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Executive Director of Education

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By Elma Lawson

Executive Director of Education

Anthem Schools Trust



At Anthem, we strive for equity in education. To give students what they need to overcome individual barriers, improve their outcomes, and enjoy equality of access to better life chances.

In *Equity in Education: Levelling the playing field of learning*, Lee Elliot Major and Emily Briant write about teachers and leaders needing to adopt an equity mindset that involves the principles of equity not equality, capacity not deficit thinking, deep not shallow relationships and multiple not singular talents.

As school leaders, we are the architects of creating those equitable learning environments. Data integrity is fundamental to this. It must be accurate, consistent and trustworthy, or our education insights will not be meaningful and just.

"When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it." Lord Kelvin, 1883

As a trust we are finally at a place where we have quality data and are well placed to capitalise on our in-house analytics systems: Bromcom, PowerBi, Smartgrade, Pupil Progress, Progress Teaching. We have the numbers to support insightful analytics at every level so we can individualise our pedagogical approach and drive improvements for every student, in every lesson, all the time.

In this edition of *Versed*...

Simon Morley talks about how we can refine our curriculum through data-driven insights that Smartgrade is giving our primary leaders. Paul Crisp talks about the impact of The Deepings' granular approach to coaching, setting clearly trackable action steps that is having a significant impact on the development of teaching practice. Louise Cowley beautifully summarises Oxford Spires Academy's research-based, evidence-driven culture that is having a phenomenal impact on the outcomes of every student.

Leona Hopwood presents an excellent piece on how stronger modelling and guided practice during the WE DO part of the lesson were necessary to improve academic outcomes in Science A levels at Saint Mark's Academy. Mel Chandler at Abacus shares with us her golden thread of assessment from Reception to Year 6, tracking every child's progress and turning numbers into action so that no child gets left behind.

The reality on the ground – how these systems help children at Gladstone Park

Fatima came to London from Syria in 2024, joining the school at the end of Reception year. She is EAL, PP & FSM. Through screening, she was identified as needing urgent attention. Her grapheme gaps were identified on Little Wandle and specific strategies were developed. She made accelerated progress, improving from a score of 16 to 32 and passing the phonics screening check!

Adam, also EAL, is a quiet Year 6 child. His target in reading is greater depth, however, in the summer assessment he achieved a SS of 95, with a Smartgrade prediction of 104. FFT assessment showed his decoding age as 11y 3months, but his fluency was at 9y 3months. The school set an expectation of daily home reading and implemented reading fluency interventions three times a week. In his recent assessment Adam achieved a score of 99 and a Smartgrade prediction of 106.

"When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it."
Lord Kelvin, 1883

In Heads Connect, Jennie Khan from St Mark's Academy will talk about predictive analytics and the importance of accurate predictions to help us accurately identify those students who may be at risk of underperformance so our schools can offer precise tailored support to those individual students.

Data integrity is the foundation of equity in education. To truly maximise achievement for every student, we must treat data as a strategic asset and equity must be the lens through which every decision is made.

Tracking a golden thread of achievement from reception to Year 6

By Melissa Chandler

Head Teacher

Abacus Belsize Primary School



At Abacus, we use year group strategies from Reception to Year 6 that form part of termly Pupil Performance Review meetings with SLT and check-in meetings with key stage leaders. These meetings provide opportunities for teachers to discuss children who are working towards the expected standard, those who are 'stuck' in their learning and those who need to be targeted for greater depth.

The meetings also enable us to carefully track the achievements of vulnerable children, those on the SEN or Pupil Premium register, those with English as an additional language, those with safeguarding concerns, and those with poor attendance. Where possible, the SENDCo, key stage leader and Pupil Premium champion attend. This allows for deeper discussions, greater challenge and helps to inform interventions and wider school priorities.

This approach supports the Anthem Assessment Principles, building on formative and summative assessment within lessons and sequences of lessons to longer-term goals. The strategies and PPR meetings are purposeful, identifying individual needs and offering support from more experienced colleagues. They are valid, identifying class-wide and individual gaps in understanding and moderate data across classes to give a wider-school picture.

A golden thread of achievement

We track children's learning from Reception baselines, tracking a golden thread of achievement from Reception to Year 6. Reception targets are identified by the first half-term, with

The achievements of vulnerable children are carefully tracked with termly Pupil Performance Review meetings.





Reception targets are identified by the first half-term.

