



**How a comparative judgment tool like RM Compare identifies earlier interventions, supports teachers in the burden of marking, and reduces workloads for all**



## The Background

Baysgarth School is a coeducational Secondary School in Barton-upon-Humber, North Lincolnshire. With over 900 pupils, it is a traditional rural school serving its local communities for over 35 years, and rightly proud of its "Good" rating by OFSTED.

With a strong vision rooted in a desire to be celebrated by the global education community for their progress through collaboration, in the potential of their students and staff to be cherished by the wider community, and ultimately in achieving successful outcomes through inspiration, innovation and empowerment – it is no surprise that the school is looking beyond the traditional forms of teaching, learning and assessment.

## Looking for a better way to undertake assessment

The English faculty of Baysgarth School assess their pupils every three weeks, using a standard formative PIN assessment:

- "Praise" – identifying positive areas within a pupil's work
- "Improvement" – how the work could be improved
- "Next steps" – the steps they need to take to reach the next level in their work

In Week Six they adopt a more summative approach – alongside the same formative feedback they add a numerical value – ranking their students accordingly. It is here that the school first started to look at Comparative Judgement to inform this process.

**"In a creative subject like English, we were finding the assessment process too subjective – what I thought was a '5' someone else might say was a '6'. This meant that we were unable to identify those pupils who really needed our help".**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English



Whilst subjectivity will always be there, finding a natural rank order helps significantly in splitting a cohort into quintiles, and from that identifying those pupils falling out of their quintile who need extra attention and support.

Faced with this dilemma, Baysgarth School looked at a number of Comparative Judgement solutions.

**"We piloted 'No More Marking' in October 2020, and whilst we saw great value within it, it was restrictive in only supporting their assessments in their time windows, yet we had gone to a lot of trouble to design our curriculum carefully and we didn't want to have to change that. It was then that we came across RM Compare which seemed to do all that we wanted, and more".**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

For Baysgarth School, RM was not a company they knew. As such, there were some trepidations in signing up for the RM Compare trial, in that – as with any new product from a supplier you do not know – they needed a level of confidence in the support they would receive. Especially when dealing with something as important as assessing a pupil's future.

**“As soon as we contacted RM, we were given all the reassurance we needed – a clear explanation how RM Compare works, shown how simple it is to use, and taken through graphs of outputs – as an English teacher, even I understood it!”**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a material effect on all parts of education, and it was somewhat ironic that Baysgarth chose this period to embark on this re-appraisal of how they undertook assessment within the school. As such, the level of support they received was more important than ever.

**“From Day One we felt valued. Even though the people we were dealing with at RM were working from home due to the pandemic, we knew they were there to help us, and were not simply motivated by profit”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

## The benefits of adopting a platform like RM Compare

For Baysgarth School, the primary benefit is the provision of a strong evidence base to inform interventions. The RM Compare system produces a body of evidence to provide a clear picture of a Year 7 pupil, identifying those where extra support is needed. It is often too late by Years 10 or 11 – this insight is crucial earlier in their school life if corrective action is to prove effective – by Years 10/11 it becomes firefighting.

A secondary – less obvious – benefit is that it helps a school understand its own teachers' judgements. By its very nature marking is subjective, manual with mistakes creeping in from time to time – whilst all markers try and keep them to a minimum, the reality is that no marking system is fool proof. With a comparative judgment tool like RM Compare you can quickly see which markers are aligned with others, and which stand out for whatever reason. It also highlights who is following the curriculum, highlighting – in an engaging way – those who may be teaching in ways that the Head of Department has not specified. As such it is a great CPD tool.

**“A good teacher will want to know what a good essay looks like, as it will help them improve their style in demanding the same from their pupils”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English



The world of assessment is changing. The cancellation of High Stakes examinations in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic caused consternation to schools and pupils alike.

**“A lot of teachers felt threatened and worried by the responsibility resting on their heads to award grades this year. A Comparative Judgement tool – like RM Compare – relieves a lot of that stress, and certainly allows me to sleep sounder”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

Like most new systems there are concerns about what it will mean – are teachers being asked to mark work twice (no), will it put them out of a job (no), will it save them time (yes).

**“It is a fact that marking schemes can slow you down. We spend a lot of time in moderation sessions – RM Compare does away with them completely”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English



The next stage for Baysgarth School is to share the practice with parents, but the school feel that they will be supportive, as they will appreciate how it helps the school identify which pupils need extra support.

**“There is no hiding place with a platform like RM Compare. No pupil can slip through the gap – we can see in an instant how everyone is performing”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English



## The future

Whilst comparison sites – to choose insurance, holidays, cars etc. – have been around for many years, demonstrating that assessing relative value is easier when you make comparisons, the concept is still very new when it comes to education.

**“This is the first time I have been truly excited by assessment!”**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

For one school – Baysgarth School – they have started in one faculty – English – but have plans to show other departmental heads how RM Compare could work for them. Baysgarth used it first for judging writing and were so impressed that extended it to English Literature essays and can see how it is a simple step from there to something like History, Art, Music or even Drama.

**“The future is very exciting. We have yet to exploit it, but we can see a time when we get pupils using RM Compare – giving and receiving feedback on each other’s work. Then they will see first-hand how their work stacks up”.**

Tom Ladbury, Head of English



“We have been really impressed with RM Compare, and notably the team behind it. We feel we are working in real partnership together. It is clear the user interface still needs tweaking, but the team are keen to get our feedback. With RM Compare I think we have stumbled on something very powerful that can revolutionise marking in the future”.

Tom Ladbury, Head of English

To find out more about  
RM Compare, or request  
a demo, please visit:  
[rm.com/compare](https://rm.com/compare)

