

Skills for learning

Ashby School, Ashby-de-la-Zouche

Problem: What challenges does your school have that need to be addressed?

Pupils progressing to A-level studies at our school with relatively low prior attainment (GCSE APS 40-46) make significantly lower progress at A-level than their more able peers, and achieve poorer outcomes than similar pupils nationally. We hypothesise this disparity may be due to low prior attainment pupils disproportionately struggling to adapt to the rigours of more independent, self-motivated studies required for linear courses at A-level. By their very nature, this lower attaining group receive more teacher support and intervention at GCSE than their more able counterparts. Although this enables them to enter sixth form and embark on A-level studies, it does not equip them with the skills required to be successful.

Innovation: How will the innovation help improve the problem you have identified and benefit teachers and learners?

We will teach the lower ability pupils the non-subject specific 'skills for learning' required to be successful at A-level, including motivation, organisation, resilience, self-study and revision skills.

This will be delivered through a series of sessions:

- One-day inspirational launch conference (outside speaker plus sessions delivered by our lead teachers).
- Ten twilight sessions, delivered weekly by lead teachers.
- Fortnightly mentoring with a Year 13 mentor.

Existing evidence: What evidence is there that this innovation will improve outcomes?

Literature review

Much of the transition research literature available focuses on the transition from primary to secondary school and from sixth form to higher education institutions. Common themes include social difficulties (particularly when moving between different institutions), personal issues (including day to day organisation, travel and funding) and academic issues.

Numerous authors report that pupils find the transition from Year 11 to Year 12 more difficult than they anticipated (for example, Hope, 2007 and Nash *et al*, 2015). A number of school-based action research projects have investigated how academic issues contribute to the difficulties that Year 12 pupils experience. The authors frequently cite a lack of effective study skills, poor ability to self-evaluate and failure to become an independent learner as key obstacles to pupil progress at A-level. A typical example of these reports is the work of Robert Butroyd at Heckmondwike Grammar School (University of Huddersfield repository). Butroyd observed that high-attaining pupils clearly recognise the importance of developing a range of study skills in Year 12 and these pupils quickly develop proficiency in areas such as independent research, analysis and critical thinking. Meanwhile, low- and middle-attaining pupils appear to lack awareness of the importance of study skills and tend to attribute success to other factors such as motivation and interest in the subject.

The wealth of literature that identifies development of study skills with success at A-level frequently recommends that these skills are specifically taught as part of an induction, or ongoing, programme (an example is Hodgson and Spores, 2014). However, there is little published quantitative evidence that such programmes have a measurable impact on outcomes or what the scale of the impact may be. This lack of quantitative data from controlled studies makes it hard justify investment in such programmes. With this evaluation we hope to help rectify this situation.

Pilot study

This academic year we have carried out a pilot study. We selected 37 pupils who we believed would struggle with the rigours of academic A-level study. After an initial launch, pupils were allocated a mentor to meet regularly. They were then allocated workshops based on their

identified areas of weakness. The workshops included topics such as organisation / revision skills / positive growth mind set etc. The pilot study has proved inconclusive. Some pupils report benefitting from the process, however some pupils have still made poor progress. From our pilot study we have learned that this type of intervention can be effective when: sessions are high quality, mentoring is regular and pupil's attendance at the sessions is good. As a result, for this study we have planned to use our best teachers to plan and deliver the intervention, increase the frequency of mentoring, monitor attendance closely and act immediately if a pupil misses a session.

Research question or hypothesis: What effect will the intervention, implemented for how long, with which pupils, have on what outcomes?

Question 1

Can progress of Year 12 A-level pupils with a GCSE APS of 40-46 be significantly improved by providing intervention over a term focused on teaching the pupils skills for learning and providing mentoring to support the transition from GCSE to A-level?

Prediction 1: Pupils taught skills for learning over one term will make better than expected progress, based on APLS target grades.

Prediction 2: Pupils taught skills for learning over one term will make more progress than control group pupils with similar GCSE results.

Question 2

Does the intervention have most impact if delivered during the autumn or spring term of year 12?

Prediction: Delivering the intervention in the autumn term of year 12 will have a greater impact on pupil progress than to delivering the intervention in the spring term of year 12.

Method: Include sample, design, measures, intervention, process evaluation and analysis

Sample

All Year 12 pupils entering A-level studies at Ashby School with APS of less than 46 will form the sample. This is expected to be approximately 50 pupils. Ashby School 14–19 academy. The majority of pupils who study A-Levels at the school attended the school at Key Stage 4 and are therefore known to the staff.

Design and assignment to condition

Each pupil in the cohort will initially be paired with a pupil of similar ability and studying similar subjects. One of each pair will be randomly assigned to the intervention group, the other assigned to the waiting list control group. Some adjustment may then be necessary to ensure prior attainment, subject and gender spread for the intervention and control groups are sufficiently matched to allow valid and robust comparisons to be made.

