



A REVISED APPROACH

WITH THE BIGGEST CHANGES TO GCSE EXAMINATIONS FOR THE LAST TWO DECADES COMING INTO FORCE THIS TERM, TS SPEAKS TO ONE DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER ABOUT HOW HIS SCHOOL IS PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE MOVE TOWARDS END OF COURSE EXAMINATION ASSESSMENTS...

Andy Quinn is deputy head teacher at The FitzWimarc School in Rayleigh, Essex – an Ofsted outstanding mixed comprehensive school of 1350 students, which has been serving the town since the 1940s.

With a long tradition of excellence in education and high academic standards, the school has been looking at ways to prepare its current students for the changes introduced by the coalition government, which will see a return to traditional exams and assessment; and in particular, considering the role that today's technology can play in helping the students to excel within the parameters of a more traditional education setting.

"Regardless of your position on the changes that have been introduced to the GCSE examinations, schools across the country are busy looking at how best to prepare their students for what lies ahead," comments Andy. "This summer's exams provided the first steps towards the monumental shift that will take place over the next two years and despite differing success rates, particularly reported in GCSE English, we were delighted with our students' performance. Our results this year were excellent; our first entry 5A* - CEM figure of 73% was well above the county average."

Success strategies

According to Andy, this year's success is down to a number of factors – none more so, of course, than the efforts of the students themselves, but he also credits a number of new approaches introduced by the school, which already seem to be having an impact.

"Revision skills don't necessarily come naturally," he points out, "so we have proactively introduced revision and study skills on to the curriculum across the entire school, meaning that students in year 7 are now already beginning to develop these much needed skills."

"Often students who don't perform in exams, panic on the day and are unable to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding to the best of their ability," he adds. "We are hoping to counteract this by introducing both more formal end of year exams throughout the school, so that examination conditions become part of the norm and not something to be feared but we are also teaching our students how to revise."

Encouraging students to find revision activities that work for them is essential, according to Andy. "We help them to look at ways of best extracting and retaining information, whether it is creating charts to stick on their wall or watching videos on YouTube," he explains. "Some of our teachers have even created their own podcasts containing key information that the students will need."

Cool tools

Last year, the school also subscribed to GCSEPod – audio visual revision content that its students can download on to their phones, tablets and PCs. "I really think this played a key role in our success," Andy says. "The presentation of the information suits all types of learner – they can listen to it, watch it and can even create their own material, appealing to most learning styles, but I think the fact it can be accessed on a smart phone, which this generation seem unable to live without, certainly enhances its appeal. It brings with it a certain kind of coolness and therefore even those students who wouldn't normally revise were downloading the podcasts for revision. In fact, we can easily monitor usage and last year 70% of our year 11 students accessed the

content, surprisingly this included a good percentage of students who we know would typically not have engaged in revision before the new technology was introduced.

Andy acknowledges that the biggest hurdle to successful revision can often be knowing where to start – but insists that what may initially seem like a mountain too high to climb can be broken down into manageable chunks and become a gentle stroll in the park. "We combine our revision sessions with the exam mapping function on GCSEPod to help the students to be better equipped to tackle this mountain," he states. "This helps the students to more or less set their own revision timetables so that they know exactly what they need to do and when in the build up to their exams."

"For other generations revision was simply a way of life – some of us were good at learning the facts and reciting them on exam days and others found it more challenging. But for this emerging generation, exam based assessments mark a significant shift in their learning. Equipping them with the skills to revise and retain information efficiently from an early age will hopefully ensure that regardless of the changes to the grade systems or the way in which results are reported, that we are giving our students the best possible chance."

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