Using Alps to drive school improvement at Key Stage 4 and 5

by Louise Umbers
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VIAT (Valley Invicta Academies Trust) consists of an exceptional cluster of primary and secondary schools at the heart of our local community, based in the Maidstone and Malling area of Kent. VIAT was legally established as a Multi Academy Trust on in March 2011. The VIAT Trust serves over 4000 children and young people aged 11-18. VIAT believes in the benefits of cross-phase education whereby all pupils, regardless of background, are taught a broad curriculum by specialist teachers across all ages; thereby enabling them to master the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their full educational and personal potential. Valley Park is a mixed secondary school with just over 1600 students on roll.

Use of Alps

We have used Alps at Valley Park for a number of years at Key Stage 5 level, for both target setting and data analysis. We have been able to ensure inspirational targets for students across their subjects and have recently expanded this to include Key Stage 4. This has enabled us to have a streamlined vision for students from the start of KS4 right through to the end of KS5 which, in turn, establishes continuity for staff and students.

The use of Alps by all staff, from Senior Team to Classroom Teachers, offers the ability to identify gaps in students' performance as well as subject teachers' performance. Making full use of the function to upload multiple data sets has enabled us to see trends across time whilst also comparing actual exam results from previous exam years to our students' current levels, in order to establish whether they are on track to achieve similar outcomes. We have found the thermometer visuals easy to understand and interpret – with red being the best outcomes and blue being not so. Accompanied by a ranking number from 1 to 9 (with 1 being the best and 9 the bottom) it gives us a clear indication of where the student or subject currently is in relation to others. The ability for teachers to move this thermometer scale to see what needs to happen for grades and outcomes to improve is an amazing feature as it provides the teacher with the information needed to enhance the bigger picture for their subject and student. In addition to this, the "What if" function is available for student grades. This lets a teacher change a single grade for a student, either improved or worsened for the subject, to enable them to see the impact this would have

Alps **Helping students aim higher**

on the overall picture for the class/subject. So, for example, if two students were to improve by one grade each, it shows what that looks like overall. The ability to do this without having to upload a new set of data with different grades on it and then reverting to original grades is a wonderful function, easing the admin burden for staff.

Alps provides us with the ability to view data for vulnerable groups as well as individual students or year groups. We can see how these groups compare to each other using all data sets uploaded. Departments can discuss outcomes easily with the thermometers and identify students who need some more help or who are excelling in the subject. Students are then encouraged to develop learning plans to achieve their target goal. With the data providing the questions, a basis for strategic and meaningful discussions can have a direct impact on whole school improvement.

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Areas within Alps

Alps has several interactive areas which each provide detailed reports and visuals for users to analyse. Strategic Analysis gives you the option to use the Alps template for a report or to build your own. This area is very helpful and gives detailed reports with beautiful formatting and easy to view snapshots of your data. The Subject Analysis area gives you the ability to compare subjects on a variety of levels all in one place. This can be exported to Excel to enable further "personalised" analysis or combined with other reports to create user driven analysis. Colour coding and scores from thermometers are contained within these reports and offer an easy understanding of where students and subjects are currently at.

In conclusion

Alps has been received at Valley Park positively by both senior team and teaching staff due to it being easy to use and understand, having clear visual graphs and thermometers, along with well-presented reports for Governors and alike to view. Alps is able to stand out from other analytical systems for school data in a way that embraces ease of use and interaction, whilst still giving you the full picture within your school. With its vibrant visuals, detailed reports and unique "What if" functionality, we believe it is the best platform out there for school improvement. I have personally used two other systems which, at the time, seemed to perform perfectly adequately for the school needs, but since using Alps I have concluded that they are in fact missing some key functionality which can only drive school improvement for the better.

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