Case study 5: Rebecca

Rebecca’s team brainstorm ideas at a departmental meeting for the benefit of a visiting department.

*Rebecca’s team brainstormed their ideas for the benefit of another school where results have been declining for a few years now. This was a great example of learning from each other. A whole departmental meeting was devoted to this. The benefits were not all one way. It served to remind Rebecca’s team of what makes them successful and this helped with morale...as did the bottles of wine the ‘receiving’ school kindly donated to the department.*

*What follows are extracts from the discussions.*

We ensure that the course we have planned closely reflects the objectives and question types in the exam. That means students answering lots of the same types of GCSE questions from early in Y10 right through to the day before the examination.

Our schemes of work set out precise timings and clear objectives so that all necessary assessment objectives are covered in depth, according to the exam weighting.

We make sure that we all use, discuss and refine the schemes of work. Although we don’t all do the same activities, we do cover the same objectives and we all do the same assessments at the same time. We built assessment into the Schemes of Work and know in outline which past questions we are going to use, and when. (e.g. Y11 mock exam)

We make sure that each unit of work is tested 4 times. We call this the 4 strikes approach. So if it was the achievements of the Weimar government it might be tested in 4 of the 5 following way:

a. through an essay prepared, written and marked to GCSE criteria in Y10
b. through a question in the internal assessment on Germany unit
c. in the Y10 exam
d. In the Y11 mock
e. In revision classes.
(See downloadable resource for an example of this)

One of the more radical things we do is to reduce the amount of time we spend on note-making in class. All written work MUST be linked to a question so it is common for students to make a few notes on cards or post-its which are then USED when they answer a 6 mark question in the last 10 minutes of the lesson. We think this helps them to answer the questions which are set and they are
more flexible in how they apply their knowledge. As far as notes are concerned we give the brightly coloured A5 sheets with “All you need to know for ….grade”

We give students extensive practice at timed essays throughout the course and plenty of practice at marking their own work using levels of response mark schemes.

We make expectations explicit and high, using Pupil Tracker/ chances graph from the start of Year 10. We find that the chances graphs are particularly helpful as they focus on what can be achieved by the minority who work really hard.

We clarify what exactly it is that students need to do to improve their grade. To save time in class we give students an essay which they have to improve. Make sure you have one for A to A*, D to C, G to E.

One of us marks for the exam board each year so that we all learn the inside ‘gen’.