

# I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

Oasis Academy Hadley,  
North East London

An all-through academy of over 1400 students aged 2-18, Oasis Academy Hadley is situated in Ponders End, North East London. Over two thirds of students qualify for pupil premium, and the number of students speaking English as an additional language is well above average



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“The jump from when it’s shown to when it’s practised makes all the difference,” Rory Sheridan says as he sums up his experiences of using Accelerated Maths (AM) and MathsFacts in a Flash. As Assistant Principal for Maths and ICT he oversees the maths department at Oasis Academy Hadley, where Renaissance Learning’s maths products are used by every student in Years 7 and 8. Key Stage 3 Co-ordinator for Maths, James Chapman, has day-to-day responsibility for implementing the programmes effectively.

Rory’s experience of the importance of practice to learning has informed the approach he and James have taken to implementing AM and MathsFacts in a Flash. They have structured the maths curriculum around two main elements: classroom lessons that teach the skills students need to learn, and computer-based exercises with AM and MathsFacts in a Flash that enable students to practise what they have been taught until they achieve mastery in those skills. AM exercises are set as homework, with students expected to complete two objectives each week or half an hour of practice.

### Building confidence through small successes

Teachers select AM objectives carefully in order to review recently-taught skills. “The mastery element of AM is really important,” James explains. “The idea is that a topic is only really learned if a student still knows it two weeks, two months or even a year later. It has made teachers think, ‘that concept I taught last week... have the students learned it?’”

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Assessment for Learning

Intervention

Motivation

Personalised practice

Professional development

The exercises students are set also include content aimed at those up to two years younger than them. This means that students review familiar skills alongside less familiar skills, building confidence as they achieve small successes. As James puts it, “the students want to see themselves going up in the rankings and mastering objectives. They can’t manage lots of objectives above their target grade.”

One unexpected benefit of allocating work in this way is that staff are able to identify missing prerequisite knowledge that students need to acquire in order to make progress. AM has therefore become an essential part of Assessment for Learning, where teachers use regular formative assessment to guide their students’ learning. AM objectives identify not only which students have mastered the skills they have been taught and which have not, but also identify the specific skills students are missing when they haven’t been able to complete their objectives successfully.

“The brilliant bit about AM is the review element of it,” James says. “We’re finding out a lot of things they should know but they are struggling on. That is the most valuable intervention because that sort of intervention wouldn’t happen in a normal lesson – finding out areas of knowledge that are missing.”

## Training staff and involving parents

When it was first implemented for a small group of students, AM was primarily a paper-based programme. Since then, it has been enhanced to offer a fully online experience. AM's online capability was introduced at roughly the same time as the academy moved to a new site with far greater access to computers in dedicated rooms and breakout spaces. The combination of these improvements to the programme and the academy's facilities allowed AM to flourish, as Rory explains: "as soon as the computers became available and we could use the programme online, we knew this was something we wanted to use."

As students had more access to computers, James and Rory slowly rolled out the programme to more classes. They introduced elements of the programme one-by-one to help both staff and students make the transition towards using AM in class and for homework.

This involved training staff, some of whom took to the programme more readily than others. "We were quite honest that some teachers would need more support than others would," James says. "Some were quite happy to explore AM for themselves after some initial training, so we paired them up with others who were less comfortable with it."

The academy has been part of the Renaissance School Partnership, which provides additional support and resources from a dedicated programme manager. James worked with the programme manager to devise a series of regular on-site training sessions for small groups of teachers. This hands-on training has proved an effective way of building knowledge of and confidence in using AR. "Our programme manager came in every two weeks to work with teachers, and that's been really positive since the start. Teachers were able to ask lots of questions and go at their own pace and recap lots of things that might otherwise have been forgotten."

"We're still giving ongoing training," Rory adds. "We're still trying to get some members of staff up to speed on what they need to do with the programme. We're in the room with staff, talking them through what they need to do with the programme and modelling best practice." James and Rory have also been class-sharing, splitting responsibility for sets with other members of staff. As they work co-operatively with colleagues they have opportunities to share their knowledge of the programme and help to build confidence in those less familiar with it.

Because students complete practice assignments at home, another crucial part of implementing the programme effectively was to get parents on board. James and Rory invited parents in for an evening where they explained how students would be using AM at home. Parents knew what to expect, ensuring that teachers were consistent with setting the agreed quantity of homework.

## Assessing students quickly and accurately

Students' progress in maths is measured using STAR Maths, provided by Renaissance Learning alongside AM. STAR is a baseline test that

takes typically less than twenty minutes to determine students' attainment. James remarks on the ease and speed of administering the test, which students now take at the end of each half term. "I think STAR Maths is brilliant. It gives a really accurate result and it's a really quick picture. It's also really good for showing growth over the year."

STAR Maths is the main assessment used for putting students into differentiated groups for AM and is used to place students into sets. It is used alongside another test, both of which inform the teacher assessment that students are required to undertake every six weeks. By using two assessments, two normalised grades are obtained for every student. Rory remarks that these assessments invite comparisons, and STAR Maths proves reliable: "towards the end of last year we found that the STAR test was normal compared to other assessments."

## Engaging students with maths

The impact of AM has been felt most strongly with students in the higher sets. Rory and James were initially using AM and MathsFacts in a Flash with students who were reluctant to learn maths, which had an impact on their level of engagement with the programme. They struggled to concentrate on practices lasting more than a few minutes and became frustrated easily when they did not immediately know the answers to the questions they were being asked.

As Rory explains, "MathsFacts in a Flash works brilliantly for our top students: it makes them laser-sharp. Likewise with AM, they like it, they enjoy it, they're engaged with it. But for our weaker students, it's too many questions in too long a time."

James suggests that the high-performing students are more engaged with the programme because of the breadth of content covered in the AM libraries. "For the brightest kids, it's opened them to areas of maths they might not have had access to." As they continue to train staff on the successful implementation of the programme, and as students build confidence with the programme and maths in general, the hope is that students will become even more engaged with AM and that their test results will continue to improve.

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