'The strategies and PPR meetings are purposeful, identifying individual needs and offering support from more experienced colleagues.'

additional adult-supported and independent activities planned into the provision to ensure there are no missed opportunities. We often find that fine motor skills are the barrier, so this has been the focus for independent learning and, in some cases, adult-supported fine motor activities for a few identified children.

We add children's names to the year group strategies for reading, writing and maths. This makes targets more personal and helps teachers and leaders to think about every student and what they need individually to reach their potential.

This year, we have shared our strategies with class teaching assistants who have taken them away and created their own suggested intervention timetables. Initially, this was to create capacity when developing a school-wide intervention timetable but has had the unexpected benefit of TAs taking greater responsibility for their interventions and therefore a greater understanding of the support needed in class through quality first teaching.

In addition to our year group strategies, and as writing is often our 'gap' for combined, writing books are moderated in a school-wide staff meeting where teachers line up children's books from those working at the highest level to those working towards or below the expected standard.

Teachers are encouraged to look at the spread across the school, identifying school-wide strengths and weaknesses. This allows staff to have a wider understanding of the development of writing across the school as well as targeted next steps for their class, moving into their next sequence of learning.

Turning numbers into actions

By tracking data carefully and consistently, we're able to spot patterns in learning, celebrate progress, and provide extra support where it's needed most. It helps us make sure every child is THRIVE-ing and getting the best possible start.

Most importantly, it turns numbers into actions - so that no one gets left behind.

By Simon Morley

Director of Education (Primary North)



Smartgrade in action: driving deeper impact across Anthem primary schools

What happens when powerful collaboration meets intelligent use of data?

Since September 2023, primary schools across Anthem have taken an aligned approach to raising standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Colleagues have collaborated in this endeavour, sharing excellent practice and supporting one another in a common goal: to help every student achieve their maximum potential and prepare them for the next phase of their education to improve their life chances.

Strength in numbers

Together, we have harnessed the power of being in a trust. Year 6 students across every primary school have undertaken assessments, using previous SATS tests, at strategically timed points of the academic year. Schools have been able to not only provide children with invaluable test experience but also to use the data this generates to plan for future lessons to meet need.

Leaders and teachers have strategically planned for quality first teaching to address cohort gaps in learning whilst also taking care to identify individual students who will benefit from targeted interventions, enabling them to make accelerated progress.

This strategy has resulted in year-on-year improvements in outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 across Anthem resulting in our schools achieving a combined outcome of 72% in 2025, a whopping 10% above the national average. This represents a significant improvement - a result of the commitment, hard work and talent of Anthem's school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants. However, while this is something to be celebrated, we are keen to go further this academic year...

Smart thinking

The launch of the Anthem Data Strategy and the work of Anthem's Head of Data & Insights around Power BI have enriched our access to, and use of, data. This has been enhanced further by the introduction of Smartgrade.

Smartgrade is a cloud-based assessment and analytics platform designed to help schools and trusts standardise internal testing, uncover learning gaps, and benchmark progress.

Following each aligned assessment, teachers can enter their marks and instantly access important topic and question-level analysis. Results are standardised nationally by Smartgrade to generate equivalent Key Stage 2 scaled scores, giving us rich performance insights in relation to dozens of MATs and thousands of students.

Smartgrade is a cloud-based assessment and analytics platform.

SMART GRADE

To get the most from it, all our primary schools are embedding Smartgrade as part of their ongoing assessment cycle. By carefully reviewing the analytics promptly, after each assessment, we will be able to explicitly build-in responsive teaching to maximise progress.

The introduction of Smartgrade, to compliment the raising standards in Key Stage 2 strategy, is helping our leaders and teachers to analyse data even more forensically. Smartgrade's age-related scaled scores are playing a key role in identifying and monitoring the impact of intervention strategies. Consistent scaled scores across testing windows indicate good progress, while a decline highlights where additional support may be needed. Improvements in scaled scores demonstrate accelerated progress relative to peers nationally. We will be better equipped to identify exactly where gaps in learning are so that our teaching can expertly address these, resulting in further improved outcomes.

But this isn't just about Year 6.

