

CASE STUDY 2: Richard

When Richard took over as head of History in Fernhill School in Farnborough the residual was -1.1. At least there was now only one way to go. Three years later the residuals were in the top 10% in the county and the A - C rate was 92%. Richard attributes his team's success to seven factors: creating the right atmosphere and work ethic; helping students to write what the examiners want; tight teaching; focussed marking; careful planning; rich resourcing and plenty of continuous professional development.*

Factor 1: creating the right atmosphere and work ethic

Richard works very closely with his colleagues and has built up an enviable reputation within the school. Not quite an island of excellence, there is, nevertheless, a perceptibly different atmosphere in the History area. Staff set consistently high expectations of work and behaviour. The team pays particular attention to motivating lower attaining boys and the wide variety of teaching approaches reflects this. Homework's are set, but they are manageable so that the completion rate is high.

Factor 2: helping students to write what the examiners wanted

From Year 7 the Department places heavy emphasis on answering key questions particularly 'why?' and 'how far?'. This extends as far as making banners that hang from the ceiling giving the key advice they need to answer each type of question. Writing is normally preceded by plenty of speaking and

listening and you will find a lot of card sorting as well as scaffolds for writing.

These writing frames are only used in Year 7 otherwise they become zimmer frames. By year 9 pupils are writing independently. Students are encouraged to be self-critical so we ask them to underline in red areas in their answer where they could improve.

Factor 3: tight teaching

Richard's team believes that GCSE success comes from good teaching in KS 3. Their systematic approach to teaching pupils how to use sources has a clear progression map charting how they will get from Year 7 to GCSE success. Above all the Department prides itself on making hard concepts accessible. The use of diagrams and visual images is particularly effective. They are also keen to make the learning meaningful so that little time is spent note making for its own sake. Students spend much of their time creating cards and then transforming them into shapes that help them answer questions.

Factor 4: focussed marking

The team mark regularly one set of books a night before they leave school. The students see that the teachers care about their work and value the helpful comments and suggestions for improvement. Marking takes place in class too, with students evaluating each other's work and offering advice on how to improve it. Quite a lot of time is spent improving answers they have been given so that they don't always start from scratch.

Factor 5: careful planning

Richard's team has a neat approach to planning which breaks down the specification into a number of questions that the examiners could possibly ask. They then ensure that students have opportunities to answer each type of question four times during the course. The enquiry approach so strong at KS 3 is continued into KS 4. Plenty of time is allocated to revision on the basis that *They won't, so we will, with them.*

Factor 6: rich resourcing

Making sure all students have their own appropriate text book for every section of the course was hard to achieve but has paid dividends. It means students can come well prepared to the lesson, thereby maximising the time available for discussion and answering questions.

Factor 7: lots of Continuous Professional Development

Richard's team spends a lot of time talking about teaching. "We don't spend a lot of time on admin at Departmental meetings so that we can get down to the business that is important to us – very good teaching. We like to take risks in our teaching but we do evaluate carefully. This means that we use a range of INSET providers and are regular adaptors of the best ideas from the Historical Association's *Teaching History*".