

Understanding and using Progress 8

creating an integrated offer to raise grades in GCSE English

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Summary

This paper outlines how Progress 8 rewards progress by moderately and less able students more than able ones and how this is intended to affect teaching and learning, bearing in mind that Progress 8 will be the main accountability measure for secondary schools from 2016. For English, it is suggested how schools might respond most effectively to this situation by creating an integrated offer in Key Stages 3 and 4, raising the attainment of all students. Several related issues are noted including cross-party policies, the removal of opportunities for 'gaming' examination entries, the restored role of HM Inspectorate, relevant changes in Ofsted expectations and possible effects on teacher morale including recruitment and retention.

Introduction

There is cross-party political agreement on the need to:

- raise school attainment in England towards that of other higher-achieving jurisdictions
- reduce the 'tail' of students leaving school with poor qualifications or none.

These aims were set out in the Coalition White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* in November 2010 (DfE 2010) and did not feature in the 2015 General Election campaign because there is no political disagreement about them. They and the decision to use GCSE as the chief means of raising standards are based on international comparisons – PIRLS, TIMSS, PIAAC and PISA (Smith 2015, Appendix 1) – which show attainment in England's secondary schools as flatlining and lower than in a number of other jurisdictions.

The relatively poor attainment of students on completing compulsory education in England is confirmed by the first PIAAC survey in 2012 which, for adults aged 16-24, places England 22nd of 24 countries for literacy and 21st of 24 for numeracy. Unlike in most other countries, these young adults performed no better than adults aged 55-65. 16-18 year olds in England came bottom for literacy and second-to-bottom for numeracy. These findings repeat those of earlier surveys (Department for Business Innovation and Skills).

Political response to the first issue – low overall attainment – began under the previous Labour Government. Since 1997 guidance for teachers had been provided by the National Strategies, led by the DfE and delivered by Capita, which had created a formulaic approach to lesson delivery; and since 1990 a curriculum and assessment advice body, eventually called the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), had promoted ever more detailed assessment of students' work as a way of raising attainment with, in sequence, National Curriculum sublevels, assessment focuses and Assessing Pupil Progress (APP), each underpinning National Curriculum tests in Years 2, 6 and 9.

Neither the Strategies' nor QCDA's approach was based on any significant research and by October 2008 the Government had accepted that neither had delivered improvements in education in England as measured by international comparisons. The Secretary of State (Ed Balls) abolished the KS3 National Curriculum tests and announced that the Strategies would be wound up and not replaced when Capita's contract ended in March 2011.

The decision to legislate to create Ofqual was taken at the same time. This was in response to the fact that, since 1987, GCSE and A Level grade rates had risen year after year but that this rise was not reflected in international comparisons. The Government accepted that the rise was caused by grade inflation in turn caused by the Awarding Bodies competing for market share. Ofqual was created with a statutory remit to ensure consistency of standards between the various examinations year on year.

QCDA was left in existence and abolished in 2012 following transfer of its regulatory powers to Ofqual in 2010 and its responsibility for the remaining National Curriculum tests to the Standards and Testing Agency in 2011. These changes enabled HM Inspectorate, which had been reduced to a training and supervisory role during the Strategies period, to resume its former role of providing advice on teaching and learning and to influence the design of the new GCSE specifications (Smith 2015, pages 13–16).

Decisions on raising attainment for all

The Coalition Government determined, and Labour accepted, that GCSE should be:

- **more demanding** in examination (end-of-course only), content and assessment (more challenging questions)
- **consistent in standard** between the various Awarding Bodies
- **internationally referenced** to standards in more successful jurisdictions
- **referenced to national standards over time** by national reference tests in English and Mathematics
- **equitable** so that all students' grades count towards Attainment 8 and Progress 8

- **focused on effective teaching** through accepting evidence provided by HM Inspectorate and others and by funding academic research into effective teaching methods, chiefly through the Education Endowment Foundation.

The timing of the introduction of the new specifications is well known, as are their essential technical features: 9–1 grading; similar proportions of students in each grade group as at present (A*/A = 9–7, B/C = 6–4, D–G = 3–1) with grades within these fixed arithmetically; abandonment of any element of criterion referencing; predetermination of the national proportions of candidates attaining 9–7 at 20:30:50; and alignment of new mid-grade 5 with average performance in several higher-achieving jurisdictions (Ofqual 2014).