Expanding the approach

The key to sustainable improvements over time is to ensure that the same level of rigour and attention is applied across all year groups. Our assessment calendar is now fully aligned with the Smartgrade schedule of assessments for all year groups in Key Stage 1 & 2. At the end of the autumn, spring and summer terms, students in year groups other than Year 6 will use HeadStart assessments to undertake assessments in reading, maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS). The data these generate with Smartgrade can be analysed in exactly the same way as the SATS papers in Year 6, leading to high-quality, focused teaching and learning across all year groups in our primary schools.

By harnessing the talent and expertise of Anthem leaders and teachers, sharing great practice and leveraging rich data via Power BI and Smartgrade we ensure that our analysis leads to fine-tuned planning which focuses precisely on the needs of our students. This strengthens our confidence in what we are teaching, sharpens interventions and ultimately helps us to go even further in our mission to make a positive difference for every student, in every lesson, all the time.



Using Smartgrade, teachers can enter their marks and instantly access analysis.

By Paul Crisp

Deputy Headteacher

The Deepings School



Launching instructional coaching on a whole-school level

We first launched instructional coaching in the autumn term of 2024. The vision was always for this to become the school's primary model for CPD, so all teachers would receive specific feedback bespoke to their individual needs, a shift from the more generic one-size-fits-all approach that comes with whole staff training sessions.

That's not to say that coming together as a collective doesn't have its benefits. It's a great way to introduce particular areas of practice, reinforce ideas, and promote consistency through supermodelling, but we have found already that the more granular approach of instructional coaching has had a significant impact in the development of teaching practice.

A fresh approach to feedback

Initially, two members of SLT (including myself) received training via the Ambition Institute and in turn, I then trained our four wonderful lead practitioners. Deliberate practice was a new concept for all of us in terms of providing feedback, although as a Drama teacher by trade, I perhaps found it less daunting than my colleagues!

The team soon put their inhibitions to one side and began discussing the potential benefits of the instructional coaching approach – particularly the nature of granular action steps and the experience of rehearsing it live.

Skilling me softly...

One of the key decisions we made was to introduce coaching in waves. We felt that if we had launched it at a whole-school level straight away, we ran the risk of it being perceived as 'the next thing', just 'another fad'.

Our goal is for coaching to stand the test of time and be used by all teachers at the Deepings well into the future. So, it was really important to get buy-in from staff and not fall at the first hurdle by trying to be too ambitious, too soon.

For the first phase we paired the two SLT and LPs with a handful of staff members. These included staff that would naturally require support – such as ECTs or international teachers new to teaching in the country – but we also welcomed participation from a few teachers who had expressed an interest in developing their own practice.

Drop-ins quickly indicated that teachers were improving their practice. They were set action steps by their coaches that were granular, specific and achievable, against very tightly focused success criteria.

In the first phase of instructional coaching, SLT and LPs are paired with a handful of staff members.



'One thing we were very keen to do from the outset was to squash any kind of stigma associated with coaching and promote the idea that it is for everyone – not just teachers who seemingly require support.'

Promoting a positive coaching culture

Three months on, following the success of the initial pairings, we invited a second wave of teachers to join the coaching programme. By this time all SLT had been trained to provide coaching, increasing our pool of experts.

One thing we were very keen to do from the outset was to squash any kind of stigma associated with coaching and promote the idea that it is for everyone – not just teachers who seemingly require support. To quote Dylan Wiliams: "If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve."

Therefore, our second cohort of coachees was largely made up of experienced middle leaders – who then in turn received training on how to be a coach. This meant they had experienced it from both sides and this was really powerful, particularly ahead of our September CPD for the current school year, where we rolled coaching out for every teacher. By this point many teachers had already enjoyed a taste of coaching and they were on hand to offer their own positive experiences to the rest of the staff body.

We are now at a stage where a) every teacher is a coach b) every teacher is being coached and c) all of us are up on our feet in the main hall every Tuesday morning carrying out deliberate practice. It's such an inspirational experience to be part of every week and the buzz in the room is phenomenal.

We are fortunate at the Deepings to have a headteacher, Kirstie Johnson, who with the trust behind her was able to fully commit to dedicating one period of everyone's teaching timetable to free up the coaching time. A small sacrifice for such a big impact.

By Louise Cowley

Headteacher

Oxford Spires Academy



Raising the tide: How Oxford Spires is working to transform outcomes for Pupil Premium students

Over the past two years, Oxford Spires Academy has been on a focused mission: to transform outcomes for our Pupil Premium students – and the results speak for themselves.

