"AM… has helped us to focus on the individual students, and their needs and personalised targets, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach."

Andy Grace had previously been the Principal of an academy in the West Midlands, where he had devised a curriculum that addressed the students' poor levels of literacy. Accelerated Reader had been an important part of the literacy strategy, and given its success Andy looked to use the programme when developing the curriculum for The Boulevard Academy.

"Because of my past experience with AR, I knew it would be central to what we did at The Boulevard Academy," Andy explains. "Having scaffolded learning around AR in the past, I was looking for opportunities to do the same thing with maths. As a result, we have made Accelerated Maths part of our learning strategy." The Academy is unashamedly focused on literacy and numeracy – 60% of the Year 7 curriculum is given over to English and maths. While progress is monitored across the curriculum, students have only literacy and numeracy skills reported on.

We have found that when parents understand the programmes and the reports, it adds to the students' expectations

Teaching focused on students and their targets

The Academy has a strategic aim to consolidate the number of staff across the curriculum, aiming for a consistency of teaching methods in different subject areas. As such, every member of staff is involved with teaching literacy and numeracy and using AR and AM in the classroom. As the Academy grows and staff teach their specialisms at KS4 level, Andy expects them to carry the literacy and numeracy strategy into their own curriculum areas.

"AR and AM help to support the teachers, along with subject leaders who are actively involved in the delivery of the programmes. Teaching like this has helped us to focus on the individual students, their needs and personalised targets, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach."

For maths, this means that subject leader Callum Young has an active role in supporting both staff and students. He leads lessons for curriculum groups, and also leads the staff team in setting their teaching methodology. "Because of how my timetable is set up," Callum describes, "I am able to go into every single maths class in Year 7. Students are timetabled for 9 hours of maths per week, 2.5 hours of which are devoted solely to Accelerated Maths.

We expect them to complete three AM objectives each week; once they have passed a practice exercise on the topic they have been learning, they are able to take a test."

After students have had their first interim assessment of the year, teachers put students into three differentiated groups, each with their own objectives. Callum oversees this, but increasingly the teachers themselves are taking ownership of the programme and Callum's role is shifting towards training and support. "For some students, we have even begun to set extended objectives when they complete their practices in good time."

Fair and genuine assessments

Students typically join the Academy with literacy and numeracy attainment two or three sub-levels behind where they should be at their ages. Some students are much further behind. Andy was concerned by the reliability of National Curriculum Levels. Given their abolition, he was looking for a reliable replacement. He introduced STAR Reading and STAR Maths, which work hand-in-hand with AR and AM to assess students and inform their learning and practice.

"If we intervened based on the levels we were given as students joined the Academy, we wouldn't be intervening properly," he explains. "We wanted a fair and genuine way to establish students' baseline attainment on their entry to the Academy, so that we can support their progress. So we STAR test students on their 2nd day at the Academy."

"It was important to us that we used a credible system to assess our students. It is a big positive for us that STAR has a direct correlation to the new National Curriculum. The reports we get are increasingly useful for us, for staff and for parents. This is what schools are looking for: a good methodology for establishing a baseline for reporting progress."

After their initial baseline assessment, students are STAR tested six times each year, two weeks before the end of every half term. STAR reports on the custom groups that the Academy monitors in relation to the overall school performance: those on Free School Meals, receiving Pupil Premium funding, Gifted and Talented, those on School Support, and those with English as an Additional Language.

Reporting six times per year

Data is fed into year group meetings, where the whole team gets together to create opportunities for review. Callum believes that this focus on data has a direct impact on teaching at the Academy. "The assessments show who has made progress and who hasn't, but they also give teachers the information they need to direct intervention effectively." Learning walks and lesson observations are conducted to ensure that students are being given the support they need to make progress.

Andy emphasises the positive impact of having progress reports that parents understand. "We report literacy and numeracy progress to parents six times each year, and each time there is an opportunity for

parent consultations. There is always time during these sessions for parents to use AR and AM for themselves. We have found that when parents understand the programmes and the reports, it adds to the students' expectations."

The impact on students' attainment has been significant. Students' targets are set ambitiously high – the equivalent to at least three sub-levels of progress each academic year – but with the right support they are meeting the challenge. In maths, for example, 70% of all students had achieved their targets by the end of the Spring Term last year and 100% had by the end of the academic year.

Andy identifies the progress of students who speak English as an additional language as being particularly pleasing. "AM supports EAL students' acquisition of knowledge very well. There is something about the programme that scaffolds learning particularly well for those students."

Callum has seen this in action across the school, remarking that "students have become much more independent with their learning and their knowledge retention has improved. One student made 7 sub-levels of progress," he adds, "but I could mention several students who made similarly impressive improvements."

Students are increasingly engaged with the programme. The amount of time they have spent practising their maths skills almost doubled between September 2014 and March 2015.

Average engaged time per day

Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2
10	14	18	19
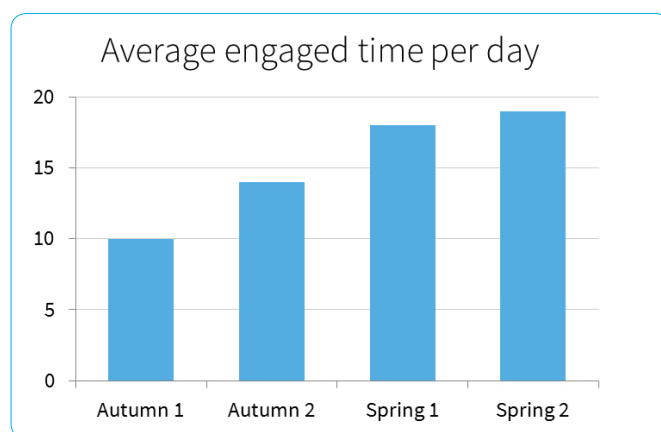
The Boulevard Academy uses a points system to measure progress, expecting one point of progress each half term (grey line). Students' actual progress to date has been twice the target level (blue line), and is projected to continue at an accelerated level (dashed blue line).

Points achievement 2014/15

Baseline average point targets — Average point achievement
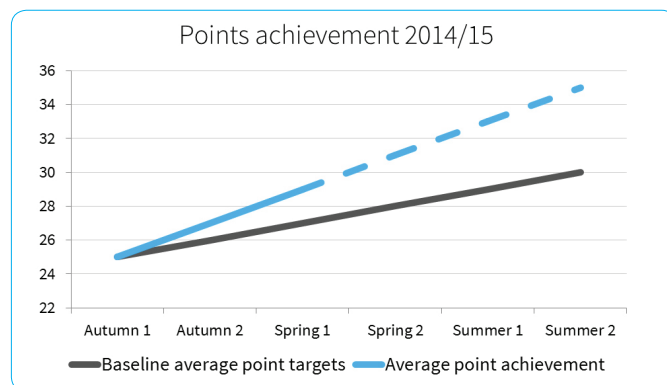
Read more stories of success at: renlearn.co.uk/partofthestory