

“All our students are making rapid and outstanding progress”

The Boulevard Academy

Kingston upon Hull

The Boulevard Academy was established for students aged 11-16 under the Free Schools programme for the start of the 2013-14 academic year. It was initially opened with 40 students in Year 7. In 2014-15 the Academy took on a cohort of 120 students, and will continue to expand at this rate until it is full in three years' time with 600 students on roll.

The school's location in Kingston upon Hull is characterised by low economic activity and poor academic attainment. Over 50% of students attract Pupil Premium funding. It was inspected by OFSTED for the first time in May 2015 and received an 'Outstanding' rating in every category.

Assessment

Data review

OFSTED

Professional development

“Our school ethos is built around promoting literacy and numeracy,” says Helena Webster, Transition Phase Director at the Boulevard Academy. “Those are the major tools that are used to access all the other subjects within the curriculum. If a child hasn't got a good literacy and numeracy level, they can't access content within the other subjects.”

The curriculum at the academy is focused heavily on these core subjects at the transition phase, with a significant amount of dedicated reading time structured into the timetable. In addition to five English lessons each week, students have three guided literacy lessons where they can read, take Accelerated Reader™ (AR™) quizzes and exchange books. They also have two homework and target-setting sessions each week, where with the help of a learning mentor they review what they have been reading and select appropriate books.

The school day starts with ten minutes of reading time, with another 15 minutes either before or after lunch. “It's a big part of being at the Boulevard Academy,” comments Year 7 Co-Ordinator Chris Navier; something noted in the academy's recent OFSTED inspection report:

The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is an outstanding feature of the work in the academy. Students read at least once, and sometimes more often, every day. The love of reading and interest in books is promoted very well.

Rapid and outstanding progress

“All our students are making rapid and outstanding progress,” Helena comments. “They have gone up by an average of two years in their reading ages, so they are on track to achieve the progress we expect from them.” When OFSTED visited, the inspectors saw a direct link between the successful reading programme and the outstanding progress students are making, reporting:

Students read widely and often. As a result, the reading ages of Year 8 students have, on average, increased by three years in five months and of Year 7, by one year in five months.

The academy uses the STAR Reading™ and STAR Maths™ assessments to determine students' levels and report progress. From a baseline obtained when students enter the academy at the start of Year 7, they are given stretching targets and are regularly monitored as they make progress towards them. The ambitions of the staff and students, as well as the effectiveness of this data monitoring, were praised in the academy's OFSTED report:

The academy sets very challenging targets for their students. The students understand these targets and demonstrate their desire to reach them. Some students have already exceeded their end-of-year targets and the academy has responded by raising the targets.

Students are making significant progress in every tutor group. Students in characteristic groups including SEN, EAL and Student Support have made on average over four times expected growth.

Thorough support

“We have an expectation that all students are reading and participating in the activities that we set them,” Chris says. There are clear expectations for what should be taking place during reading time. “If I went into a classroom, I'd expect to see a dialogue between staff and students about what they are reading; whether they are understanding it; whether they are enjoying it; and what they would read after that book based on their success in their quiz.”

These best practices are monitored periodically through the use of learning walks, where members of the leadership team see reading lessons in action. Staff receive ongoing training and support in order to embed good practice consistently across the school.

“There’s nothing more important than the staff feeling confident and able to deliver on the front line,” Chris comments, pointing to the professional services provided by the Renaissance School Partnership as a significant contributor to staff confidence. “The support we’ve received in training our staff has been extremely thorough. It’s ensured that our staff – especially new staff to the academy – are fully trained and fully conversant with the programme.”

Using regular Year Team meetings and other training opportunities, staff have been introduced to more advanced features of AR that they have then put to use in their classrooms. For example, one of these sessions introduced staff to the Summary Dashboard. Staff were then able to bring up the Dashboard in their classrooms during conversations with individual students, providing information they can put in their learning plans.

Training non-English specialists

Team meetings have also become an important forum for sharing best practices and ensuring that AR is implemented successfully in every classroom. Helena explains how this works in practice. “We get half-termly reports from our RSP programme manager, which we use to identify staff that might need support. We can see which tutor groups are not doing as well, or which are doing really, really well, so they can disseminate good practice among their colleagues.

