

Educake Case Study
Featherstone Academy
West Yorkshire





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Background

Featherstone Academy is a mixed secondary comprehensive academy for ages 11 to 16 on the outskirts of Pontefract in West Yorkshire, with around 330 students.

Featherstone Academy's Progress 8 score was 0.17 in 2016, average for schools in England. 65% of the students achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE (including English and maths). The school was rated as 'Good' at its most recent OFSTED inspection in February 2017, having been rated as 'Inadequate' in January 2014, before being taken over by the Rodillian Multi Academy Trust.

We talked to Chris McColl, Head of Science, in May 2017:

Why did you start using Educake?

Chris: We want to encourage a growth mindset in our students as much as possible, but have students coming into the school with a negative mindset. This is quite typical of students from the area, who tend to have low aspirations. We wanted to change their attitude so they see the focus as being improvements as they go along. Also, we wanted to help and encourage students to go over work they've done before. For example, we teach cells in year 7, but then only

once or twice again in years 10 and 11, but still expect them to produce a really excellent answer and get a good grade.

We also wanted to use Educake to increase students' independence. We teach our students that to get high grades they have to learn independently and Educake definitely helps with that.

Finally, we wanted to reduce staff marking load.

Another school in our trust, Rodillian Academy, use Educake for these things and were saying very positive things about the system, so we decided to give it a try.

How did you get teachers started?

We just started a free trial, set up the classes and asked teachers to try it. It wasn't difficult. They've all really bought into it.

How do you get your students engaged in using Educake?

It was easy to get student accounts, which Educake created for us. We gave the students their usernames and passwords and asked them to write them in their planners. I know now that Educake provides labels you can print on to sticky label sheets, which would be even easier.

I then set the students some questions. I said that I didn't expect them to answer them all, but just see how things go.

We have a termly celebration assembly: I use the Educake logo to make certificates. Those students who have answered the most questions on Educake get a certificate for effort, and those students who have the highest percentage of question correct get a certificate for attainment.

How do you use Educake?

We set homeworks every fortnight or so.

We also try to book a computer room with a class every fortnight. We set them questions but emphasise that although they might not get them right, the important thing is to reflect on their work and learn. It's all about low stakes testing, refreshing their knowledge, and improving their understanding. While they're working we put the whole class' results on the whiteboard. Kids really like that they can see how they're doing compared to everyone else, how many questions they've answered, which they got right and wrong, etc. And it means that if I see a pattern of a certain question being answered incorrectly by a few students I can stop them all, put the question up on the whiteboard and go over it. I can stop them and fix the misunderstanding there and then.

We also encourage the students to look at the progress report where it shows how well they're doing on each topic, and lets them do more tests on their weaker topics. Now at the end of lessons, if they've finished their questions, they set themselves some questions on Educake on those topics and just get on with more work.

What's the IT like in your school?

To be honest, it was poor until this year but it's good now. We have five computer suites that we can book out.

What has been the response from students at your school?

Students really enjoy it. They're developing a growth mindset. They are definitely more positive about science because of it. They like the instant

feedback they get the most, and they like that Educake shows them their weakest topics, so they can take a test on them and improve. In fact, we have classes pestering teachers to use Educake. And they ask for it for cover lessons.

I should tell you about one girl in year 10. At the start of the year she had no confidence in science at all, even though she was very bright and able. I talked to her about the importance of just going over things and not worrying about getting things wrong, using Educake. Since then we have seen enormous progress. She's now not only gone from middling to bottom of her class in science to the top three, but it has massively helped her confidence. She's just going from strength to strength.

What has the response been from teachers at your school?

They like the reduction in workload particularly. They also like the instant feedback the students get. And it's so easy to see the progress in students and in their attitudes. Educake has helped to change this and students now have a better attitude to science in general because of it.

Has it reduced marking load?

Yes, it's cut this back massively. It also cuts back on planning time, especially looking at data for predictions. We now use Educake for this (and end of term tests).

When I started as head of department I wanted to cut staff workload, so I negotiated with SLT to allow us to use the reports that Educake creates for each student, in student books. They agreed, because each report is specific to each student's individual progress.

Do you use Educake's analysis tools?

We use the individual student reports at parents evenings, which we print out, and then hand out.

Every half term we stick print-outs in their books of the individual student reports that Educake creates, which identifies their three best and three worst topics. We ask them to identify these topics and set themselves tests on them.

I also teach a top set year 10 and put the league table on the board for the last two weeks' work, sorted by how many questions they have set themselves.

Using the "Compare Years and Classes" page I could see that the number of questions recently answered by year 11s has increased massively as we've come up to the exams.

How does Educake compare to other online resources you've used?

We have used other systems but none of them were as good. Educake is a lot more reliable. Other systems are too big and not as reliable or effective. Educake is more efficient and it works exactly how you want.

Our students have answered over two hundred thousand questions this year, and we only have about 350 students in the whole school!

How would you describe Educake to a teacher from another school?

I'd just say give the free trial a go and give Educake a go because if you do, it can have a positive impact. Once you've got started take some time to play with its features.

Also if you have any ideas for features or improvements you want I'd recommend contacting Educake. We asked for a random question order button and it was really quickly there. The support is excellent.

Finally, is there anything else about Educake you'd like to mention?

OFSTED - they were in at the start of the year, and I was asked by the Chief Inspector to show evidence of progress in books. I showed him the Educake reports that we put in the books and asked the students to reflect on and he was really quite impressed.

Chris McColl was speaking to Charley Darbishire, founder of Educake, in May 2017.

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