Perhaps less well understood is the heavy emphasis on consistency of standards between examinations. **Ofqual’s aim under its statutory remit is to ensure that the standards of papers and marking is so similar between Awarding Bodies that the system will perform like a single examination as in other countries.** This will be achieved by:

- new specifications written to tight requirements laid down by Ofqual, so very similar
- inter-Board screening of marking by Ofqual to ensure consistency; Ofqual has the power to require Boards to change their grade boundaries before awarding
- National Reference Tests in English and Mathematics, trialled in 2016 and used fully in 2017 to moderate GCSE standards; taken annually to check on GCSE standards. (Ofqual 2014).

An Awarding Body that set an easier paper than others or marked a paper more generously would be required to change its grade boundaries to give the same proportion of, say, grade 7s as other Bodies. Initially this may mean that some of its candidates still attain grade 7 on an easier paper or through more generous marking, but the National Reference Tests will in due course provide objective evidence of lower standards through statistical comparison and the Awarding Body’s candidates will be penalised proportionately.

Decisions on raising the attainment of the less able – ‘closing the gap’

The Coalition policies, supported by Labour, are:

- pupil premium paid to schools to improve the education of disadvantaged children
- £110 million invested through the Education Endowment Foundation on research on how to raise attainment of disadvantaged children
- secondary schools to be judged primarily on a value-added measure (Progress 8)
- Progress 8 designed to reward progress by less able students more than able ones
- Ofsted to focus more closely on how well schools ‘close the gap’.

On Ofsted, it is understood that the revised school inspection framework taking effect in September 2015 will focus particularly on the achievement and aspiration of disadvantaged children. Pilot inspections by two HMIs jointly, using the revised framework, are currently taking place. There is already anecdotal evidence that schools which are not significantly raising the attainment of the relevant students are being found to require improvement however successful they are in other ways.

School accountability

From 2016 schools will publish 4 measures:

- Attainment 8 - students' average attainment in their best 8 subjects (within specified requirements)
- Progress 8 – showing students' progress compared with their Key Stage 2 (Year 6) test scores in Reading and Mathematics;
- percentage of students achieving a threshold measure in English and Maths (probably grade 5 as the new mid grade aligned to average performance in some more successful jurisdictions); and
- percentage of students achieving the English Baccalaureate

Progress 8 will be the most important. Schools that achieve a Progress 8 score of plus 1.0 or more (i.e. at least a GCSE grade) will be exempt from ordinary Ofsted inspections in the next academic year. Schools that achieve a Progress 8 score of less than minus 0.5 (i.e. half a GCSE grade) will be subject to Ofsted inspection (DfE 2015).

Calculating Attainment 8 and Progress 8

Attainment 8 is each student's best 8 GCSE results comprising:

- | | |
|--|----|
| • English Language or English Literature
(double weighted if both taken at same time) | 2 |
| • Maths (double weighted) | 2 |
| • 3 other EBacc subjects | 3 |
| • 3 others from a prescribed list | 3 |
| | — |
| | 10 |

For their Progress 8, each student's Attainment 8 score is:

- divided by 10
- related to a matrix of fine-level scores in the KS2 Reading and Mathematics tests to give the student's Progress 8 score (see Appendix 1).

The school's Progress 8 score is the average of its students' Progress 8 scores.

Schools will be required to publish their overall Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores on their website year by year in a standard format for easy comparison by parents and others. It seems that they will also be required to publish their average point score for each subject.

The KS2 fine-level scores will be published each year and it is intended that they will be published three years in advance so that schools can calculate for each of its Year 9 students the Attainment 8 score they will need in Year 11 for a positive Progress 8 score (DfE 2015, page 21).

Progress 8 and moderately/less able students

Raising a student's expected performance from grade 2 to 3 has equal value for Attainment 8 to raising it from grade 7 to 8, **but Progress 8 means that moderately and less able students will usually make greater progress than able ones.** As mentioned, Progress 8 is calculated by relating students' Attainment 8 score to their score in the KS2 Reading and Mathematics tests, that is, each student's Attainment 8 score is measured against the average Attainment 8 score for students nationally having same KS2 attainment – see Appendix 1 and DfE 2015.

