



# MARSHALLS PARK ACADEMY

## Maximising impact and progress with GCSEPod

If you ask James Pickering what stands out in his mind since his appointment as GCSEPod Lead at his school in Romford, Essex, he'll reply quick as a flash. "It's hearing the students say, 'I'm really glad I watched that GCSEPod video,' as they're coming out of an exam."

It may seem a little thing, but the impact of viewing those 3 to 5 minute learning and revision videos, or 'Pods', upon Marshalls Park Academy's summer 2018 GCSE results cannot be underestimated.

Statistics reveal that the students with the highest GCSEPod usage exceeded their predicted grades by 3.7 Attainment 8 points. This is compared to non-users, who dropped below their predicted grades by -7.7 Attainment 8 points.

In plain English, this means that the students using GCSEPod the most, irrespective of their ability, gained approximately six grades higher than their non-using peers.

Breaking it down further, on average across the year, the students with the highest usage achieved 1.0 more Progress 8 points than the lowest users. Typically, the highest GCSEPod users in the exam period attained 0.8 more Progress 8 points than the lowest users. Overall, the highest using students over the whole year realised 88% [+23.7] more Attainment 8 points than the lowest using students.

These are impressive figures - but until the autumn term of 2017, they may as well have



been dismissed as unattainable. This is because GCSEPod did not get off to a flying start at Marshalls Park. It's only since the school revisited the digital learning resource, that they have discovered the positive outcome that GCSEPod's high quality, consistent learning experience can bring to students and teachers.

Marshalls Park Academy, which is part of the South West Essex Community Education Multi-Academy Trust, first signed up to GCSEPod in 2015. However, embedding the teaching and learning platform into the 950-student-strong coeducational secondary school had some challenges at first. James Pickering, who is the school's Associate Assistant Head and a science teacher, attributes part of the problem to a lack of understanding amongst the heads of department and teachers regarding how the programme could be successfully implemented and integrated.

This was soon to change when James was handed the role of GCSEPod leader in July 2017. He was tasked with encouraging both students and teachers to embrace the learning experience, with its short and snappy Pods, home-work compatible assignment service and motivational interschool Pod Games competition.

As an early convert to the resource, his own

enthusiasm for GCSEPod and what it has to offer teachers and students of all abilities has been infectious.

In the 2015-2016 academic year, just over 1,000 videos were watched by Marshalls Park Academy's Year 10 and 11 students. This jumped to around 11,000 in the 2016-2017 school year. But in James' first year as the lead, that figure quadrupled to more than 34,000.

The numbers are looking equally impressive for the 2018-2019 academic year. By the end of November 2018, 1,659 Pods had been watched in Maths alone, closely followed by English literature with 1,159, and the Sciences with a combined total of 2,678.

James is especially keen to see how GCSEPod will impact the current Year 10s, the first group to go through the school having enjoyed the full benefits of everything the online package has to offer.

The numbers will undoubtedly soar as the GCSE mock and summer exams loom large in the curriculum.

James' ability to maximise the impact of Marshalls Park Academy's subscription to GCSEPod is a lesson to other schools, which may be looking to accelerate their own progress.





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James Pickering, Assistant Headteacher, Marshalls Park Academy

"The first thing I did was to organise a staff training session. I got everyone in, ran through the platform and showed them what a powerful resource it can be. Teachers have been encouraged to set GCSEPod homework, and we have an incentive system running for the students. We offer things like a reward breakfast for those who have watched the most Pods, as well as prizes."

"At the parents' information evenings, we have been able to show proof of the achievements their children are making."

No major changes have been required, just small tweaks that have helped to propel Marshalls Park Academy into a new league - quite literally.

Having initially started with a lower-than-average uptake, in February 2018 the Academy beat off tough competition from 89 other schools in the London and South East region, to be crowned the Pod Games Champion. The Pod Games scores educational establishments on the average number of Pods watched per student.

The school is again in the running to take the coveted title, with students and teachers alike being determined to see Marshalls Park top the league.

James is particularly gratified to see that the momentum has been maintained. "It has been really nice to see us as a secondary school competing and achieving alongside grammar schools. I think it has given everyone a great boost."

"Our last Ofsted report three years ago marked us as 'requires improvement'. Since then we have had a new head and GCSEPod has been fully implemented. The school has gone on a big journey, and I believe Ofsted will see lots of positive changes."

From an almost standstill, GCSEPod has now become a core part of the teaching and learning at Marshalls Park. James sends out regular updates on Pod usage and a healthy competition has built up between classes.

But what is it about GCSEPod that James believes is holding the student interest, especially in an age where the constant, high-energy entertainment and stimulates that surrounds us every day seems to bore rather than inspire the younger generation?

"It's incredibly user-friendly," James says. "It's so portable. You can be on the bus or

standing in a queue, open the app up on your mobile phone, click on one of the five-minute Pods and boom, everything you need is there."

"These children are part of the digital generation. They're used to getting their information in bite-sized chunks. For them, having a topic broken down into a short Pod is nothing out of the ordinary. They can stick on their headphones, watch while they're on the move, and even if only a small amount of information has gone in, they will still have learnt something."

They've also got an opportunity to revisit these videos. There is no harm in watching them again and again and again."

Figures show that 97% of Year 11 students, 95% of Year 10s and 98% of Year 9 students are actively watching the Pods.

One of the standout features for James is that GCSEPod offers the opportunity for independent learning and for students to take ownership of their own education. "It's one of the main things for me. The children can be completely independent; they can teach themselves. It's that simple."

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