Overall Progress 8 for all students has risen from 0.23 to 0.58 (2023-24), while Progress 8 for Pupil Premium students has climbed from -0.49 to +0.29(2023-24), placing Oxford Spires among the top 25 most improved schools in the country for Pupil Premium outcomes.

And the momentum hasn't slowed. In 2025, Pupil Premium outcomes in English and maths at 4+ and 5+ rose by a further 7.5%. (Due to Covid there's no Progress 8 measure for 2025.)

Before we begin... let's talk pizza



There's a running joke that our Year 11 results are down to me buying Year 11 pizza at interventions. At first glance, it might look that simple – students attend intervention, eat pizza, and progress follows.

But it really isn't about snacks; it's about systems.

"How can we create the optimal environment for absolute success?" (*Marginal Gains, Sir David Brailsford*)

That question has underpinned everything we've done – every intervention, every conversation, every refinement.

The thinking behind the doing

Our strategy has been influenced by three big ideas: *Pitch Perfect*, *The Multiplier Effect*, and *Marginal Gains*.

Each has shaped how we build a culture of excellence, not through pepperoni, but through hundreds of purposeful, aligned decisions.

1. Pitch Perfect – the power of culture

Doug Lemov's *Pitch Perfect* reminds us that excellence isn't accidental; it's rehearsed, refined, and repeated. We've worked relentlessly to build a Year 11 culture of effort, belief, and preparation, for example:

- Champions Hour (Mon-Thurs, 3-4 pm) gives students structured time to work hard – together.
- Sprint Finish, beginning each March, helps students plan revision strategically, supported by high-quality guides.

Everything is branded, consistent, and positive. We make 'working hard and trying your best' visible, celebrated, and normal.



At Oxford Spires Academy, senior leaders teach our high-priority groups.

'There's a running joke that our Year 11 results are down to me buying Year 11 pizza at interventions... The secret isn't pizza (though it helps). It's the environment. We've learned that if you build an environment for absolute success, students will rise to meet it.'

2. The Multiplier Effect – leaders who amplify

In Liz Wiseman's *Multiplier Effect*, she summarises that great leaders don't just drive outcomes – they multiply the capacity of others.

At Oxford Spires, senior leaders teach our high-priority groups. It's not symbolic; it's strategic. It removes communication layers, models instructional excellence, and sends a powerful message: *we're all in this together.*

Our subject leaders, too, have stepped into multiplier roles – creating structures, sharing expertise, and building the confidence of every teacher and student they work with.

3. Marginal Gains – small changes, big shifts

Inspired by Sir David Brailsford's success with British Cycling, we've applied the philosophy of marginal gains – the idea that a series of small, one per cent improvements can lead to remarkable overall progress. We share this principle with students and their wider community.

We focused on details:

- Every student has the same calculator. We teach them explicitly how to use it.
- Every mock exam and real exam we provide a full equipment packs. No stress, students just focus on performance.
- We map the year out for Year 11, a clearly shared map of the year ahead. No surprised, predictable and allows all stakeholders to support and stay engaged.
- Our Year 11 Scholars Guides have been redesigned to provide a clear outline for the full year. Exam board, exam structure, absolute key information that needs to be understood to succeed.
- Every revision session is calm, purposeful, and predictable.

These details reduce cognitive load, eliminate distractions, and build a rhythm of success. Over time, they compound – shifting habits, confidence, and results.

Walking, talking, believing

Our reimagined Walking Talking mocks embody all three philosophies in action: clear modelling (Pitch Perfect), belief in potential (Multiplier Effect), and careful refinement (Marginal Gains).

Students are guided step-by-step through exam technique, expectations, and effort. We set the bar high – and then hold it there. The results have been

striking: Combined Science improved at 4+, 5+, and 7+ in 2025, this year we are exciting to implementing this in Maths and English.

The ripple effect

While this journey began with Pupil Premium students, its impact has lifted everyone. The assemblies, the intervention sessions, the celebrations – they've created a community of learners who believe in themselves.

One student, once listed 'at risk', summed up the transformation perfectly when discussing his A Level choices: "The thing is, Miss, I've just come to the conclusion that there's nothing I can't learn."

I nearly self-combusted with pride, I have shared this moment with staff at Year 6 open evenings as widely as possible. That's the multiplier effect in human form.

The legacy

Our current Year 12s, the cohort who lived this approach, now have the highest attendance and the strongest engagement we've seen. Their trust in their teachers, and in themselves, is palpable.

