

I AM PART OF THEIR STORY

The Boulevard Academy,
Kingston, Humberside

The Boulevard Academy have used Star Assessments for reading and maths as their primary means of assessing progress and attainment since the school opened in 2013. Chris Navier, Assistant Principal, and Adele Elliott, Learning Assistant and Project Manager, describe how they use Star to ensure that all students are ready to access the GCSE curriculum.



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Focusing assessment on English and maths proficiency

Assessing English/maths proficiency across the board

We focus heavily on maths and literacy in our school, particularly during the transitional phase of Key Stage 3. We make use of Star to measure numeracy and literacy proficiency, defining proficiency as the point at which students are ready and able to access the GCSE curriculum. We believe that if students are literacy and numeracy proficient it's very hard for them to fail at GCSE, whereas if they aren't proficient it will be very hard for them to succeed in any subject.

We convert the scaled score provided by Star to our own points scale, and define a certain point on that scale as meeting proficiency – an average 14-year old working at the end of the Year 9 curriculum.

We baseline all students with Star when they first join the school, and then administer a test every half term. Many of our students come in working very close to that proficiency level when we baseline them, but some of them are significantly further away.

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Assessment

Data review

GCSE preparation

Ofsted

Progress monitoring

Pupil premium

Staff workload

We set all our targets to make sure that in our transition phase, our Y7 & 8 curriculum, students have targets that help them achieve that points score so we can graduate them onto our achievement phase and GCSE study.

The use of Star helps us get students to that point and enables us to consistently reach that level across literacy and numeracy curricula.

Tracking and demonstrating progress made by target groups

Star makes it easy to communicate and share information both internally and externally. We're confident in Star's reliability, and retain reports and data in an OFSTED-ready file. It's a quick and easy way to share information with external visitors and within the school with our SLT, who are all familiar with the system.

When we were last inspected, in 2015, we showed them the half-termly reports we generate. We could demonstrate the reading age growth made by our students, and their progress, by percentile rank. Ofsted made a few comments about our assessment approach in their report:

Thorough and frequent assessments mean teachers understand the ability of each student in their class.

Assessment in the academy is based on regular standardised testing. All students are assessed in English and mathematics on entry to the academy to provide a baseline. Challenging targets are set and progress is tracked carefully against this baseline.

We're able to filter our reports by student characteristics, such as EAL and Pupil Premium eligibility. It's very easy to do, and very important to us that we can track different groups to ensure that all students are making expected progress across the board.

In terms of our regular reporting, we make frequent use of the Summary Report to track changes between each half term. We then make use of the Growth and Screening reports to highlight specific students who aren't making expected progress and require intervention. The Suggested Skills report helps us identify where exactly students are struggling with the Star test, and that then forms part of their learning plan for the next half term.

Low-stakes testing with high-value outcomes

We discourage our students from feeling hugely pressured by the Star tests. They're delivered by their regular teacher in the standard classroom, and students test frequently enough that it doesn't become an intimidating process. Of course, the test outcomes remain hugely important to students and teachers; we place a great deal of value on them.

Students tend to find the computer-adaptivity of the test helpful. Because the difficulty adjusts depending on their responses, they know that if they find themselves struggling with a difficult question then not only are they doing well, but the level will soon adjust to one they're comfortable with. It's also a very useful feature for us, in terms of tracking progress and ability. Instead of presenting them with a set of questions at one level, which they cannot progress beyond until the next test, we can identify their appropriate level with just one assessment.

New teachers joining the school often expect to be marking a lot of papers, so are always pleased to hear that Star tests mark themselves! We love the programme's ease of use, the depth and precision of the data it provides us and its coverage of the full English and maths curricula. It gives us clear, accurate information about where students are, and allows us to plan next steps for students, enabling us to track student growth over time.

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