Measures

Based on GCSE results, pupils are assigned a target grade by ALPS (national benchmarking organisation, details of which can be found at <https://alps-va.co.uk/paper/using-alps-to-set-targets-with-students/>). The intervention will take place for the intervention group during the autumn term. A school wide formal assessment takes place at the start of the spring term in all subjects. In this assessment teachers are asked to give the pupils a grade on the following basis: *“If the pupil continues to work to the same standard and manner as now and show the same commitment and effort for the rest of the course, this is the grade they are most likely to achieve.”*

Different subjects come to conclusions in different ways. Where possible most subjects use formal summative assessment through rigorous testing to come to conclusions about grades. Where this is less applicable, subjects use assessments of coursework, homework and portfolios to come to conclusions. Teachers making the assessments will not know which pupils are a part of this study, either in the intervention group or the waiting list control group, thereby helping to ensure objectivity. Pupils' attainment in this assessment will be compared to target grades to provide an ALPS score for the intervention group and waiting list control group.

The waiting list control group will then receive the intervention late during the spring term / start of the summer term. Another formal assessment takes place in all subjects during the summer term. Results from this assessment will be used to generate an ALPS score for each group. This will not only confirm if the intervention is effective but will reveal whether the timing of the intervention is a key factor.

Intervention

The intervention will consist of:

1. A one day inspirational launch conference with an outside speaker and workshops delivered by our lead teachers. This will consist of:
 - o an introduction from a lead member of staff;
 - o a motivational session on developing independence delivered by Dave Keeling from Independent Thinking;

- o a session on getting organised delivered by our Lead Practitioner;
 - o a session on brain training delivered by our Director of Teaching and Learning.
2. A series of 10 twilight sessions delivered weekly by lead teachers on different skills for learning. All pupils in the intervention cohort will attend each session in a group of approximately 25. The foci for the sessions are listed below:

Session 1	using study periods
Session 2	literacy – reading / exam paper focus
Session 3	staying positive / growth mind set
Session 4	literacy – speaking focus
Session 5	health and wellbeing / dealing with stress
Session 6	literacy – writing focus
Session 7	staying positive / growth mind set
Session 8	revision advice
Session 9	subject market place
Session 10	building a portfolio / CV / feedback

3. Fortnightly mentoring / coaching meetings with a Year 13 mentor. Mentors will be hand-picked and matched to pupils in the intervention group. Mentor training will be provided by our Director of Teaching and Learning who has extensive experience in mentoring and developing new mentors. The format of these meetings will be agreed in advance to minimise inconsistency.

The twilight sessions will be delivered by lead teachers. They have been given a long lead time to research the developments in that field and put together an effective session.

The intervention group will receive the intervention during the autumn term, 2017. The waiting list control group will receive the intervention in the spring/summer term, 2018.

Process evaluation

Twilight sessions will be observed by the Director of Teaching and Learning and Lead Practitioner.

A survey will be completed by all pupils immediately after each session to evaluate their perception of the effectiveness of the session. A second survey will then be completed by all pupils at the end of the intervention to evaluate the perceived lasting impact of each session.

Data analysis

We will compare our measure of pupil progress (ALPS score) for the intervention and waiting list

control groups based on the whole school formal assessment at the end of the initial intervention (Jan 2018). This will establish whether the intervention has had a measurable impact and the size of the effect. If the intervention and control groups are particularly well matched we will also be able to compare the attainment of the two groups.

We will then compare the performance of the intervention and waiting list control groups in their second formal assessment in the summer term (June 2018, after the waiting list control group have received the intervention) to the ALPS target grade calculated from their GCSE results. This will demonstrate whether the intervention has had a sustained impact for the control group and whether any gaps between the intervention and waiting list control groups can be closed by applying the intervention later. This will establish whether the timing of the intervention is a critical factor.

We will also compare results to the equivalent cohorts from two previous years for further confirmation of the size of any effect. We will use the same selection criteria retrospectively on the previous year groups to identify the cohort for comparison. We can then compare average progress at the equivalent assessment points. Although this will not provide such robust comparison as the control group, it will provide interesting secondary evidence of effectiveness of our approach.

Within the sample cohort we will be able to compare progress of different sub-groups of pupils eg. gender, pupil premium, science vs arts etc.

With our analysis we will:

- quantify the size of the effect of the intervention;
- establish if the timing of intervention is important;
- identify if the intervention is more efficacious for any sub-groups.

We will also analyse and report the results of the pupil surveys to establish which particular sessions pupils perceived were most effective in the short term and which had the most sustained perceived impact.

**Conclusion: What will happen if your innovation improves outcomes, or not?
What are the limitations of your evaluation?**

If successful, this research will be used to reach an evidence-based decision to invest in repeating or expanding this intervention to more pupils in subsequent years. If unsuccessful we will have ruled out this approach to helping our lower ability KS5 pupils to make progress. We

would then look at other strategies, for example trying this sort of intervention earlier in pupils' school careers.

Our findings will be disseminated via the Kyra Research School newsletter and website and by running a workshop at the Kyra RS conference, thus allowing other schools to make an evidence based value judgement on replicating a similar approach.

There are some limitations to the effectiveness of this study:

- This is a fairly small sample of pupils from one school.
- Comparisons to previous year groups may be confused by changes unrelated to the intervention.
- If pupils fail to attend the full intervention or drop out, it could influence the results. We will need to monitor attendance closely.

References

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