The effect of Progress 8 can be shown most directly by considering a student's Attainment 8 estimate in terms of GCSE grades by dividing the Attainment 8 estimate by 10, that is, the students best 8 permitted subjects (= 8) with English Language or English Literature and Mathematics double-weighted (=10). Referring to Appendix 1:

Example 1. Student who enters Year 7 with the highest KS2 fine level score of 5.8 (i.e. close to Level 6 in Reading and Mathematics) has an expected Attainment 8 score of 76.32 = expected average GCSE grades 7.63.

If she attains grade 7 in all eight subjects (= 70), her Progress 8 will be minus 6.32.

If she attains four grade 7s including one double-weighted and four grade 8s including one double-weighted (= 75), she will still have a minus Progress 8 score (-1.32).

Only if she attains five grade 8s and three grade 7s with grade 8 for both English and Maths (= 77) will she attain a modest positive Progress 8 score (+0.68).

If she attains grade 8 in all eight subjects (= 80), her Progress 8 will be +3.68.

Example 2. A student who enters Year 7 with a KS2 fine level score of 2.9 has an expected Attainment 8 score of 21.78 = expected average GCSE grades 2.18.

If he attains grade 3 in two Attainment 8 subjects and grade 2 in the others including English and Maths, his Progress 8 will be +0.22 ($8 \times 2 + 2 \times 3 = 22 - 21.78$)

If one of the grade 3s is in English Language/Literature or Maths, Progress 8 will be +1.22; if both, +2.22.

If this student attains grade 3 in all 8 subjects (=30), his Progress 8 will be +8.22 – far higher than the student attaining grade 8 in all subjects (+3.68).

In line with government policy on ‘closing the gap’, Progress 8 rewards progress by moderately and less able students more than able ones. Schools therefore have a strong incentive to develop the teaching and learning of students assessed as moderately and less able. This incentive can be tracked up the Pupil progress matrix (Appendix 1). Less able students require *lower* attainment than their KS2 fine level score to register as positive Progress 8, viz:

- a student entering with 2.0 KS2 fine-level score requires average Attainment 8 of 1.8
- 3.5 fine-level score requires average Attainment 8 of 2.7
- 4.0 fine-level score requires average Attainment 8 of 3.6

The matrix equalises at 4.4 fine-level score which requires 4.41 Attainment 8, i.e. average GCSE grade 4.4, and then reverses so that more able students require *higher* Attainment 8 to register as positive Progress 8, viz:

- 5.0 fine-level score requires average Attainment 8 of 5.7
- 5.5 fine-level score requires average Attainment 8 of 6.97
- 5.8 fine-level score (the highest permitted) requires average Attainment 8 of 7.6.

Students entering secondary school with a fine-level score below 4.5 (which is close to the mid point of the new 9 to 1 GCSE grades) will gain significantly more in terms of Progress 8 for each GCSE grade above expectation than students with a fine-level score above 4.5 for whom the reverse is true.

The difficulty of attaining grades 7, 8 and 9 is increased by the fact that they will be awarded in set proportions – 50, 30 and 20 per cent of candidates attaining grades 7–9 nationally. However, students attaining high grades will have this satisfaction although their Progress 8 score is likely to be low. On the other hand, students attaining lower grades may well have the satisfaction of achieving a high Progress 8 score. Much will depend on how schools share Progress 8 with their students. Obviously Progress 8 will not be relevant to students’ future – acceptance for further or higher education or employment will still depend on

students' grades, not on the progress they have made since Year 6. But Progress 8 may be a strong motivating factor for moderately and less able students who may receive reports, certificates and indeed awards for exceptional progress as measured by Progress 8.

In summary, Progress 8 has been designed to require schools to focus their energies on the second of the Government's (and cross-party) policy aims – raising the attainment of those who currently leave school with poor qualifications or none. The new system will expose schools which favour the more able at the expense of the less – failing to 'close the gap' in terms of Government policy – or are coasting if they are selective.