The secret isn't pizza (though it helps). It's the environment. We've learned that if you build an environment for absolute success, students will rise to meet it.

Because when belief, structure and culture align, there really is nothing they can't learn.



Above: Oxford Spires Academy's motto is, 'Be the best you can be'.

Below: Quotes and learning tips are displayed around the school. All part of our 'marginal gains' philosophy.



Transforming academic outcomes through modelling

By Leona Hopwood

Teacher of Science and Head of Sixth Form

St. Mark's Academy



At St Mark's, we have been focusing on enhancing the WE DO phase of the I DO, WE DO, YOU DO instructional model by improving the quality and consistency of teacher modelling before students move into independent practice.

Specifically, our approach aimed to strengthen explicit modelling of thought processes, success criteria, and application of metacognitive skills through guided practice using examples and non-examples.

This work directly links to the WE DO strand of The Anthem Way, which emphasises guided practice and formative assessment as crucial steps between teacher instruction and student independence. It also aligns with the trust's practice guide for formative assessment, particularly the elements focusing on curriculum fluency, identifying misconceptions, and embedding key skills.

The thinking behind the doing

When I began my leadership legacy project alongside my new role as Head of Sixth Form, A Level Chemistry outcomes showed that students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with middle to lower prior attainment – were underperforming in AO3 questions that required extended responses and higher-order thinking. Teaching had been too teacher-centred, and students were not effectively supported to bridge the gap between instruction and independent application.

This lack of metacognitive guidance meant students struggled to apply knowledge confidently, limiting both progress and self-efficacy. I identified that stronger modelling nd guided practice were necessary to improve academic outcomes and student confidence.

Putting it into practice

I began by grounding my approach in the trust's pedagogical priorities and practice guide, ensuring alignment with wider institutional goals. With the support of senior leaders and the Quality of Education team, I shared the project's aims at the trust-level Assessment for Challenge meeting, gaining endorsement from the Head of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment.

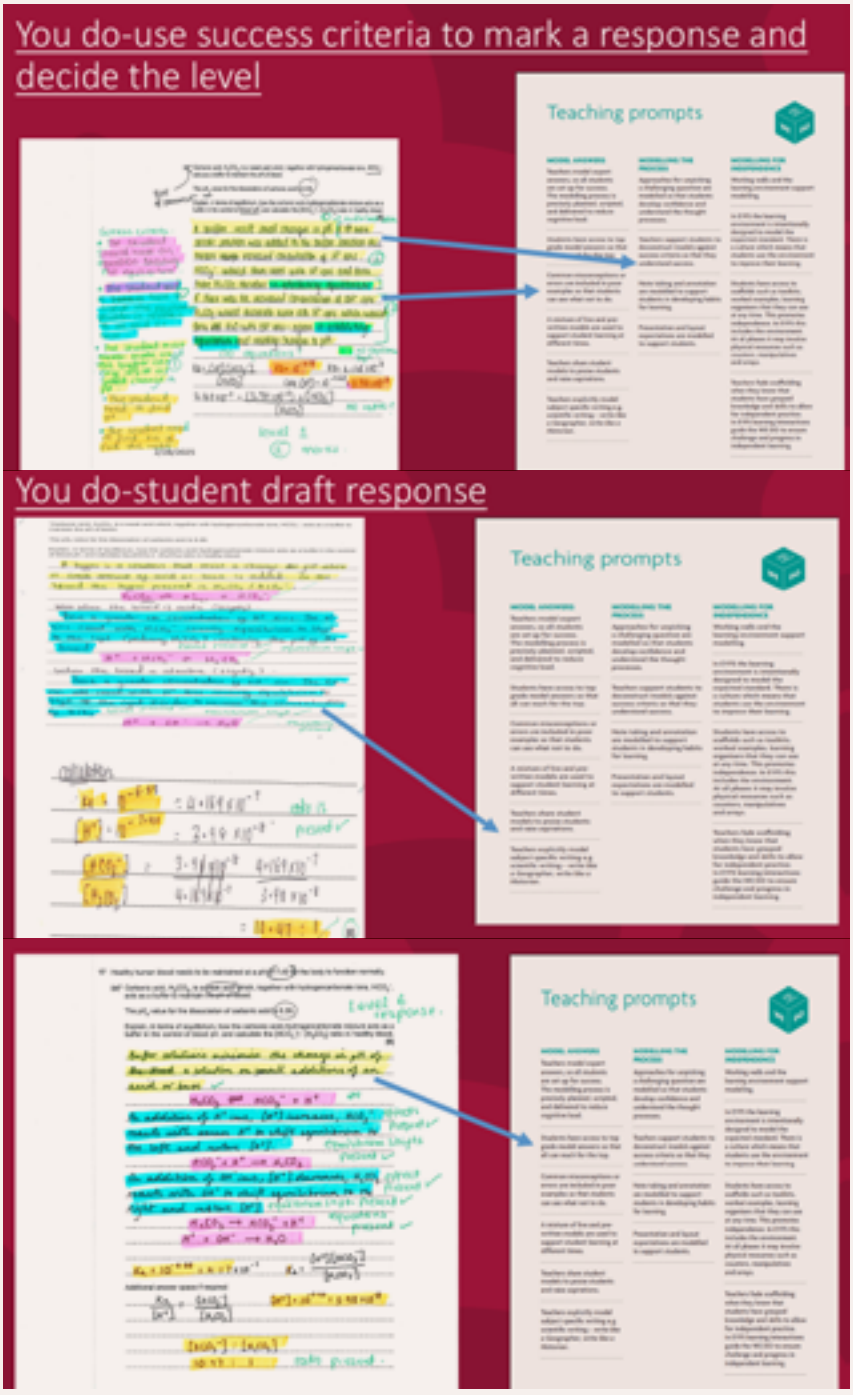
Next, I led a whole-school CPD on modelling and formative assessment, highlighting how effective guided practice can improve independent learning. Within the Science department, I conducted a subject-specific CPD to ensure consistency in A Level Chemistry lesson. Lessons were co-planned to embed modelling within the curriculum sequence, with a focus on making success criteria explicit and verbalising thought processes ('thinking aloud') during the WE DO phase.

