

**Early success for the gifted and talented
Belvoir School case study and interview**

Early success for the gifted and talented – ALAN qualifications in action

Belvoir High is a middle school that draws pupils from a range of high-performing primaries in the Leicestershire countryside. The school has been highly successful in using ALAN qualifications to motivate gifted and talented Year 9 students post-SATs.

Change is on the horizon as Belvoir High is set to open as an 11-16 school in September 2009. Deputy Head, Paul Ainsworth, plans to roll out ALAN qualifications across the whole of Year 9 in due course and the school's Head Teacher, Jonathan Sherwin, sees ALAN as a powerful springboard for the delivery of GCSEs in 2009.

Full interview with Deputy Head, Paul Ainsworth

'ALAN allows our gifted and talented Year 9's to take a big qualification early.'

To date you've used Adult Literacy qualifications to motivate able Year 9 students?

Yes, that was our focus last academic year. We put our Year 9 English and Maths top sets in for ALAN Level 2 – that's about 40 students taking one of the exams and 20 taking both. Our strategy was to see how these children got on with it, and how much prior teaching they needed, and to see if we needed to re-jig schemes of work. In terms of National Curriculum levels, these are students who all got Level 7 and above in Maths and Level 6 and above in English in their SATs.

Do you plan to roll out ALAN across the whole of Year 9 eventually?

Eventually, yes. We have a four-form entry, so last year we got Set 1 to take the Level 2 test. We intend to use that experience to help us decide which children in Set 2 should take Level 2 and which should take Level 1. In Set 3 we'll give the children the Level 1 test. Then the following year we'll see how Set 4 fits into it.

By using this 'trickle down' technique we'll be challenging the children but ensuring that they succeed, as we can enter them at what we believe to be exactly the right level, but we can still arrange a quick re-take if need be. So they leave the middle school on a high with a short course GCSE qualification.

What about cost?

Cost is something that all schools have to think about and had ALAN not been so affordable, we wouldn't have been able to offer it. Affordability is a real plus-point.

How do the parents feel about their children taking ALAN at Year 9?

They're all for it! We call it a short-course Literacy and Numeracy GCSE, or half a GCSE. The parents and children think that's fab. ALAN is a unique opportunity for our gifted and talented Year 9 students to take a big qualification early.

Do you find ALAN easy to teach?

I use the resources on the internet and that's the kind of teaching we're favouring. So the children learn online in a test environment rather than using textbooks.

So you're using ALAN qualifications as a motivator?

Yes. It's another way of validating the work they've done in Key Stage 3. This is a very rural area with lots of small primary feeder schools, which are exceptionally good at equipping the children with good basic functional skills. Also because we take children at Year 6 we have them for an extra year so when they leave us they have an excellent grounding in Literacy and Numeracy.

How has the staff reacted to the introduction of ALAN?

At the moment it only involves the English, Maths and IT teacher but other staff have been very interested. It's made them look at what other short course qualifications they could offer.

What affect does it have on the timetable?

ALAN qualifications don't affect the timetable at all because the children have finished their SATS and we're using their English and Maths lessons to prepare them. And in the same way, students will take their ALAN tests in their IT lesson time. The Head of IT is very positive about it, not least because they've done their IT national curriculum tests, so it fits in with the timetable very well.

When we look at the whole Year Group doing it, things will change a bit. When we have 100 children doing ALAN rather than 30, there will be more timetabling considerations.

Do you think ALAN would appeal to the independent sector?

Belvoir High School is a maintained school but I've worked at three independent schools at senior management level and I think the sector would be keen to adopt ALAN. Many independent schools don't do Key Stage 3 exams so this would be a great motivator.

And what about the future?

In two years time we'll face a new challenge when Belvoir changes from a middle school to an 11-16 comprehensive. It'll be very exciting to offer ALAN then and we'll have learnt so much along the way. That's why I'm so interested in the approaches adopted by other schools that offer ALAN.