Sustaining
high achievement
using alps

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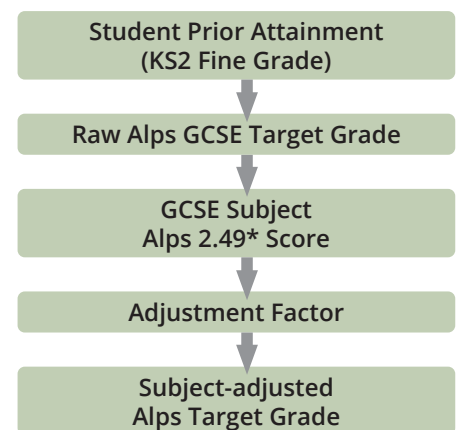**Alps** Helping students aim higher

Historical and School Context

In terms of 'Alps' as a measure of school performance, I am definitely a 'remainer'! I remain convinced of its value in securing school improvement, having used and witnessed its impact at both my previous school and back in 2014 when I introduced it at my current school for A level and subsequently at GCSE.

Rickmansworth is an 11-19 co-educational comprehensive converter academy with approximately 1,300 students. It is part of the South West Herts consortium which operates a partially selective system; the school admits 25% of the Year 7 cohort on academic ability and a further 10% on musical aptitude. The percentage of students eligible for free school-meals is well below the national average. A traditional academic curriculum operates at Key Stage 4, commensurate with the academic and socio-economic profile of the students.

This case study outlines strategies used to sustain high achievement.

Transferring the Alps principles from A Level to GCSE

Setting targets equating to the top 25% achievement amongst one's competitors is clearly a robust mechanism for securing improvement. We use a slightly adjusted version of this well-established model to set targets for all subjects & students. However, since GCSE performance is often the ultimate single benchmark to compare any type of secondary school, and following a disappointing 2016 school Progress 8 score, we decided to set a higher challenge for our GCSE targets. Core subjects had to set targets to Alps 2* (top 10%) and the rest had to be nearer Alps 2* than 3* (≤ 2.49*).

| Student Prior Attainment (KS2 Fine Grade) |
| Raw Alps GCSE Target Grade |
| GCSE Subject Alps 2.49* Score |
| Adjustment Factor |
| Subject-adjusted Alps Target Grade |

Subject Adjustment of Alps Target Grades

This depends on the subject's Alps thermometer score at Alps 2* (English/Maths) and 2.49* (all other subjects). If the Alps score on the subject thermometer at Alps 2* is 1.00, no adjustment is required. However, for Alps scores below 1.00, targets can be lowered towards but not below the 3* (top 25%) line, and for those higher than 1.00, targets can be raised. With our own internal fine-grades system, this gives greater precision on subsequent adjustments. We also allow subject leaders to use their own professional judgement to deviate from the mechanism for individual students since the model should not be a 'one size fits all' approach.

Example: GCSE Student (KS2 Fine Grade 5.17) studying English, Biology, Astronomy.
RAW Alps Target Grade: 6

KS2 Fine Grade	GCSE Subject	RAW Alps GCSE Target	Subject ALPS 2.00/2.49 Score	Adjustment Factor
5.17	English Lang.	6 ➡ 6.5	1.07	½ grade increase for most students
5.17	Biology	6 ➡ 7	1.17	1 grade increase for most students
5.17	Astronomy	6 ➡ 5.5	0.89	½ grade decrease for all students

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Tracking and Monitoring Performance

Our drive has been based on smart multi-dimensional and accessible data with succinct but impactful analysis. This is both a system and culture approach. The former has been a project for our data team and the latter delivered via training to develop skills and mind-sets as part of our CPD programme.

Tracking data provides information for the overall cohort, by teaching and learner groups. Analysis focuses on identifying the issues to be addressed, stating the actions to be taken and determining success criteria so that impact can be evaluated when performance is reviewed at the next tracking point. The emphasis is on dialogue and thought, with clarity of message, rather than excessive amounts of documented notes. Middle Leaders list up to four development points following each data release; the first two need to focus on raising 9-7 standards and on disadvantaged student progress as these are current whole-school priorities. Whilst our disadvantaged group only accounts for approximately 10% of our cohort, every child matters and it is an area we have struggled to fully address and therefore remains a priority for us.

A Quality Assurance scale which is linked to Alps and mirrors Ofsted 1-4 grades is then used to determine performance. Since the introduction of Alps at GCSE we are therefore able to use similar scales at both key stages; Alps 1-3 (QA1), 4-5 (QA2), 6 (QA3), 7-9 (QA4), with QA3/4 subject areas being provided with deeper support.

Quality Assurance systems are then used to monitor the impact of the strategies proposed as well as maintaining a 'health-check' on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Our CPD programme is used to share best practice and support middle leaders in developing their skills in data analysis, intervention strategies, and having potentially difficult conversations with staff where standards observed are below expectations. We redesigned the QA proforma, aiming to streamline the process, with a focus on taking action to resolve issues when they emerge, rather than collating copious amounts of monitoring data that simply show a recurring problem.

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Our developing systems have helped us establish a more cohesive link between data analysis, quality assurance, and CPD to impact on teaching and learning and cohort achievement outcomes.

ACHIEVEMNET	GCSE LEVEL			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
QI Score	0.98	**1.03**	**1.03**	**0.99**
QI Grade	4	**3**	**3**	**3**
P8 Score	-0.06	+0.34	+0.13	+0.38
P8 Disadv Score	-0.60	-0.03	-0.38	-0.28

However, we are not complacent and recognise we have further work to do with two sets of learner groups in particular; disadvantaged students and reducing the achievement gap between boys and girls (2019: +0.09/+0.75 respectively) and these will be whole-school priorities for us in 2019-20. But whilst the symptoms emerge in Year 11 where we often prioritise our interventions, perhaps the underlying roots of the issue may well be at KS3.

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