

Meeting the personalised learning agenda – Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy qualifications in action

St John Fisher is a successful Roman Catholic 11-16 mixed comprehensive in North Staffordshire. The school draws pupils from Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, both areas of relatively high social deprivation.

For the last two years St John Fisher has been operating a unique 'Pathways for Learning' curriculum throughout the school. The school devised the Pathways approach to guarantee a personalised learning agenda for each individual student.

Interview with Curriculum Deputy Head, Martin Nugent

How do you prepare your Pathways groups for ALAN qualifications?

By Year 9 our Additional Literacy and Numeracy group and our Vocational students will have their separate Numeracy and Literacy programme ramped up to four lessons a week. These will be 100% focussed on ALAN qualifications.

By contrast, groups in other Pathways have ALAN slotted into their English and Maths GCSE programme. Our Fast Track group will typically sit and pass 10 GCSEs. They now sit ALAN after their last GCSE in Year 11, giving them a further nationally recognised qualification.

What student feedback have you had on the ALAN tests?

We surveyed our students after the last round of tests and the feedback was very interesting. The students didn't find IT a barrier at all, almost unanimously they saw it as a plus. They enjoyed the content of the test and they absolutely loved the immediacy of the results. We already offer high added value with a typically 70% GCSE pass rate. However being able to deliver this kind of success in an adult qualification is a huge morale booster for students across all our ability Pathways.

Which teachers deliver the ALAN programme?

All our teaching staff deliver ALAN. It makes sense because our teachers all have English and Maths qualifications and it opens their eyes to the children's need for access to basic skills. Working flexibly means we can deliver the programme easily within the curriculum, because any teacher who doesn't have a full allocation of lessons will be allocated either Literacy or Numeracy.

What's your staffing ratio?

All our ALAN lessons are highly staffed. So a class of thirty children will have two qualified teachers and two teaching assistants.

How did staff react to being asked to teach ALAN, particularly if it wasn't their core discipline?

They were very hostile initially. It was largely a knee-jerk, "But I'm not a Maths teacher" reaction. But they very quickly came to realise how essential ALAN skills are to our children's futures. One of my Science teachers said the other day, "Even though I teach pupils Science I never realised how poor some pupils' basic skills are. It's extremely rewarding to bring them up to speed on the essentials because it sets them up for all the other subjects."

So how do you feel about your decision to introduce ALAN?

I think it's one of the best things I've done here, because it fits in so well with the personalised learning agenda and the students enjoy it so much. Teachers have overheard students talking enthusiastically about it outside school, which as any teacher will tell you, is rare. And the other day the parent of a girl who was struggling came to me full of praise for ALAN, saying, "She's come on leaps and bounds, she really seems to understand what she's doing now."