Double-weighted English and the end of 'gaming'

The higher of students' grades for English Language or English Literature will be double-weighted for Attainment 8 and Progress 8 if both examinations are taken in the same series. This has three implications:

1 If a student does better in English Language which is double-weighted, her English Literature score can also be included (single weighted) in the 'open group' of subjects for Attainment 8. English is therefore potentially, and in many cases will be actually, by far the largest contributory factor to students' Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Some Heads of English have already argued successfully for a higher allocation of curriculum time in KS4.

2 Some schools seem to be planning to enter students assessed as less able for a non-EBacc English examination rather than GCSE in English Language or English Literature. Evidently these schools have not yet understood how Progress 8 is calculated. Only GCSE English Language / English Literature will be allowed to count in the English 'slot' in Attainment 8 and Progress 8 and be double-weighted (DfE 2015, page 21). **Schools that do not enter students for GCSE English Language and English Literature, and do not prepare them fully for the examinations, will reduce the students', and the school's, Progress 8 score significantly.**

3 Some schools may be considering teaching less able students for GCSE English Language *or* English Literature and entering them for both examinations solely to obtain double-weighting. As absentees will probably be disallowed for double-weighting unless they provide a medical certificate, students would have to attend the examination, but would be double-weighted for the other English GCSE if they wrote little and were graded U.

This may cause problems with the students and their parents. But there may be other reputational problems, both a lowering of Progress 8 because of increased numbers of ungraded results and criticism, and potential downgrading, by Ofsted. From September 2015 school inspections will be carried out and directed by HMI which has published expectations of good English teaching (see below). The Common Inspection Framework taking effect in September 2015 will for the first time require inspectors to make judgements

about outcomes for children. In view of the increasing emphasis on raising attainment by disadvantaged pupils, inspectors are likely strongly to criticise entering students for examinations for which they have not been taught solely for Progress 8 purposes and may judge the school as requiring improvement.

Early, multiple and repeated entries are already discouraged by allowing only a student's first result to count in the school's accountability score.

It seems that double-weighting of English together with Progress 8 will put an end to the 'gaming' of entries that some schools have carried out. There will be no feasible alternative to preparing all the school's students to do their best in GCSE English Language and English Literature.

HM Inspectorate and the new Ofsted inspections

From 1997 HM Inspectorate was limited to a training and monitoring role on behalf of Ofsted while guidance on teaching and learning was provided by the National Strategies and assessment was led by QCDA and its predecessors. Following the decision in October 2008 to abolish the KS3 National Curriculum tests and wind up the National Strategies, HMI immediately began to reassert its traditional role of surveying good practice in schools and publishing advice.

For English, there were a series of progressive reports culminating in two major surveys which provided the necessary basis for rethinking English teaching: *Excellence in English* (Ofsted 2011) and *Moving English forward : action to raise standards in English* (Ofsted 2012). These described a model of good practice very different from the one promoted by the Strategies. HMI's influence, with others, was also decisive in the compromise reached over the design of the new GCSE English specifications by which the preference of the Secretary of State (Michael Gove) for content-led specifications traditionally assessed was modified by the great majority of marks being awarded for open-ended questions requiring evaluation and comparison. The exclusion of non-British texts and short stories from English Literature is evidence that the compromise was hard-fought, but these restrictions will no doubt be lifted when the new specifications have proved reliable and led to higher attainment in international comparisons.

HMI's view of the teaching and learning needed for students to do well in the new examinations, as indicated in its reports, can be summarised as follows:

- confidence and resilience are developed through challenging discussion of texts in which students are given the opportunity to develop and test their own ideas;
- wider reading enables students to develop 'cultural capital' – experience of a variety of texts to 'place' unseen texts historically and draw on this experience when

reading and writing about them; reading for pleasure should be encouraged as part of this;

- experience of these needs to begin in Key Stage 3.