The additional training has been particularly important to the academy because most tutors are not English specialists. “We have PE teachers, computer sciences teachers... they all teach literacy because when they come to the academy they know that literacy is a main part of any subject,” Helena says. “The ideas that training has given to members of staff who are not English specialists have been valuable. They have been supported in helping our students with their learning.

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. As the academy grows and staff teach their specialism at Key Stage 4, they will be expected to carry the literacy and numeracy strategy into their own curriculum areas.

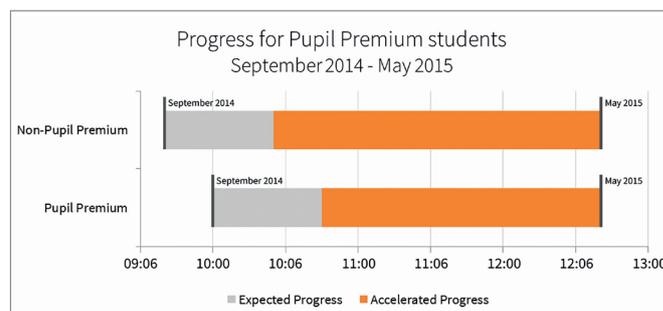
Part of the ethos

As well as training, RSP provides additional resources and initiatives for schools to run alongside their regular reading practice and literacy curriculum. “The partnership has been useful in supporting initiatives and running with ideas,” Helena says, citing the pursuit of Model Class status as a motivator for students.

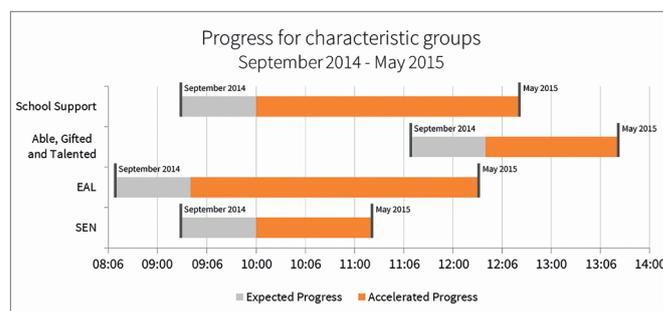
Model Class status is awarded to groups that meet research-based excellence standards for the quality and quantity of their reading practice. “Within the classes they look at the Reading Dashboard and

see where they are in the competition between classes – and I think the staff are now very competitive!”

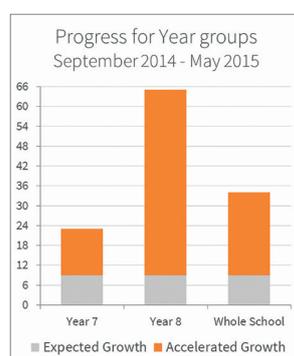
Between the training, reports and additional resources for building a reading culture, the Renaissance School Partnership has been instrumental to embedding AR successfully at the academy. “I wouldn’t have thought we’d be in the position we are now if it hadn’t been for the programme,” Helena says, adding that “AR is part of the ethos of our school.” As the school grows in the coming years, the team is confident that the best practices embedded so firmly with the help of RSP will transfer to new staff and a new intake of students each year.



Students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding began the year with an average reading age four months ahead of their peers. Both groups have made exceptional progress, achieving the same average reading age of 12 years 8 months in May.



Students in characteristic groups, like those on School Support or with English as an additional language, made at least twice the expected level of progress between September and May.



Students in both year groups have made significant accelerated progress, at least twice the expected growth of nine months between September and May.

Renaissance Learning opens the Renaissance School Partnership (RSP) programme to applications each academic year, carefully selecting a small number of schools to work with over the course of the year. Amongst other benefits, RSP schools have a dedicated Programme Manager who works directly with the school’s leadership and AR teams, and an extensive training programme tailored specifically to the school’s needs, including unlimited access to remote training. Read more at: renlearn.co.uk/rsp

Read more stories of success at: renlearn.co.uk/success