



A sixth form journey with Alps at **St Mary's Menston Academy**

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Case study

St Mary's Menston Academy

Who we are

St Mary's Menston Catholic Voluntary Academy is an 11-18 comprehensive secondary school situated on the north west edge of Leeds between the Aire and Wharfe valleys. Our 1,200 students come from a wide catchment to the north of Leeds and Bradford, including Ilkley, Otley, Guiseley, Yeadon, Horsforth and Pudsey. Rated outstanding by Ofsted in 2014, the school has a strong reputation both for its pastoral care and for its academic success. It has a thriving sixth form of 250 students who follow a range of academic and technical study programmes, with an emphasis on traditional A levels.

Our sixth form journey with Alps

We first used Alps back in 2003 as part of the LSC's value added project in West Yorkshire. We were proud of being a high-achieving sixth form with strong retention and progression to university; however in those days it was difficult to measure anything other than raw achievement. That first Alps report looked very different from today's: it was all black and white with just one page – the subject value added overview – in the familiar red and blue. But it gave us an instant picture of how our subjects were performing, and it has been at the heart of our school improvement planning since.

Throughout the last 15 years, and the bewildering pace of change and post 16 qualification reform, Alps has tracked our performance. It has not all been plain sailing: a sustained period when our provider Quality Indicator Score was Alps 3 gave way to a number of years when blue subjects began to outnumber red ones. This led us to re-evaluate everything: our IAG and course choice guidance, our subject offer, teaching and learning strategies and intervention, all informed by Alps data. In the summer of 2018, our T score returned to Alps grade 3 with 56% of our entries in the red band.

How Alps makes a difference for us

We think Alps is so effective in driving up standards because everyone understands it and buys into it: governors use the subject overview to challenge (or to congratulate), faculty leaders are able to analyse the impact of boundary leapers and devise their intervention strategies accordingly, and classroom teachers can focus on the needs of each individual student. We set targets in week 1 of Year 12 using Alps, and use Alps to analyse our tracking data three times a year.

The Alps subject pages form the basis of our standards review process and improvement planning, both after trial exams, and when the results of the real thing come out. Because everyone understands the thermometer, it fosters healthy competition and professional pride; people see an Alps 2 or Alps 3 grade as a badge of honour.





Every pupil matters

As a Catholic school with a philosophy that treats every individual as equal and unique, we find Alps reflects our values. Long before Progress 8 made it such a priority at Key Stage 4, Alps enabled us to focus on the progress of each individual student in our sixth form. We trained our teachers to use the Alps calculations to quickly see what a significance every grade shift has. With Alps Connect Interactive, they no longer have to do it manually. When Alps Connect Interactive was announced, we signed up for the pilot programme because we could see the potential for sharing student-level data more swiftly and more widely. One feature of Connect Interactive has proved especially popular with colleagues: the 'what if?' functionality. As any of our teachers can access Connect Interactive, it is this feature that inspires more conversations about progress – and ultimately actions, to make it happen.

Instant data at Key Stage 4

Having found Alps such a useful school improvement tool at A level, we were keen to use it at Key Stage 4 too. Everything that makes it essential at A level also works at GCSE. The analysis of groups and pupils banded by ability has enabled us to shape our school priorities and inform our review of the curriculum, while maintaining the focus on each individual child. We are delighted to have had Quality Indicator of grade 3 for the last three years. The beauty of Alps is that the feedback is instant. We had our Alps GCSE analysis this year as our students were collecting their results on 22 August, which is so much more useful for planning than having to wait for the Progress 8 score.



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