



LOVED BY STUDENTS,  
RECOMMENDED BY TEACHERS

## How the Parker E-ACT Academy has gone from failing to flying

Principal Andrew Mackereth at the Academy explains how.

**This summer, Daventry's Parker E-ACT Academy pulled in its best ever set of exam results with 55% of its students achieving five grade A\* - Cs and its principal Andrew Mackereth is resolute that the academy will become Daventry's next outstanding school: no small feat for an academy which only two years ago was placed in special measures.**

Whilst there is still work to be done, Andrew explains how with the support of E-ACT multi academy trust, he has led the transformation of the academy and how the heart and spirit of the school has once again been restored.

"One of our senior house keepers who has worked at the academy for more than 30 years came in to my office on the first day of the autumn term and her words pretty much sum up why we have been able to make so much progress in such a short space of time. She said, "see I told you it would all come good." Her words stick with me because it's her belief and the belief of every member of staff, every student and of our parents which I believe has helped us to turn the school round in such a short space of time."

In 2013, the former struggling William Parker School in Daventry was converted in to an academy and became part of the E-ACT Multi Academy Trust – which manages, maintains and develops 23 academies across the UK and is committed to improving historically under-performing schools in disadvantaged social economic areas.

Andrew said: "When I arrived in June of 2014 the academy had been in special measures for six months and things were far from great. It was clear to me that the school and everyone in it needed a complete change of mind set if we were to turn things around. Yes, our results and attainment were well below expectation, but I made the decision not to place my immediate focus on the teaching and attainment within school but instead I reorganised our pastoral structures, introducing a house based system which I was confident would add huge value.

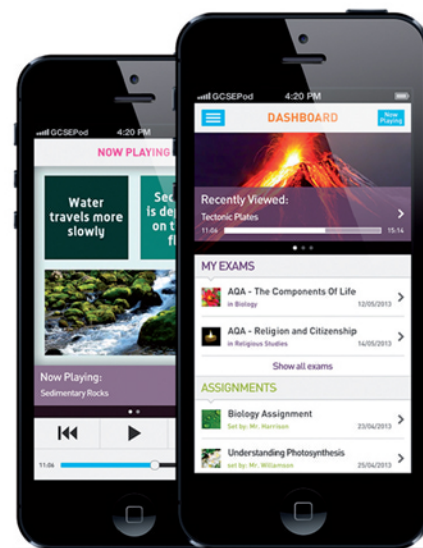
"Much to the surprise of the staff and the students I also invested a lot of energy in to reintroducing school sports day – a good old fashioned house based event filled with welly whanging and egg and spoon races. I was told it wouldn't work, that the students historically would not engage. Whilst I knew I was sticking my neck on the line placing such importance on an event that had typically had little support I had conviction in my belief so ploughed on with plans. Thankfully it paid off and in one short two hour window we could all see a glimmer of hope which became a turning point.

"When I joined the academy, a large proportion of the students and indeed the staff only knew the school as a failing one and when you are part of a sinking ship it is hard to see how you will ever get off. I knew we had to change the ethos of the academy – a monumental and unquantifiable task – but one I believe, and Ofsted inspectors have also confirmed, we have achieved.

"I spent time with the students, teachers and parents and affirmed we were going to be different, we were going to be the best we could be. Out with the old and in with the new and some of the attitudes and behaviour which had become common place, such as swearing, could no longer be accepted at The Parker Academy. I wanted to send out a clear message that the academy now had real leadership and together we would make it a place we were all proud to be part of.

"I'm a firm believer in self-fulfilling prophecy so we used social media and other communication channels to build a positive image of the academy and repeatedly reminded everyone involved – the general public included – that The Parker Academy was a great place to learn and to be the best you can be.

"It became our mantra and the last round of Ofsted inspectors to come to





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school highlighted how everyone involved knows what the academy stands for and their role in achieving it. In fact you can find inspirational words from staff and students adorned on the walls around school; the one that stands out and resonates most is from the student panel who said; "The school might be in special measures but the students are not." Indeed this is true."

Whilst building belief and a sense of feel good was an important part of the academy's recovery, Andrew knows that it goes much further and he spent a great deal of time examining the teaching. However, he did not make busloads of staff changes but rather recruited additional support in subjects such as maths and science where attainment was particularly low, and invested time empowering the existing teachers and instilling confidence in their ability which he believes has liberated their approach.

He said: "We encourage teachers to try new techniques, perhaps we might introduce a 'no hands up day' or recommend a 'no questions lesson' or that they use some of the academy's technology resources to 'flip the classroom'. We have encouraged our teaching staff to have courage to step out of their comfort zones and work with new resources and techniques.

"Our students were criticised for lacking any sense of responsibility for their own learning and success and were in the main happy passive learners. We know that in order to help our students to develop as fully rounded individuals and become the best they can be, ready for the next chapter in their lives we owe it to them to foster their own independent learning skills."

Whilst Andrew and his team take charge of the day to day running of the school,

*"I could immediately see how GCSEPod could work for us and how it would benefit our students, helping us to encourage a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning. The data shows that there was most certainly a direct correlation between students who engaged in GCSEPod and the progress they made; all of our students, bar one, who made the greatest progress were high users."*

The Parker Academy is part of a wider supportive Multi Academy Trust, two thirds of which are rated good by Ofsted and one outstanding. As part of the Trust's ongoing commitment to providing every student, regardless of location and background access to the same opportunities in order to accelerate attainment and raise the bar in education standards, E-ACT became the first multi academy trust in the UK to subscribe to GCSEPod across its entire secondary estate, providing 9,500 students with access to the award winning content.

"I could immediately see how GCSEPod could work for us and how it would benefit our students and help us to encourage a greater sense of responsibility for their own learning," added Andrew. "We use it in the main as an independent learning tool but I am working closely with the teaching staff- even those who shy away from technology- to encourage them to make it part of everyday learning. Some teachers use it to set assignments whilst others simply gently remind students to refer to GCSEPod on their phones and mobile devices whenever they have a spare few minutes to recap on things they have learnt in the classroom or to prepare for upcoming topics.

"Without a doubt I think encouraging students to become independent learners and take responsibility for their own success has had a massive impact. We introduced GCSEPod relatively late in the academic year and I was a little anxious that it was perhaps too late to benefit the then Year 11 students. However, with 10,000 downloads within a six month period and our best set of exam results ever, I needn't have worried. And the data shows that there was most certainly a direct correlation between students who engaged in independent learning through the likes of GCSEPod and other resources and the progress they made; all of our students, bar one, who made the greatest progress were high users and I was pleasantly surprised by the wide range of students making good use of it.

"So whilst we still have some way to go, we have come an awful long way in a very short space of time and becoming the next outstanding school in Daventry no longer seems out of reach for either our staff or students. We are built on strong foundations and all share the same belief that we can be great which I think prepares us fully for the future."