HMI's return to its central role of judging and providing advice on good practice in teaching and learning will be completed when becomes responsible for Ofsted inspections from September 2015 (Ofsted 2015). Contracts with the bodies that have provided inspectors since Ofsted's inception in 1992 will end in August 2015 and all inspections will then be by HMIs and other inspectors directly trained and monitored by them. **This means that HMI will judge teaching and learning according to its published expectations and advice.** For English, schools would be wise to revisit *Excellence in English* (Ofsted 2011) and *Moving English forward : action to raise standards in English* (Ofsted 2012), summarised above.

Creating an integrated offer for English

Schools will need to respond to the facts that:

- from 2016 secondary schools will be primarily judged on their Progress 8
- Progress 8 rewards progress by moderately and less able students more than able ones
- for maximum Progress 8 all students need to be taught and entered for GCSE English Language and English Literature
- the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework will place heavier emphasis on attainment by disadvantaged students ('closing the gap')
- from September Ofsted inspections will be carried out by HMIs and inspectors trained and monitored directly by them, so that teaching and learning will be judged according to HMI's published expectations and advice.

In these circumstances it is suggested that it would be reasonable for schools to:

- revisit HMI's expectations and advice
- investigate well-researched methods of raising attainment by all students
- actively consider the advantages of mixed-attainment grouping.

The aim would be to create an integrated offer by which all the school's students would make the greatest progress. Each element is now considered.

1 Revisit HMI's expectations and advice

On the basis of its surveys of good practice, from 2011 the then HMI Subject Adviser for English, Phil Jarrett, and his colleagues set about persuading DfE (and teachers at meetings to which they were invited) that the worst excesses of the National Strategies approach needed modifying, in particular:

- outstanding English departments focus on learning rather than teaching.
- it is a myth that outstanding teaching is achieved by the teacher working hard.
- pace should be the pace of learning, not the pace of teaching.
- too many lessons attempted too many things – pupils need time to think.
- learning objectives should be seen as longer term than the lesson – what is the purpose of the unit and how does the lesson fit into this?

This was supported by evidence from leading researchers which was presented to DfE officials; for example, Robin Alexander who presented a detailed paper, *Improving oracy and classroom talk in English schools: achievements and challenges* at a DfE seminar on 20 February 2012 (Alexander 2012).

Both HM Inspectorate and researchers like Alexander, Neil Mercer and Guy Claxton draw on copious evidence of the limitations of instruction. Instruction is sometimes called IRE – *Initiation-response-evaluation* – in which the teacher asks a closed question and the student recalls the correct answer if possible which the teacher confirms if correct or corrects (or asks another student) if incorrect. This has been identified as the 'essential teaching exchange' that differentiates classroom interaction from human interaction elsewhere, and it is the default teaching mode in Britain, the United States and perhaps worldwide.

It has long been evident that instruction is an inefficient method of developing students' understanding because it relies on their working with information provided by the teacher solely in ways prescribed by her. For English, there is urgent need for more effective teaching because the new GCSE examinations:

- use more challenging unseen and studied texts than at present
- award most marks for evaluation and comparison questions
- need to be taken by all students including those assessed as less able.

To achieve higher level responses to unseen texts, students will need regular opportunities to develop the skills of inference and deduction in a literary context and, to do this, they will need to explore the implications of a variety of texts with careful but light-touch guidance by the teacher rather than instruction. The case is well summarised by Alexander:

Pupils need, for both learning and life, not only to be able to provide relevant and focused answers but also to learn how to pose their own questions, and how to use talk to narrate, explain, speculate, imagine, hypothesise, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, reason and justify ...

... we now have robust and replicable evidence, from studies using pre-test/post-test with experimental and control groups, that talk that is cognitively demanding, reciprocal, accountable and/or dialogic has a direct and positive impact on measured standards in English, mathematics and science. (Alexander 2012, pages 4 & 5)

For English, talk of this kind needs to be exploratory but not unfocussed. To achieve cognitive development effectively, discussion needs to be carefully focussed on literary features of text such as genre, mood, tone, the writer's purposes, language, structure, and figurative devices.

2 Investigate well-researched methods of raising attainment by all students

This view of the limits of instruction is supported by other research evidence. Only three teaching programmes have been repeatedly proven in international trials to increase students' cognitive (reasoning) skills substantially: Philosophy for Children, Reuven Feuerstein's Instrumental Enhancement, and Adey and Shayer's Cognitive Acceleration. All three:

- are based on secure psychological principles relating to effective learning
- require discussion of ideas in groups moderated by the teacher
- significantly increase the cognitive (reasoning skills) of students of all abilities.

