. Similarly, the Head of Sixth Form has a line manager meeting to discuss the state of play of progress against Alps targets across the sixth form.

Since Alps is based on student progress and value added data it has 'levelled the playing field' across subject areas. Actual results always vary across subjects and there are those who say that the more able students choose these subjects and the less able choose those subjects and so their results will never be as good etc. With Alps, all departments are on an equal footing as it is the progress which is being measured, their own value-added contribution. We are an open school when it comes to performance data, so when the Alps reports are released, every department sees the data for every other department. This has led to some interesting conversations.

Alps has been incorporated very well into Brynteg's existing tracking system but has provided more data than previously available which has increased the capacity of staff to reflect on past performance and also provided a sound basis on which to challenge and to continue to bring about improvement.

In the three years that we have been working with Alps, the school has seen an improvement in outcomes at post-16. Retention rates are very high with nearly 80% of the cohort returning to study A levels at post-16. The performance of the 2016 cohort at Level 3 at 99% exceeded the previous year's level of 95%. Pupil destinations indicate that 80% of pupils were successful in gaining a place at their first choice university last year and over 90% were successful in gaining a place at their first or second choice.

We are very pleased that our Alps T score for the past three years has resulted in an Alps grade of 3. This indicates that over that period there has been excellent overall performance comparable to the top 25% of the benchmark. The balance of support and challenge which the system has provided has clearly played a considerable part in the improvement in outcomes at Brynteg. This has resulted in more pupils being able to follow their chosen future direction which is what it is all about.

**Contact us:** The Alps office is open Monday to Friday 9am - 5.00pm. Please feel free to contact us to discuss any aspect of Alps. t. 01484 887600 | email. [info@alps-va.co.uk](mailto:info@alps-va.co.uk)



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