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Raising the achievement of students learning English as an additional language: Feltham Community College

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Brief description

This example shows how Feltham Community College enables students learning English as an additional language to make outstanding progress through a combination of good teaching, rigorous assessment and monitoring procedures, and a tailored curriculum.

Overview – the school’s message

‘In the past, the achievement for students learning English as an additional language (EAL) has been inconsistent and their experience of school has not always been positive. Expectations about progress made by early stage learners at Key Stage 4 were low. Now the achievement of these students is high and many progress to A level courses. Expectations are much better and experiences of school are generally positive.

Raising attainment, achievement and expectations for every student was our overarching goal at the time and work to improve assessment, target-setting, personalised monitoring and support has benefited students learning English as an additional language as much as their peers. The IGCSE supports students and helps them to achieve at C grade or above in English language. We are now working on a similar model in science.’

Victoria Eadie, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

‘Students who speak English as an additional language are dragging our results down.’

How often have you heard this view expressed by heads or teachers? Well, not if you spend a day in the company of staff at Feltham Community College. When Victoria Eadie joined the school as headteacher two years ago, this was the widely held view at the school. GCSE results were well below the national average including those of the rapidly growing

population of students learning English as an additional language. Expectations were low, especially for those who were joining the school as late as Year 11.

Why is it then that, two years on, when the numbers of new arrivals have continued to increase, students learning English as an additional language make outstanding progress from Key Stages 2 to 4 and the percentage achieving five good grades at GCSE is above the national average?

Raising the aspirations of staff and the students themselves was the first challenge, in order to inculcate a belief that all students could succeed whether they joined the school in Year 7 or in Year 11. Students for whom English was an additional language were too often seen as a barrier to raising standards in the school. Expectations for their performance had to be raised and not based on Key Stage 2 data or the level of English when the pupil first arrived. Victoria says, 'We released the potential of students who were highly motivated and could make very rapid progress if the "glass ceiling" was lifted.' According to the school's last [inspection report](#), 'The headteacher's leadership is outstanding as she has brought to the school a clear vision and strong determination that has successfully transformed its learning and behaviour culture.'

Targets are reviewed at least termly and usually raised so that students continually live with challenging targets. A rigorous system of assessment and monitoring is in place; every individual and group is tracked in each subject. Performance information pinpoints particular individuals, subjects and classes to provide evidence for teachers to raise their expectations if targets have been set too low.

A comprehensive training programme uses the expertise in the department and the local authority specialist language service. As well as whole-school training about how bilingual learners achieve and learn, the school tailors training to particular departments, for example, in science, where underperformance of learners had been identified. Key to the internal training are the two specialist, well-qualified teachers who work with staff to share their knowledge and expertise.

Specialist EAL teacher support

The school has invested in staff from its own budget rather than rely on the uncertainties surrounding external funding such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. To build capacity and to ensure a legacy for the future, the school has organised a 'literacy dream team' to ensure a spread of literacy and EAL skills across all departments. Leaders are ensuring that every department sees literacy and EAL as their responsibility. Last year, 12 teachers across a range of subjects completed an intensive local authority course on supporting bilingual learners in mainstream lessons.



Changes to the curriculum

Alternative routes are provided for students joining the school during Years 10 or 11, and for whom 'standard' GCSE provision is not appropriate. Learners who join too late to sit English GCSE or to achieve a high grade, follow the IGCSE [course](#). The course is taught by specialist EAL teachers and also supports learners in their other subjects. It has been extended to the sixth form for students who missed the chance to take English GCSE in Year 11. In English

lessons, specialist EAL teachers work in partnership with subject teachers to plan and deliver lessons and to maximise the support available for students. New arrivals at an early stage of English receive an intense period of induction based around a daily lesson. For older beginners, an entry level in English (ESOL) course has been provided.



Flexible courses that combine to meet individuals' needs and grouping students to maximise opportunities for support are the key requirements. However, the curriculum also builds in progression for those who advance rapidly from beginners on an ESOL course to achieving a grade C at English language GCSE. As part of raising aspirations, students are no longer routinely placed in lower sets when, despite the evidence of previous test results, they show they have the potential to achieve at a higher level. New arrivals are 'fast tracked' if there are indications that they

have the ability. Last year, all students were entered early for English GCSE including those learning English as an additional language. The department also works with others in the school to build expertise through training and collaborative [planning](#). According to one teacher, 'Before there was no collaboration, now we share the curriculum.'

So what's it like now for the students?

In lessons, EAL learners self-assess their own work and that of their peers so that they can identify points for development and be more involved in setting targets. The students have high aspirations and regularly set themselves goals and targets beyond the minimum targets that they have been set. Teachers across a range of subjects are aware of the importance of language and of explaining keywords, to ensure that students understand and can explain concepts before they move on.

Ask any student learning EAL and they will tell you the same things.

'Friendly...positive...helpful...welcoming.' The final word should go to Victoria who has created the ethos to make all this possible: 'My advice would be to raise expectations, and personalise target-setting, monitoring and tracking with a sharp focus on EAL groups. Provide EAL alongside English teaching, to create powerful learning opportunities that benefit all students.'

The school's background

[Feltham Community College](#) is an 11-18 specialist sports college of above average size in Hounslow. For over a third of the students, English is an additional language. Forty are at an early stage of English language acquisition.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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