Of these, only Cognitive Acceleration (CA) relates directly to school subjects – English, Mathematics and Science. Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) is the longest established of the CA programmes, having been developed during the 1980s. It has been repeatedly shown to increase attainment by between one and two GCSE grades (Adey 2012; CASE 2013). The “robust and replicable evidence” to which Alexander refers above includes Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) as a prime example.

An English programme (Let's Think in English) has been developed since 2009 on the same principles. It is currently under formal trialling, but **initial outcomes are of the same order as Science, showing significant rises in attainment for all students but especially for students assessed as moderately and less able – see Appendix 2.** Students' cognitive (reasoning) abilities increase through challenging discussion based on texts – fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama and film – and are gradually reflected in writing showing improved grammar and enhanced vocabulary.

A specific advantage of the Let's Think pedagogy is that it provides a framework for the guided discussion that develops cognition which is assessed incrementally in terms of Piaget's stages of cognitive development. These can be mapped onto the new GCSE English grades enabling the teacher to track and enhance attainment. This gives Let's Think programmes their power to raise attainment at all levels of ability. A full discussion of this aspect, with evidence, is provided at Smith (2015), pages 20/21 and Appendix 7.

Further information about Let's Think in English is available at www.letsthinkinenglish.org With regard to the next section, all Let's Think in English have been fully trialled and shown to be effective in mixed-attainment as well as attainment groupings.

3 Actively consider the advantages of mixed-attainment grouping

There is strong repeated research evidence that teaching and learning in mixed attainment groups raises the attainment of students assessed as moderately and less able while not disadvantaging more able students. ('Mixed attainment' is preferred to mixed ability because students are normally allocated to teaching groups by testing a limited range of easily testable skills rather than ability, particularly reasoning ability.)

Mixed attainment groupings were common in comprehensive schools until the development of governments' target-driven policy from 1990 with its requirement to show students making levels of progress and schools being judged on their percentage of A – C (subsequently A* – C) grades. With this focus on the results of able and reasonably able students only, streaming and setting by attainment was understandable and became the norm.

The removal of levels from the National Curriculum, the requirement that all GCSE grades count towards Attainment 8 and Progress 8 and the design of Progress 8 now make teaching by attainment groupings less appropriate. Government policy has also called into question the only objective advantage of ability setting, which is that high-attaining students achieve more highly when they undertake a differentiated curriculum matched to their attainment and in these circumstances can take an examination a year or more early and perform as well as others taking the examination later. But this advantage is less relevant now that early entry is discouraged by allowing only the first result to count.

Progress 8 requires schools to weigh early entry for a small number of able students against substantial evidence that attainment grouping does not enable most students, able as well as less able, to achieve their best. The evidence has recently been summarised by Baines and by Francis and Wong:

- less able students perform less well in attainment groupings than in mixed attainment settings, but this is not true of able students; able students also benefit from mixed attainment groups which promote the use of elaboration, explanation and collaborative discussion between peers – all essential ingredients for developing high level understanding and high level thinking skills

- teachers' expectations are lower with groups of lower-attainment students; they naturally provide them with less challenging work and this is reflected in poorer results
- students are sometimes misallocated to attainment groups for reasons such as poor performance in a test, erratic motivation or untidy written work, but once allocated to an attainment group movement from it is unusual
- students assessed as lower-attainment often underestimate their ability and resort to "learned helplessness" (e.g. Hattie 2011, page 53); they develop a negative view of their ability which limits their willingness to work and can cause poor behaviour
- schools typically allocate their less experienced/effective teachers to lower attainment groupings
- by international surveys like PISA, the more countries group by attainment, the lower their students' performance overall; for example, Finland, which is one of the most successful countries educationally, abandoned attainment grouping in 1985 (Sahlberg 2011, page 22).