The CPD followed a blended approach of direct training, practical modelling demonstrations, and peer coaching. Departmental sessions allowed teachers to observe and practise modelling techniques collaboratively. Weekly reminders and updates reinforced expectations and kept the focus consistent. Coaching conversations and peer observations helped embed the practice and created a culture of reflective improvement.

Change was managed through collaboration and trust. By aligning the strategy with existing school and trust priorities, I avoided initiative overload. I adopted a facilitative leadership style – setting clear goals, modelling high expectations, and providing constructive feedback. This approach-built confidence

and ownership among staff, ensuring that implementation felt supportive rather than imposed.

Implementation was monitored through lesson observations, drop-ins, book scrutiny, and feedback discussions. Teachers' lesson materials and students' workbooks were expected to demonstrate clear modelling linked to independent tasks. Peer observations further ensured consistency across classes, followed by structured feedback to refine practice.



Examples of 'We do' teacher prompts from the Anthem Way.

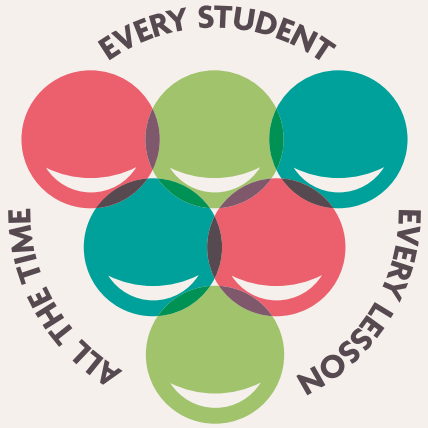
A strong response from students

The strategy led to visible improvements in student engagement and confidence, particularly in tackling AO3 extended response questions. Students became more adept at articulating reasoning and applying key concepts independently. The positive outcomes in Chemistry inspired colleagues in Biology and Physics to adopt similar approaches, leading to wider impact across A Level Science subjects. In A Level Physics, for example, lesson observations showed increased student participation and stronger analytical responses.

'Coaching conversations and peer observations helped embed the practice and created a culture of reflective improvement.'

Some of the key things we learned from this process were the importance of explicitly modelling how to think, not just what to do, ensuring teachers co-plan modelling sequences, and maintaining regular opportunities for feedback and reflection. Change is most sustainable when it is aligned with institutional priorities and underpinned by trust-based leadership.

Moving forward, I plan to develop a cross-departmental community of practice focused on modelling and guided practice to sustain improvement across subjects.



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