

# Case Studies from the Standards Site on Raising BME Achievement

## Case Study 1 - Raising Attainment at GCSE

### Issue

One school had concerns about pupils in Year 11. They were behind with coursework and pupils who had achieved well at KS3 were now in danger of being entered for Foundation or Intermediate tier or not being entered for GCSE at all.

Too much teacher time was being spent dealing with disruptive behaviour and the school felt that they needed to assess what was happening to pupils in Year 11 so that they could devise school specific strategies to address the issues and raise achievement.

### Response

A member of the school's senior management team took overall responsibility for overseeing the project.

All Year 11 pupils received a questionnaire asking them to identify strategies that helped them learn and work.

All subject teachers were asked to identify pupils in danger of not being entered for GCSE and to provide the reasons why they weren't being entered. They were also asked to produce a list of pupils behind with coursework and identify specific pieces of work that were outstanding. In addition to this, teachers were asked to indicate which tier pupils would be entered for in the forthcoming exams.

To assess the level of disruption to lessons caused by poor behaviour, each Year 11 subject teacher completed a day sheet and identified pupils who disrupted lessons and specified that nature of the disruption.

The senior manager overseeing the project gathered together the various pieces of information. This was analysed by ethnicity, gender and subject group.

Analysis of the day sheets helped to identify the kind of behaviour that was preventing teachers from teaching and pupils from learning, and also allowed senior managers to target particular classes for support.

Analysis of the prospective non-entries revealed that many students were not being entered due to lack of coursework. In some cases pupils were behind with as many as 13 pieces.

The analysis also revealed that some pupils who had achieved level 5 and 6 at KS3 were not entered for higher tier English but were not entered for History where similar skills were required.

The results were discussed with Heads of Department, tutors and the Year Heads and middle managers were asked to come up with possible explanations for the anomalies and suggest solutions.

- African Caribbean boys were disproportionately represented in all of the data.
- Nearly three quarters of the pupils behind with coursework were boys.
- In total 86 pupils were identified as being in danger of failing or underachieving.

Senior managers interviewed each pupil with their parents and were presented with the information. They were informed that if changes were not made then the pupils would fail, and that the school was not prepared to let this happen. Parents were asked to give permission for their child to attend a compulsory homework club on Monday to Friday from 3:30pm – 5:00pm in order to get up to date with coursework.

Parents felt that the school was taking responsibility for their children's learning and all parents agreed to this request.

Each pupil was issued with a personal action plan that identified each piece of missing coursework.

They were advised that they would have to attend the club until their subject teacher had signed the action plan to say that the work had been completed and that it had been completed to the best of that pupil's ability.

The club ran from November to December. The aim was to ensure that all pupils were up to date before Christmas so that they could be entered for their GCSE exams in January.

The school also introduced a positive behaviour management programme for teachers and created a forum where teachers could talk about behaviour issues and agree solutions.

## **Outcomes**

Initially the pupils were extremely resentful and hostile. However they attended reluctantly because they knew that the school was working in partnership with their parents and this deterred them from bunking.

Two weeks into the project pupil attitude began to change. They were stopping members of staff in the corridor to announce that they had completed a piece of work or to ask for advice. In the lunch queue pupils were stopping staff to say that they'd completed work. The students felt a sense of achievement and as one Year 11 boy told a member of staff, "You care".

They also started to enjoy lessons as they were no longer going to lessons feeling defensive and having to explain why they had not completed their work. This made for a much more positive classroom environment.

Previously the school had not had a history of homework clubs or study support pupils in their class with particular pieces of work.

Pupils have said that it was the first time in their secondary school career that they felt that their education mattered to the school and that this had had a dramatic impact on how they viewed the teachers and the school.

The pupils did not become model pupils overnight but the hostile antagonism that had existed between staff and pupils seemed to dissipate, and this had a knock on effect with pupils lower down the school.

What was being developed was a real partnership between parents, pupils and children within a firm but supportive environment.

That year the school had the lowest non-entry rate and the highest number of African Caribbean boys staying on into the Sixth Form and studying for A-level courses.

The project allowed the school to intervene before pupils failed. Staff also benefited as senior managers worked with Heads of Department to help equip them to monitor the work of their departments more effectively. It sent a clear message to parents that the school was not prepared to allow their children to fail and that they were part of the solution. It also had a lasting impact on the school as it set in motion a pattern of school self evaluation that was developed further in other areas of school life.

## Case Study 2 – Monitoring Performance

A school analysed its GCSE results by ethnic background, sex and subject area. For a more detailed analysis, the school asked its department heads to compare the results with previous terms (in terms of overall performance, national averages and estimated grades), to see if there were significant differences in performance relating to ability, gender, teaching groups, and ethnic groups. The school also asked the heads to explain any inequalities they found, and to suggest what individual departments, and the school as a whole, should do to raise attainment levels.

### Case Study 3 – Monitoring Fixed Term Exclusions

As part of a strategy to reduce permanent exclusions, a secondary school monitored and analysed fixed-term exclusions over each school term. The school kept records by ethnic group, sex, year group, subject, and reasons for exclusions, and discussed the results with staff at department and year team meetings. This data allowed the school to identify:

- Individual pupils who needed support;
- Year groups that needed support;
- Individual staff and departments that needed support; and
- Areas in where both individuals and the school as a whole needed training.

The school was able to direct resources where they were most needed. It introduced plans to support individual pupils, with strategies for 'anger management and behaviour modification' in some cases. The school worked not only with pupils, but also with teaching and other staff, who all received training in managing behaviour. A part-time counsellor worked with some of the pupils and ran early morning clinics once a fortnight for teachers. These sessions gave teachers the chance to think about how to deal with certain types of behaviour and to understand where their pupils were coming from. Form tutors also met parents and guardians regularly to discuss their children's progress.