From a Progress 8 perspective, attainment-grouping is harmful because it reduces the opportunities for progress by the moderately and less able. The Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit summarises research into the 30 best ways of spending the pupil premium to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. **Of the 30 approaches, attainment grouping is one of only two to have a negative effect on students' attainment, exceeded only by requiring students to repeat a year.** The EEF comments:

Low attaining learners fall behind by one or two months a year, on average, when compared with the progress of similar students in classes without attainment grouping. It appears likely that routine setting or streaming arrangements undermine low attainers' confidence and discourage the belief that attainment can be improved through effort. (Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit)

Schools may find moving from attainment-grouping to mixed attainment difficult to manage because it requires changes in teaching approach. Schools may also fear resistance from some parents although this is likely to diminish when the benefits of mixed attainment teaching and the imperatives of government policy are explained so that, as seems likely, a move to mixed attainment teaching becomes common.

An alternative is to introduce mixed attainment teaching incrementally from Year 7 although, if this begins in September 2015, it would leave students in Year 8 and above to prepare for the new GCSE examinations in attainment groupings.

As an interim measure already adopted by some schools using Let's Think in English, schools may wish to arrange for one lesson per week to be taught in mixed attainment

groups, using this lesson for the fortnightly Let's Think/Cognitive Acceleration programme with the other lesson used to 'bridge' to other similar work – all Let's Think/ Cognitive Acceleration lessons include suggestions for bridging. All Let's Think lessons have been fully trialled with mixed attainment classes and shown to work very well in terms of cognitive growth and student engagement.

Conclusion

For all schools, grade rates in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics will be lower in 2017 than in 2016. This will be due to the higher demand of the new specifications, their unfamiliarity to teachers and students and the new grading system (see Smith 2015, Appendix 3). The same will happen with other GCSEs in 2018. **Politically this will be presented by Ofqual and the government of the day as students' true level of attainment in contrast with previous grade inflation and as a springboard from which England's future educational success can be accurately measured.**

As all schools will be in the same position, resulting from government policy to rectify past inadequacies caused by previous governments and the Awarding Bodies, schools cannot be held responsible for the drop in grade rates between 2016 and 2017/18, provided the drop is within a 'normal range' of minus Progress 8 scores to be determined by Ofsted. Clearly the benchmark of minus 0.5 which is planned to trigger an Ofsted inspection in the future cannot apply in 2017 or 2018 when minus scores will largely be caused by transition from one grading system to another. For these two years at least, Ofsted will need to determine a different minus Progress 8 score as a baseline for inspections.

However, after schools' Progress 8 scores are stabilised in 2018, they will be judged on how these rise in subsequent years with scores lower than minus 0.5 triggering an Ofsted inspection as planned. In these circumstances schools will be more successful if they review and develop their teaching and learning in the light of the imperatives of the new grading and accountability system, especially Progress 8, earlier rather than later.

The cross-party policies underlying the changes are appropriate to the country's future educational needs and the changes themselves, though demanding to implement, are thorough and coherent. When understood and implemented, they will not only raise the attainment of students, especially those assessed as moderately and less able, for the purpose of international comparisons. Their focus on cognitive development rather than instruction will raise the quality of education in England for all students by making teaching and learning more stimulating, effective, equitable and enjoyable. This will also increase teachers' professional self-determination and morale, and so may start to counteract the approaching crisis in teacher recruitment and retention (Wiggins 2015).

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Appendix 1 – 2014 Attainment 8 estimates [DfE 2015, page 29]

The estimated Attainment 8 score is the average Attainment 8 score of all pupils nationally with the same prior attainment at key stage 2 (KS2). The following table shows the Attainment 8 estimates for each KS2 average fine level, based on the 2014 cohort averages.

Changes to national subject entry patterns and performance will cause these estimates to change in future years, as they will be derived from averages from later cohorts. As such they should be treated with caution if extrapolating to cohorts beyond 2014.

