

## Case study Beal High School



# Using Alps as a high impact assessment and reporting tool

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With the largest school sixth form in the country, **Beal High School** (part of the Beacon Multi Academy Trust) is a fully comprehensive, diverse and inclusive Academy serving our local community in East London. Offering an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum, we deliver over 60 programmes of study across key stage 4 and 5, encompassing three academic pathways across two sites. We have been using Alps as a high impact assessment and reporting tool since 2010 to maximise outcomes for young people through raised aspiration, accountability and equality of opportunity. Out of annual cohorts of 400 school leavers, over 25% annually secure places at elite, high tariff Russell Group universities (including Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College) with over 55% at 'Top Third' institutions, with others undertaking competitive degree apprenticeships and other prestigious employment and training routes. Alps plays an essential part in this success as it helps schools to challenge fixed mindsets to be ones of growth, resilience and perseverance; when progress is celebrated above raw attainment, it connects with our ethos as a school, where students are given the support to achieve well above national expectations whatever their starting points and with 100% progression secured for all.

## High Impact

The challenge for a large sixth form is to ensure that grading projections are accurate and fair, particularly when there are large cohorts of as large as eight or nine separate teaching sets across sites where variance can emerge. Post-16 published projected data becomes 'high stakes', linking to future aspiration and UCAS and degree apprenticeship applications as well as individual student self-esteem, so this process must be objective and based on collective professional judgment and robust quality assurance protocols. Students, parents and carers rightly demand accuracy and fairness and can at some schools seek to apply pressure to influence grading decisions. Alps use of national datasets greatly helps here as it gives schools the power to conduct robust learning conversations and intervention based upon prior performance and expected flightpath trajectories. It is a powerful performance tool and when used to its full potential offers very good value.



## Alps for Students and Parents

Students tell us they really like working with Alps as unlike other assessment tools they do not feel like there is a limit placed on their potential – they are always challenged to ‘meet or beat’ their Alps Minimum Expected Grade (MEG), rather than settle for anything less. These are published as part of the student reports three times a year and followed up with learning conversations by pastoral tutors and teams. Crucially, students tell us that they do not feel labelled by the stigma of prior attainment - instead they are challenged to achieve as high a grade as possible.

Parents and carers appreciate the training they receive as part of Induction and Partnership Evenings where they are taught how to calculate their child’s individual ‘MEGs’, and following periodic progress reports students on or above expected progress are recognised and celebrated in assemblies, awards and parent evenings. This helps with the transition from 9-1 at GCSE to A\*-E at A level and Distinction\*-Pass at Vocational. Expectations are therefore fair, realistic and transparent and students do not feel over-burdened by unfairly oppressive target-grade demands. Complacency can be avoided too, with the highest of expectations for those ‘high fliers’ at GCSE. The Alps colour coding (red-black-blue) is simple to understand (albeit counter-intuitive!) and those students under-performing can access additional support through pastoral ‘Information, Advice and Guidance’ reviews and academic intervention.



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## Alps for Subject and Pastoral Leaders

Alps is empowering for subject and pastoral leaders and their respective teams, who enjoy using the online platform ‘Alps Connect’ to track student performance across cohorts and undertaking quality assurance sense checks where required, checking grade curve distributions, expected progress across gender, FSM and ethnicity as well as across teaching sets. In the words of one colleague, ‘it does the hard work for us!’ in terms of identifying where the issues are, so staff can respond using their professional expertise. They can check average prior attainment of a subject cohort across several years to determine trends and a strong narrative for the year group, latest prediction trends over time, year on year analysis, internal v public outcomes and then challenge anomalous or outlying data. They also appreciate that the value added algorithms take into account subject-specific national outcomes, so progress is judged as relative to other schools delivering the same subject rather than in the manner of some other data packages, which can make crude value added comparisons across subjects. During grade review meetings teachers can use the ‘what if’ function to speculate how marginal grade increases can boost the overall cohort progress performance. This is motivational for staff, whose performance management includes KPIs linked to Alps data of student outcomes. Subject and Pastoral leads are then empowered to intervene with the ‘right’ students at the right time – whether that be via learning conversation, an IAG meeting or a personalised intervention programme.



## Alps for Students and Parents

In order to ensure equality of opportunity, consistency and transparency, our internal predicted grades are based on both the prior and current attainment of the student and take into account their Alps minimum expected grades as well as historic and in-year performance. They are also checked against school and national grade distribution curves to ensure departments are not being lenient or cautious in their grade projections. Teachers, subject and pastoral leads are thus held to account for the grades they submit by the leadership team at the school. Middle leaders receive annual Alps training so they can navigate the platform effectively and make full use of the progress data dashboards and ongoing professional dialogue helps to ensure that data is accurate and impactful. Alps also contributes to Trust-wide curriculum and assessment alignment, so critical to equality of opportunity and consistency.

## Alps for Senior Leaders

Alps gives senior leaders a powerful 'state of play' snapshot of current predictions, so they can robustly challenge underperformance in a forensic and granular manner. At leadership meetings throughout the year, senior leaders are able to scrutinise the data to address inconsistencies promptly. These are then raised and actioned in fortnightly seminar group meetings with middle leaders, adding to the sense of an ongoing professional dialogue of improvement. Trends over time are easy to identify and where cohorts within cohorts are underperforming, action plans are established speedily to narrow gaps. In this manner Alps empowers school leaders to act with confidence, agency and timeliness to ensure all students are given the right support to achieve.

“**The success of Alps lies in its simplicity of use, timeliness and the agency it gives professionals to drive school improvement, ensuring that all the young people in our school achieve exceptionally well academically.**”



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The potency of the platform is in the 'live' data. Senior leaders can be confident in establishing the narrative of a current cohort, as they will have access to contextual data which can influence overall outcomes. We have also customised our filters so we can track school-specific groups in line with our School Improvement Plan, such as the progress of those students on a bursary, at separate sites or when making comparison between the progress of 'internal' students and those new to our school post-16, which has been invaluable following two years of unvalidated TAGs. Once public examination outcomes are published in August, senior leaders can evaluate the accuracy of final predictions against actual outcomes to identify particular strengths and where under-performance needs to be addressed in emerging whole school, subject and pastoral department action plans.

### Alps for Governors and Trustees

Published Alps reports give Governors and Trustees a clear oversight of expected and actual performance across subjects, sets and teachers, as well as by gender, FSM and ethnicity. The colour coding, progress thermometers and table format mean data can be captured in one go, and trends over time can be factored in, with historic external and internal data directly comparable. They can also compare cohort contexts, which is often key in understanding the latest overall performance (average prior attainment of whole cohort, for example, or the proportion of students studying courses at mid or high prior performance). Forensically the Alps software enables them to pinpoint specific areas of under-performance so they can hold school leaders to account more effectively for the progress of all students.

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### Conclusion

For us, the success of Alps lies in its simplicity of use, timeliness and the agency it gives professionals to drive school improvement, ensuring that all the young people in our school achieve exceptionally well academically, secure 100% progression and make us proud!



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