Table B.1 2014 Attainment 8 estimates for each KS2 fine level

KS2 average fine level (English & Maths)	2014 Attainment 8 estimate	KS2 average fine level (English & Maths)	2014 Attainment 8 estimate	KS2 average fine level (English & Maths)	2014 Attainment 8 estimate
1.5a	14.94	3.7	31.75	4.9	55.11
2.0b	18.06	3.8	33.02	5.0	57.33
2.5c	19.03	3.9	34.71	5.1	59.72
2.8d	20.88	4.0	36.55	5.2	62.02
2.9	21.78	4.1	38.48	5.3	64.46
3.0	23.12	4.2	40.42	5.4	66.97
3.1	23.38	4.3	42.26	5.5	69.72
3.2	24.98	4.4	44.41	5.6	72.49
3.3	26.04	4.5	46.37	5.7	74.71
3.4	26.98	4.6	48.52	5.8e	76.32
3.5	28.39	4.7	50.67	***	*****
3.6	29.95	4.8	52.84	***	*****

- a. Pupils with mean KS2 fine grade score of less than 1.5 are assigned a KS2 score of 1.5
- b. Pupils with mean KS2 fine grade score between 1.6 and 2.0 are assigned a KS2 score of 2.0
- c. Pupils with mean KS2 fine grade score between 2.1 and 2.5 are assigned a KS2 score of 2.5
- d. Pupils with mean KS2 fine grade score between 2.6 and 2.8 are assigned a KS2 score of 2.8
- e. Pupils with mean KS2 fine grade score of more than 5.8 are assigned a KS2 score of 5.8

Appendix 2 – Raising attainment with Let’s Think in English (LTE)

Case study 1 – able students

Ruth Pringle is KS3 English Coordinator at a mixed comprehensive school in South London. She used Let’s Think in English fortnightly with her top set Year 8 class for a full year. Her class and the parallel Y8 top set had the same end-of-year assessment (an imaginative writing task and a response to a Shakespeare scene, both under controlled conditions), as had her previous year’s top Y8 set. These were cross-moderated to ensure consistent marking. The results were:

	Level 7	Level 6	Level 5	Level 4
Y8.1 class with LTE	14	11	4	1
Parallel Y8.1 class without LTE	0	11	19	0
Previous Y8.1 class without LTE	0	13	13	1

The full case study is available at <http://www.letsthinkinenglish.org/evidence-of-success/>

Case study 2 – lower attainment and disadvantaged students

Six schools in Hampshire provided two teachers each. They were trained in July 2013 and taught LTE lessons fortnightly to Year 8 and Year 9 classes throughout 2013/14, attending half-termly joint support sessions led by Leah Crawford, Hampshire Inspector/Adviser, and myself.

All of the schools set the students by attainment. As the teachers’ timetables turned out, at least half of the classes were assessed as lower ability with a significant number of students on free school meals (FSM). The students were teacher-assessed at the beginning and end of the year for Reading and Writing and took two different APP tasks in response to an unseen text in timed conditions with a shared mark scheme in September 2013 and June 2014.

All the students made better progress than expected with the FSM students making greater progress than others, for example:

Year 8 TA Reading – 3+ sublevels progress : All students 28% FSM 38%

Year 8 APP Reading – 2+ sublevels progress : All students 61% FSM 90%

Year 8 TA Writing – 2+ sublevels progress : All students 65% FSM 100%

Year 9 TA Reading – 4+ sublevels progress : All students 15% FSM 28%

Year 9 APP Reading – 3+ sublevels progress : All students 42% FSM 50%

Year 9 TA Writing – 3+ sublevels progress : All students 38% FSM 44%

4+ sublevels progress : All students 15% FSM 28%

Average sub-level gain

	TA reading	APP reading	TA writing
All students	2.1	Select table column	1.81
3 lowest attaining classes	2.35	-	2.25

One group in Year 8 and two in Year 9 stood out as particularly low attaining classes at the start of the year. Significantly, the average gain across these groups was greater than for the students as a whole (above).

One school (see table below) was able to present data from a parallel ability group who had experienced the same curriculum but not the LTE intervention. These were both Year 9 low attaining groups, in which the students were working largely at L4a/5c at the start of the year. The comparative data, presented in terms of the average sublevel gain for these groups is particularly compelling.

	TA reading	APP reading	TA writing
LTE group	2.55	-	2.73
Control group	1.27	-	1.09

These outcomes were achieved in one year. Let's Think in English (LTE) is designed to be used for at least two years and raises attainment by similar amounts each year.

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